

PUTIN'S WARS



THE RISE OF RUSSIA'S
NEW IMPERIALISM

MARCEL H. VAN HERPEN

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To Valérie, Michiel, and Cyrille

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Glossary and Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANI	Associazione Nazionale Italiana
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRIC	Acronym of grouping referring to Brazil, Russia, India, and China
BRICS	Acronym of grouping referring to Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BRIICS	Acronym of grouping referring to Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, and South Africa
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent

	States
CaPRF	Cossack Party of the Russian Federation
Cheka	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Soviet secret service December 1917–1922)
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CU	Customs Union
DMD	<i>Dobrovolnye Molodezhnye Druzhiny</i> (Voluntary Youth Militias)
DPNI	<i>Dvizhenie protiv nelegalnoy immigratsii</i> (“Movement Against Illegal Immigration,” extreme right organization)
EU	European Union

EurAsEc	Eurasian Economic Community
FSB	<i>Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti</i> (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRU	<i>Glavnoe Razvedyvatelnoe Upravlenie</i> (“Main Intelligence Directorate,” Russian Military Foreign Intelligence Agency)
HJ	<i>Hitlerjugend</i> (Hitler Youth)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITAR-TASS	Russian News Agency
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i> (“Committee for State Security,” secret service of the Soviet Union)
KOMSOMOL	<i>Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodezhi</i> (“Communist Youth Union,” youth department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union)
KTO	<i>kontrterroristicheskie operatsii</i> (counterterrorist operations)

LDPR	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia
MAP	Membership Action Plan (NATO)
MID	<i>Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Rossiyskoy Federatsii</i> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PARNAS	<i>Partiya Narodnoy Svobody</i> ("People's Freedom Party")
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
OAS	<i>Organisation de l'armée secrète</i> (French far-right paramilitary organization)
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

PA CSTO	Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (Communist Party of Afghanistan)
RIA NOVOSTI	Russian News Agency
ROSMOLODEZH	Russian Federal Youth Agency
SA	<i>Sturm Abteilung</i> (paramilitary organization of Hitler's NSDAP)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SdP	<i>Sudetendeutsche Partei</i> (Sudeten German Party)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic)
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAD	All-Russian Association of Militias

VTsIOM

All-Russian Center for the Study of
~~Public Opinion (official state pollster)~~

WTO

World Trade Organization

Introduction

In December 1991 the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The end of the last European empire came suddenly and unexpectedly, not least for the Russians themselves. However, with hindsight it seemed to be the logical conclusion of a chapter in European history. Other European countries had gone down the same road. Spain had already lost its colonies in the nineteenth century. France, Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands had decolonized after World War II. Even Portugal, a colonialist “laggard” that clung to its possessions in Africa and Asia until the bitter end, had to give up its empire after the “carnation revolution” of 1974. Decolonization—until now—has seemed to be an irreversible process: once a former colony had obtained its independence, it was unlikely that the former colonial power could make a

comeback. The history of European decolonization has been, so far, a linear and not a cyclical process. The chapter of European colonialism seems to be closed definitively, once and for all. But is it? Does this analysis also apply to Russia? This is the big question because not only the conditions under which Russia built its empire were quite different than for the other European countries, but also because the process of decolonization was different. Let us consider these differences. There are, at least, five:

- First, Russia did not build its empire overseas, as did the other European powers. Its empire was contiguous and continental: the new lands it acquired were incorporated in one continuous landmass.
- Second, with shorter communication lines and no need to cross oceans, rebellions and independence movements

in the colonized territories could be more easily repressed.

- Third, Russian empire building was also different because it did not come *after* the process of state-building, as was the case in Western Europe. In Russia it was an integral part of the process of state-building itself.
- Fourth, Russian empire building was neither casual, nor primarily driven by commercial interests, as was the case in Western Europe, but from the start, it had a clear geopolitical function, namely, to safeguard Russia's borders against foreign invaders.
- Fifth, in Russian history periods of decolonization were never linear, nor irreversible. Decolonization was never definitive. When, for instance, after the Bolshevik Revolution, the colonized lands of the Russian empire were set free, they were soon afterwards reconquered by the

Red Army.

It is these five historical characteristics of Russian colonization and decolonization that one has to bear in mind when analyzing the behavior of the Russian leadership. The thesis of this book is that—unlike in Western Europe, where the process of decolonization was definitive—the same is not necessarily true for Russia. For the Russian state colonizing neighboring territories and subduing neighboring peoples has been a continuous process. It is, one could almost say, part of Russia's genetic makeup. The central question with which we are confronted after the demise of the Soviet Union is whether this centuries-old urge to subdue and incorporate neighboring peoples has disappeared or if this imperial reflex might be making a comeback.

RUSSIA: A POST-IMPERIUM?

According to some authors the end of the

Soviet Union sounded the death knell of Russian colonialism and imperialism. One of these authors is Dmitri Trenin, a Russian analyst and the head of the Moscow bureau of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In his book, with the telling title *Post-Imperium*, he tries to reassure the reader that “Russia has abandoned the age-old pattern of territorial growth. A merger with Belarus was not pursued as a priority. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were turned into military buffers, but only in extremis.”^[1] In his book Trenin repeats this reassuring mantra again and again. He writes: “The days of the Russian empire are gone; Russia has entered a post-imperial world;”^[2] or: “Russia will never again be an empire;”^[3] and again: “The Russian empire is over, never to return. The enterprise that had lasted for hundreds of years simply lost the drive. The élan is gone. In the two decades since the collapse, imperial restoration was never

considered seriously by the leaders, nor demanded by a wider public.”^[4] Trenin gives several arguments for his thesis. The first of these is the presence in Russia of an *empire fatigue*. Russians, he argues, are no longer willing to pay for an empire: “At the top, there was neither money nor strong will for irredentism.”^[5] Instead of an empire, he continues, Russia has only the desire to become a “great power.” The difference between the two is, in his opinion, that great powers are selfish. They don’t want to spend money on behalf of other nations. “Empires,” writes the author, “for all the coercion they necessarily entail, do produce some public goods, in the name of a special mission. Great powers can be at least equally brutish and oppressive, but they are essentially selfish creatures.”

However, the sudden eclipse of Russia’s eternal imperial drive cannot be explained exclusively by “selfishness.” Trenin gives a second reason, which is the growing *xenophobia*

in the Russian population. Although xenophobia may be an ugly, anti-humanist attitude, in Russia's case, it would have some positive effects. "What the rise in xenophobia, the upsurge of chauvinism, and the spread of anti-government violence also tell," writes the author, "is that there is no appetite whatsoever for a new edition of empire, only residual nostalgia for the old days."^[6] Like Bernard Mandeville, who in his *Fable of the Bees* explained how public benefits could emerge from private vices, Dmitri Trenin explains how in contemporary Russia private vices, such as xenophobia and egoism, result in a public benefit: the lack of appetite in the Russian population for the restoration of the lost empire.

However, the problem with Trenin's analysis is not only that it is too simple, but also that it contradicts the facts. One of these facts is that during Putin's reign the phase of "empire fatigue" has definitively come to an

end. Under the guise of the “Eurasian Customs Union,” “Eurasian Economic Union,” and—most recently—“Eurasian Union,” new efforts of empire building have begun. As concerns xenophobia, presented by Trenin as an effective antidote against empire building, history shows that xenophobia, far from eliminating an imperialist drive, it often accompanies it. One does not have to go back to the 1930s to find extremely xenophobic regimes that at the same time were expansionist and imperialist. A good example of this combination in contemporary Russia is the leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party in the Duma, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who, in his book *Poslednyy brodok na yug* (Last Push to the South), likens immigrants to Russia from the Caucasus or Central Asia to “cockroaches” (*tarakany*) who should be expelled from the European center of Russia.^[7] This does not prevent Zhirinovskiy from pleading for a reconquest of both the Soviet and tsarist empires (the latter included parts of

contemporary Poland and Finland). Zhirinovskiy even claims Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan as exclusive spheres of influence, not excluding that “Russia gets a frontier with India.”^[8]

Trenin’s argument that the widespread xenophobia in Russia will prevent Russia from becoming imperialist is therefore not valid. In fact the contrary is true: ultranationalism and imperial chauvinism are often most developed in xenophobic and racist countries.

Ironically, Trenin mentions in his book a number of facts that undermine his own theory of Russia as a post-imperium. These facts are rather disconcerting. When Trenin mentions how Putin called the demise of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century,” he writes that “Putin’s words were interpreted as evidence of an active Kremlin nostalgia for the recently lost empire, and even as a sign of his intention to bring back the USSR. This was a misinterpretation.”^[9]

Trenin is certainly right that Putin did not want

to bring back the USSR—because, as he rightly stresses, Putin “blamed the non-performing communist system for losing the Soviet Union.” But a Russian empire does not have to be a *communist* empire, as the tsarist experience proves. Trenin also mentions Putin’s remark at the Bucharest NATO summit in April 2008 that Ukraine “was not even a state” and “would break apart.” This was, according to Trenin, neither an expression of Russian imperial arrogance and contempt, nor a barely disguised threat. Putin, he wrote, “was probably highlighting the brittleness of Ukraine’s unity, which would not survive a serious test.”^[10]

But if Putin was completely free of any annexationist fervor, why, in 2003, did he propose that Belarus return to Russia and join the Russian Federation as six oblasts (provinces), a proposition that was refused by Belarus? As long ago as 1993, the Supreme Soviet laid claim to the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol.^[11] However, if Putin’s objectives

are so radically different, why would his government distribute Russian passports in the Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, knowing that the Ukrainian Constitution strictly forbade dual nationality? And why was this distribution of Russian passports accompanied in August 2008 by Medvedev's introduction of "five foreign policy principles," which included the right for the Kremlin to protect Russians "wherever they are" and intervene on their behalf? These principles were applied in the case of Georgia, which was invaded in August 2008. And why, after the Orange Revolution, did Russian politicians speak out in favor of the "federalization" of Ukraine?^[12] As Trenin himself writes, this proposal was interpreted by Ukrainian politicians as "paving the way to its breakup and the absorption of its eastern and southern regions by Russia." And why, in 2003, did Putin equally propose the federalization of Moldova?^[13] Was it not because it would make a breakup of that state easier and bring the

breakaway province of Transnistria definitively back within Moscow's sphere of influence? Trenin also mentions that after the Ukrainian bid for a route into NATO, "some not entirely academic quarters in Moscow played with the idea of a major geopolitical redesign of the northern Black Sea area, under which southern Ukraine, from the Crimea to Odessa, would secede from Kiev and form a Moscow-friendly buffer state, 'Novorossiya'—New Russia. As part of that grand scheme, tiny Transnistria would either be affiliated with that state or absorbed by it. The rest of Moldova could then be annexed by Romania."^[14] These sentences need to be read very carefully: for "some not entirely academic quarters in Moscow," one could read: the Kremlin or Kremlin-related politicians. For "played with the idea of a major geopolitical redesign," one could read: military intervention in order to break up Ukraine, an internationally recognized sovereign state (also recognized by Russia). Moreover, the creation

of a Russia-friendly “buffer state” has traditionally, in Russian politics, led to that state becoming part of Russia. One could be tempted to see some historical parallels. But, of course, you need not. Because Trenin is reassuring us: Putin’s Russia has no plans to reconquer its lost empire. Russia is a *post-empire* and intends to remain so.

The thesis of this book is that the Russian Federation is *both* a post-imperial state and a pre-imperial state. The aim of this book is to analyze Putin’s wars in Chechnya and Georgia and to put them in a broader context in order to better understand the inner dynamic of Putin’s system. The key idea of the book is that in Russian history there has always existed a negative relationship between empire building and territorial expansion on the one hand and internal democratization on the other. Reform periods in Russia (after 1855, 1905, and 1989) are often the result of lost wars and/or the weakening of the empire. Periods of imperial

expansion, on the contrary, tended to have a negative impact on internal reform and democratization. Gorbachev's perestroika—a product of the lost Cold War—is an example of the former, Putin's policy of a reimperialization of the former Soviet space is an example of the latter.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book consists of three parts.

Part I: “Russia and the Curse of Empire” (chapters 1–5)

In this part I analyze the role of empire building in Russian history and look at the similarities and differences with empire building in Western Europe. Why is it that in Russia empire building and despotism have always tended to go hand in hand? What are the differences and similarities between the

legitimation theories used for empire building in Russia and in the West? This part ends with a chapter on “empire fatigue” in post-Soviet Russia and suggests that empire fatigue came to an end with the arrival of Vladimir Putin, who considered it his historic role to reestablish the lost empire. In the final chapters of this part the different diplomatic initiatives of Putin are analyzed, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Russia-Belarus Union State, the BRICS, the Customs Union, as well as his most recent project: the Eurasian Union.

Part II: “The ‘Internal War’” (chapters 6–9)

Part II analyzes how Putin, convinced that in order to rebuild the empire he needed to rule for at least twenty years without interruption, put a system in place that

guaranteed this continued rule. It analyzes in detail how he eroded and dismantled the democratic reforms, manipulated the party system, introduced fake parties, falsified elections, and transformed the ruling party “United Russia” from a centrist party into a revanchist and ultranationalist party. One particular chapter describes the activities of the Kremlin’s youth movement “Nashi,” which enabled the Kremlin to inculcate its adherents with its ultranationalist ideology and strengthen its grip on civil society by harassing and intimidating opponents. Another chapter describes the new role, assigned to the Cossacks, who function as Putin’s praetorian guard and auxiliary police force after the mass protests of 2011–2012.

Part III: “The Wheels of War” (chapters 10–16)

In this part the wars of Putin's regime are analyzed and compared with other recent wars fought by (Soviet) Russia. In the first chapter three *lost* wars are analyzed: the war in Afghanistan, the Cold War, and the First Chechen War. This analysis is followed by a chapter on the *casus belli*, which offered (then) Prime Minister Putin an opportunity to start an all-out second war in Chechnya: the so-called "apartment bombings" of September 1999, which killed hundreds of Russian citizens. The Kremlin ascribed these attacks to Chechen terrorists, but the official Kremlin version is put in doubt by allegations that the FSB, the KGB's follow-up organization, masterminded these explosions. This chapter is followed by a chapter on the Second Chechen War, a war characterized by purges, torture, and forced disappearances. I explain that this war had a triple function for the Kremlin: to consolidate Putin's position, to legitimate Putin's power, and, additionally, to enable him to roll back the

democratic reforms. In the final chapters the 2008 war with Georgia is analyzed. I distinguish three phases in this war: a “cold” war, a “lukewarm” war, and, finally, the “hot” (five-day) war. Despite the Kremlin’s declarations that this war came as a surprise, I present and analyze the many circumstances indicating that this war was preplanned with the objective of bringing about a regime change in Georgia.

NOTES

1. Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 142.
2. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 200.
3. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 232.
4. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 233.
5. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 208.
6. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 62.
7. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, *Poslednyy brodok na yug* (Moscow: Liberalnaya Demokraticheskaya Partiya Rossii, 1993), 117.

8. Zhirinovskiy, *Poslednyy brodok*, 138.
9. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 27.
10. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 46.
11. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 45.
12. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 57.
13. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 100.
14. Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 100.

Part I

Russia and the Curse of Empire

Chapter 1

Despotism and the Quest for Empire

The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.

—Winston Churchill, speech at Harvard University, September 6, 1943

Russia has always been, and still is, a very special country: first, because of its geographical size, and second, because of its history. Russia is huge. It covers the biggest landmass in the world. But this huge country is mostly landlocked and has only some sparse outlets to the sea—on the Baltic and the Barents Seas in the north, the Black Sea in the south, and the Pacific Ocean in the east. If the sea is a “window on the world” (as tsar Peter the Great thought, which was why he built his new capital in Saint Petersburg), then Russia

resembles a huge bunker with high closed walls and only a few small apertures. Is this the reason for the “bunker mentality” that foreign visitors often observed and which led Russians to view their Western neighbors with mixed feelings of distrust and jealousy?: jealousy because of the economic progress and technical prowess of these neighbors (which Russia was eager to copy) and distrust because of the dangerous democratic ideas that were considered a contagious disease that should be stopped at the frontier. This country on the fringes of Europe was known for the despotism of its leaders, its lack of freedom, and its eternal drive for territorial expansion.

MONTESQUIEU, ROUSSEAU, AND DIDEROT: EARLY CRITICS OF RUSSIAN DESPOTISM

In the eighteenth century especially, when in Western Europe philosophers of the Enlightenment started to attack absolutist rule and formulated their first radical democratic

projects, Russia became the counterexample to everything the *philosophes* stood for.

Montesquieu, for instance, considered Russia a huge *prison*: “The Moscovites cannot leave the empire,” he wrote, “not even to travel.”^[1] The tsar, he continued, was “the absolute ruler over the life and the goods of his subjects, who, with the exception of four families, are all slaves.”^[2]

In *De l'esprit des lois* Montesquieu wrote that despotic governments, like Russia's, are exclusively based on *fear*: “One cannot speak without trembling about these monstrous governments.”^[3] Jean-Jacques Rousseau was hardly more friendly in his assessment of the Russians, who were for him not only “cruel fellows,” but who “will always regard free people as they themselves should be regarded, that is to say as nobodies on whom only two instruments bear any influence, namely money and the knout.”^[4] Rousseau wrote these words in a recommendation for reform of the Polish

government that he sent to his Polish interlocutors shortly before Poland's first partition in 1772. It was not without foresight that he warned the Poles: "You will never be free as long as there remains one Russian soldier in Poland and your freedom will always be threatened as long as Russia interferes in your affairs."^[5]

It is interesting to note that Rousseau wrote this text during the reign of tsarina Catherine the Great, who reigned from 1762 to 1796 and was a great admirer of the French encyclopaedists. She corresponded with Diderot and Voltaire, and she actually invited Diderot to Saint Petersburg for five months. Like Peter the Great before her, she displayed an energetic drive to modernize the country, and she herself wrote the 655 articles of the *Nakaz*, a radical law reform based on the works of Montesquieu. She even introduced some pseudo-democratic measures, such as convening an All-Russian Legislative Commission. But all this had no

lasting consequences. Back in Paris, Diderot wrote his *Observations*, in which he expressed a sharp critique of the *Nakaz*. “There is no true sovereign except the nation,” he wrote. “There can be no true legislator except the people. It is rare that people submit sincerely to laws which have been imposed on them. But they will love the laws, respect, obey and protect them as their own achievement, if they are themselves the authors of them.”^[6] Diderot made no effort to flatter the tsarina. “The Empress of Russia,” he wrote, “is certainly a despot.”^[7] Catherine only saw Diderot’s critical *Observations* after the death of the philosopher, when his library was transferred to Saint Petersburg under a contractual agreement. When she finally read Diderot’s comments, wrote Jonathan Israel, “she flew into a rage and apparently destroyed the copy she received.”^[8]

However, Catherine, this modern, enlightened despot, became less enlightened

and more despotic during the Pugachev revolt (1774–1775). This popular uprising in the southwestern part of her empire, led by a Cossack leader who claimed to be acting on behalf of the assassinated tsar Peter III, Catherine's former husband, changed her ideas. During this peasants' revolt over a thousand noblemen and their families were killed, which was approximately 5 percent of the Russian nobility.^[9] Instead of abolishing serfdom and giving the Russian people a parliament as she had promised to do, she signed in 1785 the Charter of Nobility, which gave the Russian nobility the same special rights as in Western Europe. Ironically, this happened at a time when in Western Europe these rights began to be questioned and would be abolished some years later during the French Revolution.^[10] In the end Catherine's "democratic revolution" created precisely the opposite: it "created an aristocracy, the better to govern, or rather to dominate the mass of the people. For some to

have a sphere of rights due to special birth or rank was doubtless better than for no one to have any assured rights at all.”^[11] Catherine remained a convinced autocrat and is mainly remembered for her exuberant love life and the Russian expansion into the Crimea.

HOW LOST WARS LED TO SHORT-LIVED REFORMS

The despotic character of Russian rule was criticized not only by foreigners, but equally by the Russian intelligentsia. However, reform periods in Russia were, in general, short-lived. They were mostly introduced after *lost wars*, when the absolute power of the tsar and the ruling elite was temporarily weakened. In the last two centuries there were at least *four* such lost wars that led to deep and important reforms: the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the First World War, and the Cold War.^[12] The Crimean

War had the effect of a wake-up call. Despite the fact that tsarist Russia mobilized 1,742,297 officers and men, plus 787,197 irregulars and militia, it was unable to deal with a force of 300,000 French, British, Sardinian, and Ottoman troops.^[13] The rank and file of the Russian army consisted of serfs, who were conscripts for life. The officers came from the nobility. It became clear that in an epoch of mounting nationalism one could not win a war with an army of unmotivated and illiterate serfs.^[14] A direct consequence of the lost war was the Era of the Great Reforms, initiated by tsar Alexander II, who during his reign (1855–1881) abolished serfdom in Russia.

However, these social reforms were less inspired by a genuine concern for the situation of the exploited Russian *muzhik*, as by the geopolitical needs of the Russian empire. Walter Pintner rightly remarked that it was “Russia’s military requirements [which] dictated

major social changes.”^[15] A similar situation arose in 1905 after the defeat in the war against Japan. This defeat led to a revolution and subsequently to the formation of the first parliament, the State Duma in Saint Petersburg. Another lost war: the defeat of the tsarist army in the First World War gave birth to the February Revolution of 1917 that laid the foundation for a Western-style democracy. Unfortunately, at the end of the same year the fragile democratic government of Kerensky was swept away by the Bolsheviks, who installed an autocratic and totalitarian system that endured for the next seventy years. Although during the communist era Khrushchev’s rule brought a short period of cultural “thaw” after Stalin’s death, it did not bring internal democratization, and one had to wait until 1989 before the autocratic communist system began to crumble.

THE HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF 1989

When this finally happened expectations were high. At last Russia would take its rightful place amongst the ranks of the democratic countries of Europe. At last it would build a viable *Rechtsstaat* with an independent judiciary and abolish the almost inborn fear that the police and secret services instilled in Russian citizens. Inside, as well as outside, Russia there was a sense of relief: finally Russia would become a “normal” country. Western powers were so eager to let this transformation happen that they offered Russia access to democratic forums even before Russia had shown itself worthy of this honor and had acquired the necessary democratic credentials. Rather prematurely Russia was invited to the G7 meetings (renamed G8) and became a member of the Council of Europe. In retrospect this early embracing of a new democratic Russia was too optimistic and too hasty, granting Russia a position among the democratic nations it did not yet deserve.^[16] It was as if the West, by granting Russia the status

of a fully fledged democratic state, wanted to invoke a “democratic spirit,” hoping that Russia, having been accepted as a member of the club, would automatically *behave* as a member of the club.

A few critical voices in the West warned against too much optimism. One of them was Zbigniew Brzezinski. “Unfortunately,” he wrote as early as 1994, “considerable evidence suggests that the near-term perspectives for a stable Russian democracy are not very promising.”^[17] Brzezinski was right. It did not take long, indeed, before the West grew disappointed. After the chaotic, but democratically still promising decade of the 1990s under Yeltsin the Russian spring turned into a chilly winter. While the façade of a multiparty democracy was kept in place, elections were falsified and stolen, corruption was rampant, democratic freedoms were trampled upon, journalists, lawyers, and human rights activists were killed, the judiciary lacked

independence, and not the people, but the spymasters of the KGB—rebaptized into FSB—became the country's supreme masters. Despite Medvedev's repeated mantras on *modernizatsiya*, it was not the modernization of the country, but its own self-perpetuation that was the real objective of the regime.

Three times—in 1856, 1905, and 1917—modern Russia had tried to reform itself after a lost war. Three times it failed. The only enduring success was the abolition of serfdom by tsar Alexander II. After the end of the Cold War it had—probably for the first time in its history—a real chance to join the democratic mainstream. Unfortunately, Russia missed this unique historical opportunity. Russian despotism could be likened to a mythical monster: every time it lies down on the ground and appears finally defeated, it rises to power again. This despotic nature of the Russian polity is not only a problem for the Russian population, its immediate victim, but also for

the neighboring peoples, and—ultimately—for the whole world. The reason for this is that Russian despotism is intimately linked with Russia's imperial drive.

THE FOUR ROOTS OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

This “eternal” Russian imperialism has four origins:

1. Russia's geographical position
2. Russia's economic system
3. Russia's expansionist tradition
4. A deliberate expansionist policy conducted by the Russian ruling elite

Historically it was Russia's geographical position, near Siberia—a huge and almost empty space—that made expansion easy. This was a great advantage for Russia compared with the countries of mainland Europe that competed for territorial expansion in an area where land was scarce. Russia's opportunities

for territorial expansion were enhanced after Ivan III (The Great), who reigned from 1462 to 1505, had succeeded in driving the Mongols back. Under his grandson Ivan IV (The Terrible), who reigned from 1547 to 1584, Russia—as if driven by a *horror vacui*—started to conquer the vast expanses of Siberia. Within a century the Russians had reached the Pacific. They did not stop there, but crossed the Bering Strait and went on to conquer Alaska. In the early nineteenth century Russian colonists went as far as California, where, in 1812, they founded Fort Ross north of Bodega Bay on the Pacific coast, just above San Francisco.^[18] According to the American geopolitician Nicholas J. Spykman, “It was fair to assume that if the grip of Spain in California ever weakened, Russia would be eager to take her place.”^[19] However, Russian territorial expansion into the South, the West, and the North was less easy. Here it was less *pull* factors of an easy expansion than the *push* factors of a deliberate imperialist policy that

prevailed.

An important push factor for Russia's imperial expansion was Russia's *economic system*. It was based on agriculture in feudal properties, and the labor force consisted largely of serfs. This agriculture was not capital-intensive, as was mostly the case in Western Europe, but *coercion-intensive*.^[20] This meant that it was neither innovative nor efficient and rendered only marginal profits to the landlords who disposed of two methods only to raise their profits: increasing the exploitation of the serfs or adding new land. Because the exploitation of the serfs could not be increased beyond certain physical limits, this led to a continuous search for new land and territorial expansion. This tendency was reinforced by the fact that "the Russian state took shape in a capital-poor environment."^[21] The state simply did not have enough money to pay or reward faithful servants of the state and successful military commanders. "[T]he logic of warmaking

and statemaking in a region of little capital led rulers to buy officeholders with expropriated land,"^[22] and with newly acquired land. The two above-mentioned factors led to Russia developing a tradition of territorial expansion from an early stage. Territorial expansion became, as it were, the normal "way of life" of the Russian state. It was like an organism that grows and grows and continues to grow until it has reached its full size, preordained by its biological nature. But unlike an organism, Russia did *not* have a genetically preordained "normal size." It could go on and on, growing beyond any limit. And in a certain sense that was what happened. According to Colin Gray, territorial expansion was "the Russian way," just as it has been "the Soviet way."

It is estimated, for example, that between the middle of the 16th century and the end of the 17th, Russia conquered territory the size of the modern Netherlands *every year*

for *150 years* running. Furthermore, unlike the case of most other imperial powers conquest by Russia became a permanent and nonnegotiable political fact (save under conditions of extreme duress, as with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918).^[23]

Traditions can be upheld and followed with more or less constancy and enthusiasm. A country can become an imperial power by making this an explicit choice or in a more or less accidental way. The British Empire, according to the nineteenth century British historian Sir John Seeley, was acquired “in a fit of absence of mind.” There existed no previous, elaborated British *plan* to build an empire. Edward Dicey, a British journalist and writer, wrote in 1877:

We have never been a conquering nation. Since the days when the Plantagenets

essayed the conquest of France we have never deliberately undertaken the conquest of any foreign country; we have never made war with the set purpose of annexing any given territory. We have had no monarchs whose aim and ambition it has been to add fresh possessions to the crown, in order simply and solely to extend the area of their dominions.^[24]

Although the British perception that their empire was created in “a fit of absence of mind” may be exaggerated, it is not an exaggeration to say that from its early beginnings the Russian empire has been conceived as a *deliberate project*. The twin objectives of territorial expansion and the subjugation of other peoples were consciously and purposively pursued by Russia’s political elite. An exemplification for this mindset is tsarina Catherine the Great’s famous dictum: “I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them.”^[25] It was not only

a supposed fragility of the Russian state that was at the root of its continuous expansion. “The fact that, unlike Western Europe, the formation of the empire does not *succeed* the construction of the state, but *accompanies* it, has also blurred the dividing lines. The concept of the nation and imperial ambition merge as soon as Moscow, the first centre of the modern state, gains the upper hand over rival Russian principalities and, then, over the weakened mongol overlord.”^[26] The fact that in Russia empire building was a constitutive part of the process of state formation indicates a fundamental difference with empire building by the Western European states, which only began *after* the national states had been consolidated. While Russia was a “product of empire,” this was not the case here. John Darwin, for instance, emphasized the fact that Britain “was not in any obvious way a product of empire. It was not ‘constituted’ by empire—a modish but vacuous expression. The main

reason for this was that its English core was already an exceptionally strong and culturally unified state (taking language and law as the most obvious criteria) long before it acquired an empire beyond Europe.”^[27] The same was true for Portugal, Spain, France, and even the Netherlands (which from 1568 to 1648 was fighting a war of independence against Spain).

RUSSIAN DESPOTISM AND RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM: INSEPARABLE TWIN BROTHERS?

In Russia internal despotism and external imperialism went hand in hand. They were, so to speak, inseparable twin brothers. We can distinguish five factors that played a role in establishing this link:

1. Territorial expansion gave *extra legitimation* to the rule of the despot.
2. Territorial expansion functioned as a *surrogate satisfaction* for the

disenfranchised (serf) population.

3. Because despots tend to *reign for longer periods* than democratically elected leaders, they are in a better position to make long-term projects, especially those concerning imperialist territorial expansion.
4. Despotic rule as such *fits better* with imperial rule than with democratic rule. Despotic and imperial rule are *congenial*.
5. Despotic rule is not only more apt to generate imperialist policies than non-despotic rule, it also has a tendency—as in a dialectical process—to be *strengthened*, in its turn, by the empire, because its vast surface and the many different subjugated populations will hamper the establishment of a more democratic rule. In this sense despotic rule and imperialism are *mutually reinforcing* processes.

Despotic rule means suffering for the

population, which is denied basic human freedoms and civil rights. A despotic tsar does not legitimize his absolutist rule by a reference to the popular will, but to divine right. This legitimacy, based upon a metaphysical *droit divin*, will be strengthened when the ruler can boast important imperial conquests. Imperial conquests provide, so to speak, an *additional legitimacy* for his rule. This same mechanism can be seen to play a role in Putin's (partial) rehabilitation of Stalin. Stalin's "geopolitical genius," that is, his territorial expansionism, is used to (re-)legitimate his regime.

Since the *Sobornoe Ulozhenie* of 1649, which is the social charter of Russian absolutism, the enserfment of the Russian peasantry, which had already begun two centuries earlier, was definitively established. From that moment on Russian serfs were irreversibly bound to the soil of their master. Moreover, the towns were subjected to tight controls and sealed off from the rest of the

country. The urban poor were considered as state serfs. Only taxpayers (that is, the aristocracy and the rich merchant class) could be legal residents. No inhabitant could leave without royal permission.^[28] Rural migration was definitively stopped. Serfdom, however, was not in the interest of the private landowners alone. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Russian state owned land with twenty million serfs on it. This was 40 percent of the peasant population.^[29] This population was literally the property of the state. A population that has practically no rights, not even the ability to move freely around the home country, cannot have the personal pride and individual satisfaction of free people. In such a case, the home country's imperial conquests provide an ersatz satisfaction. Feelings of powerlessness and a lack of personal pride and individual accomplishment are compensated by a process of identification with the power and the glory

of their country. The lack of personal respect that they receive as individuals is compensated by the respect—and fear—that their home country inspires. “If a man is proud of his Belief, his Fatherland, his People,” one can still read in an anonymous Russian publication of 2007 attacking democracy, “he finds internal pride in himself as a representative of this great people and great country.”^[30] This mechanism can be observed in a population of serfs that has been enslaved, as well as in a population that gives up its original freedom and enslaves *itself* for the sake of national glory. John Stuart Mill already described this mechanism in his *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), where he wrote:

There are nations in whom the passion for governing others is so much stronger than the desire of personal independence, that for the mere shadow of the one they are found ready to sacrifice the whole of the

other. Each one of their number is willing, like the private soldier in an army, to abdicate his personal freedom of action into the hands of his general, provided the army is triumphant and victorious, and he is able to flatter himself that he is one of a conquering host, though the notion that he has himself any share in the domination exercised over the conquered is an illusion. A government strictly limited in its powers and attributions, required to hold its hands from overmeddling, and to let most things go on without its assuming the part of guardian or director, is not to the taste of such a people. [\[31\]](#)

According to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk this tendency to compensate one's lack of personal self-respect by indulging in the imperialist glory of one's home country can be observed especially in the nation states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These are for him “experiments in collective self-esteem and self-aggrandizement, directed by the mass media.” The foreign policy of these national states, “insofar as it included imaginary competition, was always dramatized by tensions of respect and disrespect.”^[32] This element of *surrogate satisfaction* must not be underestimated. It clearly still plays an important role in present-day Russia, where citizens, whose political freedoms are more and more restricted, long for “national greatness” and a recovery of “Russia’s glorious past.”^[33]

Despotic rulers are sometimes poisoned, sometimes deposed. However, as a rule, they tend to have *longer reigns* than those of their democratic counterparts, who, at regular intervals, have to expose themselves to elections. Their long reigns enable despots to initiate long-term projects, such as territorial conquests, and bring them to fruition. Russia’s kings and tsars were often blessed with long lives, which led to extraordinarily long reigns.

This was the case for the first three rulers, who may be considered the founders of the Russian imperial project. Ivan III (the Great) reigned for forty-three years, his successor Vassily III, for twenty-eight years, and Ivan IV (the Terrible), who was the first to call himself tsar, for thirty-seven years. Between 1462 and 1584 these three rulers reigned for 108 years altogether, a period that was only interrupted for fourteen years when Ivan IV was a minor. It is, therefore, no surprise that under this long and stable rule the foundations for Russia's continuous expansion were laid.

Of course long reigns of monarchs were not a privilege of Russia alone. Absolutist monarchs in Western Europe equally could reign for long periods during which they were able to undertake ambitious expansionist projects. Louis XIV, the French *roi soleil*, is a good example of this. But with the end of absolutism in Western Europe and the advent of parliamentary democracy, Russia's autocratic

government gained an advantage. This advantage remained when tsarist autocracy made way for communist dictatorship. Stalin, who ruled for almost thirty years, was as staunch an empire builder as Ivan the Terrible, whom—in fact—he surpassed by creating the greatest Russian empire ever.^[34] Vladimir Putin's attempt to rule possibly for twenty-four years must be seen within this perspective. Putin considers this long personal rule as a necessary precondition for his supreme geopolitical goal: the restoration of the lost empire.

There exists, furthermore, a fundamental mismatch between democratic rule and imperial rule. Democracies are based on the principle of the fundamental *equality* of their citizens. Imperial rule is based on a basic *inequality* between the rulers and the ruled.^[35] Imperial rule, exercised by a despotic ruler, is, therefore, more logical and consistent, because no distinction is made between the inhabitants

of the imperial mother country and the inhabitants of the imperial possession: in fact *no one* is a citizen. All are, in the most literal sense, *subjects*. Jan Nederveen Pieterse stressed the

direct connection, a military nexus, between the exercise of imperialist force overseas and the application of force to repress domestic unrest; time and again we find that not only the same methods and equipment were deployed but also the same personnel.^[36] . . . In Russia, with tsarist generals, the great Suvorov among them, stamping on rebels at home and other peoples in Asia were always twin employments. This gives a concrete significance to the saying that a people that oppresses another nation cannot itself be free.^[37]

The last, and fifth, point is that the

vastness of an empire strengthens despotic rule. This was an argument that was already being used by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers. Their argument was that huge countries with large populations could be neither prosperous nor democratic. This argument was used especially by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for whom the ideal state was a city-state, the size of Geneva. "Size of states!" he wrote, "first and most important source of human misery, and especially of the many disasters that undermine and ruin the civilized peoples. Almost all small states, whether republics or monarchies, prosper only by the fact of being small."^[38] And he added: "All large states, crushed by their own mass, are suffering."^[39] Rousseau's aversion to big states was shared by Voltaire, who wrote: "Men seldom deserve to govern themselves. This happiness seems to be the lot only of small nations hidden in islands, or between mountains, like rabbits who hide from the

carnivorous animals; but in the end they are found and devoured.”^[40] Adam Ferguson, their contemporary, and one of the leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, wrote, in a similar vein, in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767):

Small communities, however corrupted, are not prepared for despotical government: their members, crowded together, and contiguous to the feats of power, never forget their relation to the public; they pry, with habits of familiarity and freedom, into the pretensions of those who would rule. . . . In proportion as the territory is extended, its parts lose their relative importance to the whole. Its inhabitants cease to perceive their connection with the state, and are seldom united in the execution of any national . . . designs. Distance from the feats of administration, and indifference to the

persons who contend for preferment, teach the majority to consider themselves as the subjects of a sovereignty, not as the members of a political body. It is even remarkable that enlargement of territory, by rendering the individual of less consequence to the public, and less able to intrude with his counsel, actually tends to reduce national affairs within a narrower compass, as well as to diminish the numbers who are consulted in legislation, or in other matters of government.^[41]

And Ferguson concluded:

Among the circumstances, therefore, which . . . lead to the establishment of despotism, there is none, perhaps, that arrives at this termination, with so sure an aim, as the perpetual enlargement of territory In the progress of conquest, those who are subdued are said to have

lost their liberties; but from the history of mankind, to conquer, or to be conquered, has appeared, in effect, the same.^[42]

These early laudatory speeches in praise of *small is beautiful* were written before the American Revolution, at a time when it was almost axiomatic that democratic rule was only possible in small territories, such as the ancient Greek *polis* or the Italian and Swiss city-states. However, even in the twentieth century authors continued to express their doubts about the viability and utility of large states. In 1914 the British historian Sir John Seeley made the following remark about the size of the British empire: “At the outset we are not much impressed with its vast extent, because we know no reason, in the nature of things, why a state should be any the better for being large, and because throughout the greater part of history very large states have usually been states of a low type.”^[43] He added: “For a long

time no high organisation was possible except in very small states.”^[44] This assessment led him to make the following remark about Russia: “We cannot, it is true, yet speak of Russia as having a high type of organisation.”^[45]

The United States was the first counterexample, showing—contrary to all historical evidence—that it was possible to organize a democratic society over a large territory. But the young United States was not an empire; it was a former colony with a homogeneous population that had liberated itself from British rule.^[46] Russia was different. It was from its foundation an imperialist, as well as an absolutist state: continuously expanding its territory and subjugating and incorporating foreign peoples within its frontiers. Its mere size and its heterogeneous populations seem, indeed, to have been determining factors that have hampered its development into a modern, democratic polity.

NOTES

1. Montesquieu, "Lettres persanes," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 89.
2. Montesquieu, "Lettres persanes," 89.
3. Montesquieu, "De l'esprit des lois," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 539.
4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée," *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Part III (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 1039.
5. Rousseau, "Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée," *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Part III, 1039.
6. Cf. Denis Diderot, "Observations on the Instruction of the Empress of Russia to the Deputies for the Making of Laws," in *Diderot: Political Writings*, ed. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2001), 81.

7. Diderot, "Observations," 82. Another contemporary who expressed his doubts concerning Catherine's democratic credentials was the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. "The monarch of Russia," he wrote, "presupposes a motivating force that her language, nation, and empire do not possess: honor. One should read Montesquieu on this and the Russian nation and state of mind is exactly its opposite: one should read him on despotism and fear, and both are exactly present." (Johann Gottfried Herder, *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1976), 99.)

8. Cf. Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 622.

9. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 626.

10. Cf. R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and*

America, 1760–1800, I. The Challenge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 403. These special rights of the nobility included that “they could not lose their status, honor, property or life without judicial proceedings, and could be judged only by judges of equal birth with themselves. . . . They received permission to leave state service at will, to take service with foreign governments, and to travel outside the country. They were given the right to sign their names (like European nobles) with territorial titles. They were reconfirmed in their right to ‘buy villages’ (that is serfs), and to engage in wholesale or overseas trade.”

11. Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 404.

12. It is still a subject of discussion whether the Cold War could be called a “war” that ended in a defeat. This interpretation is defended by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who wrote: “The Cold War did end in the victory of one side and in the defeat of the other. This reality cannot be denied.” (Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Cold War

and its Aftermath,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 4 (Fall 1992), 31.) Ernst-Otto Czempiel, on the other hand, stated: “It is easy, but erroneous, to argue that NATO won the conflict, . . . that the NATO alliance defeated the Warsaw Pact without firing a single round, so to speak. . . . The Warsaw Pact remained a strong military alliance until the very end. It was in many respects superior to NATO. No, a proper explanation lies elsewhere. It is more accurate to view the end of the East-West conflict as having been produced not by the military defeat of the Warsaw Pact.” (Ernst-Otto Czempiel, “Governance and Democratization,” in *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, eds. James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 251.) Of course, Czempiel is right: it was not a *military* defeat. However, it certainly was an ideological, economic, political, and moral defeat. It was this moral defeat, in particular, that led to the

breakdown of the empire and—ultimately—to the disestablishment of the Warsaw Pact.

13. Cf. Walter Pintner, “Russian Military Thought: The Western Model and the Shadow of Suvorov,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 360.

14. According to Benedict Anderson, as late as 1840, almost 98 percent (!) of the Russian population was illiterate. (Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 75–76.) However, the Russian defeat in the Crimean War was caused not only by the illiteracy of the Russian serf soldiers, but also by the use of obsolete military technology. According to Daniel Headrick, “During the Crimean War, while French and British soldiers carried modern rifles, almost all Russian soldiers used smoothbore muskets, the same kind of guns used in the war against Napoleon.

The Russian government tried to purchase new guns from the American Samuel Colt and from gun makers in Liège but were not able to import them in time.” (Daniel R. Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 169.)

15. Pintner, “Russian Military Thought,” 362.

16. As concerns Russia’s membership of the G-8, even Moscow’s mayor and 1999 presidential hopeful, Yury Luzhkov, remarked: “Its [Russia’s] full membership of the ‘Big Eight’ is obviously also a self-deceit.” Luzhkov, however, was here not so much referring to Russia’s deficient *democratic* credentials, as to its insufficient *economic* potential. (Y. M. Luzhkov, *The Renewal of History: Mankind in the 21st Century and the Future of Russia* (London: Stacey International, 2003), 151–152).

17. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (March/April 1994), 71.

18. Daniel Headrick contrasts this smooth, swift, and easy conquest of Siberia by the Russians with the slow conquest of its Western frontier by the young United States, where, due to the fierce resistance of the Native American tribes, “the conquest was slow, difficult, and costly” (Headrick, *Power over Peoples*, 277). “The contrast with the Russian expansion into Siberia is striking,” wrote Headrick. “In the 1590s, Russia was confined to the west of the Ural Mountains. By 1646, Russian explorers and fur traders had reached the eastern edge of Siberia and had founded Okhotsk off the sea of that name and Anadyrsk in northeastern Asia. By 1689—after only a hundred years—Russia controlled almost all of Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, 3,500 miles from European Russia” (Headrick, *Power over Peoples*, 278).

19. Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, with a new introduction by Francis P. Sempa (New Brunswick: Transaction

Publishers, 2008), 69.

20. Cf. Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 31.

21. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 140.

22. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital*, 141.

23. Colin S. Gray, “The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartland, Rimlands, and the Technological Revolution,” Strategy Paper No. 30, National Strategy Information Center, Inc., (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1977), 35. Charles Tilly even spoke of “two and a half centuries, [in which] Russian expansion scarcely ceased” (cf. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital*, 189). The Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen estimated that “every seven years from 1500 until his day [around 1910, MHVH], Russia gained an amount of territory equal to that of his own country, the Kingdom of Norway.” (Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova, *Inside the Kremlin* (London: W. H. Allen & Co Plc,

1988), 262–263.) The land surface won by Russia in four hundred years, was, according to Nansen, approximately fifty-seven times that of Norway, which is about 17 million square kilometers. The surface of the tsarist empire in 1910 was about 23 million square kilometers. Nansen's estimate seems rather plausible.

24. Edward Dicey, "Mr Gladstone and Our Empire," September 1877, in *Nineteenth Century Opinion: An Anthology of Extracts from the First Fifty Volumes of The Nineteenth Century 1877–1901*, ed. Michael Goodwin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), 261. Dicey added: "But our conquests have come to us as the accidents of war, not as the objects of our warfare. I do not deduce from this that our annexations of territory have been obtained more justly or more rightfully than those of other powers who have conquered for the sake of conquering. What I want to point out is that our Empire is the result not so much of any military spirit as of a certain instinct of development in our race.

We have in us the blood of the Vikings; and the same impulse which sent the Norsemen forth to seek new homes in strange lands has, for century after century, impelled their descendants to wander forth in search of wealth, power, or adventure” (Dicey, “Mr Gladstone,” 262).

25. Quoted in Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, “The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe,” Policy paper (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2010), 32.

26. Claire Mouradian, “Les Russes au Caucase,” in *Le livre noir du colonialisme: XVIe–XXIe siècle: de l’extermination à la repentance*, ed. Marc Ferro (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003), 393 (emphasis mine).

27. John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013), 399.

28. Cf. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979), 337.

29. Anderson, *Lineages*, 346.

30. Anonymous authors, *Proekt Rossiya: Vybor Puti, Vtoraya Kniga* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 395.
31. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, with a preface by F. A. Hayek, reprint of the original edition of 1861 (Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1962), 88. This compensatory function of imperialist policies had also been observed by the sociologist Max Weber: “Weber saw Russia as a typical imperialist power, its pressure for expansion coming from a combination of elements within Russian society: from the landhunger of the peasants; from the power interests of the bureaucracy; from the cultural imperialism of the intelligentsia, who, ‘too weak to secure even the most elementary demands for a constitutional order and guaranteed freedoms at home . . . find a support for their damaged self-esteem in the service of a policy of expansion, concealed under fine-sounding phrases.’” (David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (London: George Allen

& Unwin Ltd, 1974), 140.)

32. Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen: Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 33.

33. Instead of seeking refuge in the ersatz self-esteem, provided by empire, a more authentic way to reappropriate the self-esteem that has been denied, is described by Axel Honneth in his book *The Struggle for Recognition*. "In the context of the emotional response associated with shame," he wrote, "the experience of being disrespected can become the motivational impetus for a struggle for recognition. For it is only by regaining the possibility of active conduct that individuals can dispel the state of emotional tension into which they are forced as a result of humiliation." The praxis thus opened up makes it possible, according to Honneth, "to take the form of political resistance." (Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of*

Social Conflicts (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 138.)

34. Stalin was a great admirer of Ivan the Terrible (Ivan Grozny), whom he considered as his great historical role model. According to Simon Sebag Montefiore, “[H]e regarded Ivan the Terrible as his true *alter ego*, his ‘teacher.’” (Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 177.) Montefiore described how Stalin, at the very moment that the German armies stood before Moscow, “kept reading history: it was now that he scribbled on a new biography of Ivan the Terrible: ‘teacher teacher’ and then: ‘We shall overcome!’” (Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin*, 396). Stalin admired in Ivan not only his imperialist policies, but also—if not more—his ruthless killing of the *boyars*, the Russian nobility. (On Stalin’s self-identification with Ivan the Terrible, see also Benedict Anderson, *Lineages*, 160, and Vladimir Fédorovski, “Le Fantôme d’Ivan le Terrible,” in *Le Fantôme de*

Staline (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2007), 175–181).

35. An example of this imperial inequality was the fact that even when, in 1946, the Algerians obtained civil rights, they did not get the same voting rights as French colonists. They got these only in 1956 after the war of liberation had already started.

36. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Empire & Emancipation: Power and Liberation on a World Scale* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 187.

37. Nederveen Pieterse, *Empire*, *ibid.*

38. Rousseau, “Considérations,” 1039.

39. Rousseau, “Considérations,” 970.

40. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary* (London and New York: Penguin, 2004), 193.

41. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, reprint of the original, Edinburgh, 1767 (Milano: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 2001), 417.

42. Ferguson, *An Essay*, 418.

43. Sir John Rober Seeley, *The Expansion of*

England: Two Courses of Lectures (London: Macmillan & Co, 1914), 294.

44. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 347.

45. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 348.

46. The young and democratic United States had an important flaw, which was the status of black slaves who were not considered citizens. However, in its territorial expansion the United States did not act as an empire (at least not until 1898, when it took the Philippines from Spain). Neither did it incorporate the native American tribes. Their land was “bought,” and they were driven from their lands, finally ending up in extraterritorial reservations. Alexis de Tocqueville, a profound admirer of American democracy, who, in December 1831, witnessed the deportation of the Chactas Indians, denounced the silent extermination that went on behind a juridical façade, writing that “the Americans of the United States, more humane, more moderate, more respectful of the law and legality [than the Spaniards in South America],

never bloodthirsty, are more profoundly destructive of their race [Chactas tribe] and it is beyond doubt that in one hundred years there will remain in North America not one single tribe, nor even one single man, belonging to the most remarkable of the Indian races.” (Alexis de Tocqueville, “Contre le génocide des Indiens d’Amérique,” in *Textes essentiels*, Anthologie critique par J.-L. Benoît, (Paris: Havas, 2000), 305.)

Chapter 2

Comparing Western and Russian Legitimation Theories for Empire

Imperial rule needs legitimation. But it would be an exaggeration to state that imperialist rule always needs legitimation. In the first phases of modern imperialism territorial expansion *just happened*. Often it could not even be called imperialism, especially when expansion took place in empty territories where no native populations lived that could be subdued. However, it was a different matter when imperialist expansion implied wars of conquest, as in South America where the Spanish *conquistadores* conducted bloody wars against the indigenous Indian populations. It is, therefore, no coincidence that “Spain was the only conquering country . . . that asked itself questions about its capacity and the legality to

exercise its rights and dominate other peoples.”^[1]

IMPERIALIST LEGITIMATION THEORIES: CHRISTIANITY, A SUPERIOR CIVILIZATION, AND THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN

In its search for a legitimation theory Spain fell back on the old medieval theory of the “just war” waged by Christians against the infidels. The “infidels,” in this case, were not Muslims, but pagans. An additional argument was found in the fact that the population of the Caribbean included cannibals, which was considered a reason for them to be enslaved. Thus, in this early period the Christian faith and the superiority of Europe’s civilization were used as arguments to support imperialist rule. In Western Europe the inherent hypocrisy of these theories began to be attacked in the eighteenth century when Enlightenment philosophers, such as Voltaire and Diderot, formulated the first

fundamental criticism of slavery and colonial rule.^[2] These critical voices found resonance in the nineteenth century, when a widely supported anti-slavery movement emerged. This led to a new legitimation theory, the theory of the *white man's burden*, which was the result of the bad conscience caused by the new moral criticism. It became more difficult to legitimate imperialist expansion by referring to the Christian faith (in both its catholic, as well as its protestant variants). In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith,

[Colonialism's] real motives, were they stated, would be altogether too uncouth, selfish or obscene. So where colonization has involved people—where it has not meant merely the appropriation and settlement of unused lands—the colonialists have almost always seen themselves as the purveyors of some transcendental moral, spiritual, political or

social worth. The reality [however] has as regularly included a considerable component of pecuniary interest, real or anticipated, for important participants.^[3]

The bad conscience about colonial practice that emerged in the nineteenth century necessitated the forging of a new legitimation theory in which the concept of *moral duty* had a central place. This was especially the case in protestant countries, such as Britain and the Netherlands. This new legitimation theory was dubbed *the white man's burden*,^[4] because imperialist expansion was considered not so much an interest- and profit-driven exploitation of foreign countries and foreign peoples, but rather a *civilizing mission*. Of course this civilizing mission had already played a role when the Christian faith was used as a legitimation theory. But then the emphasis was still on the *spiritual* salvation of the indigenous populations by their conversion to Christianity.

Now this legitimization theory was turned upside down: what was at stake was not their *spiritual* salvation in the afterlife, but their *earthly* salvation here and now. The colonial ruler—far from being an oppressor and exploiter—was a *helper* and a *coach* of native populations, bringing them the benefits of modern governance, modern transport systems, modern industry and trade, and, in addition, the whole rich Western culture that became available to local elites by giving them access to higher education. In 1897 H. F. Wyatt, the founder of the British *Imperial Maritime League*, wrote:

In Asia and in Africa great native populations have passed under our hands. To us—to us, and not to others, a certain definite duty has been assigned. To carry light and civilization into the dark places of the world; to touch the mind of Asia and of Africa with the ethical ideas of Europe; to give to thronging millions, who would

otherwise never know peace or security, these first conditions of human advance . .

..^[5] To sustain worthily the burden of empire is the task manifestly appointed to Britain, and therefore to fulfil that task is her duty, as it should also be her delight.^[6]

The young Winston Churchill, twenty-two years old, delivered his first political speech in Bath in the same year (1897). He told his audience “that our determination is to uphold the Empire that we have inherited from our fathers as Englishmen,” adding: “we shall continue to pursue that course marked out for us by an all-wise hand and carry out our mission of bearing peace, civilization and good government to the uttermost ends of the earth.”^[7] Was this merely a *new* hypocrisy replacing the old? One might be tempted to reply in the affirmative. However, this is not completely true. Galbraith, for instance, stressed the important role Britain played in

building a *Rechtsstaat* in India. Introducing a functioning independent and impartial judiciary in this large country was, indeed, a matter of great historical progress.

“The new faith was law,” wrote Galbraith. “The British were in India to trade and make money. There was nothing wrong with that. But the redeeming purpose was to bring government according to law. It was an idea of genuine power.”^[8] “Largely in consequence,” he continued, “India was one of the best-governed countries in the world. Persons and property were safe. Thought and speech were more secure than in recent times. There was effective action to arrest famine and improve communications. The courts functioned impartially and to the very great pleasure of the litigiously-minded Indians.”^[9] And Galbraith concluded: “The British rulers were snobbish, race-conscious and often arrogant. But if colonialism could anywhere have been considered a success (the empty lands always

apart), it was in India.”^[10]

At the end of the nineteenth century the theory of the white man’s burden became widely accepted in the Netherlands also. Here it was called *de ethische koers* (the ethical course). This “ethical course” was intended to repair the historical *ereschuld* (honorable debt) to the indigenous populations.^[11] It is telling that even a Dutch socialist MP, Henri van Kol, who, in 1901, in an article in the press had severely attacked the imperialist policies of the Dutch government, was much more positive after a visit to the Dutch Indies (Indonesia) some years later. In a report he wrote of having felt “a feeling of pride” during his visit: “There is over there something great and noble being achieved.”^[12] According to the Dutch sociologist Van Doorn, “this sense of mission, the feeling of being ‘responsible’ for Indonesia grew between the world wars to almost mythical proportions.”^[13] The Dutch were even

praised by outsiders:

In the 1920s American perceptions of Dutch colonial rule had been positive, even if such assessments were colored by paternalistic, racial overtones. Consul-General Chas Hoover spoke approvingly of Dutch colonial rule over the “apathetically conservative people of these islands.” His successor argued that “the whites—particularly the 30,000 Dutch who are doing it—are experts in the art of government” who were willing to “discuss with friendly interest the aspirations of the brown people to learn how to govern themselves.”^[14]

Although recognizing the fact that “every empire has been both Jekyll and Hyde,”^[15] ex-colonial powers, generally, have stressed the credit balance of their imperial rule. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century the

sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, who was anything but a pure democrat, criticized the hypocrisy of the European powers. “An Englishman, a Frenchman, a Belgian, an Italian,” he wrote, “when he fights and dies for his fatherland, is a hero; but an African, when he dares to defend his fatherland against these nations, is a vile rebel and a traitor. And the Europeans carry out their holy duty to destroy the Africans, as, for instance in the Congo, in order to teach them to be civilized.”^[16] Despite the moral self-satisfaction of the former colonial powers concerning the supposed blessings of their colonial rule, it is good to remember the words of Aimé Césaire, the founder of the *négritude* movement in France, who wrote:

I maintain that colonial Europe is dishonest in legitimating colonialism *a posteriori* by the evident material progress which has been realized in certain domains under colonial rule; . . . that nobody knows

at what stage of material development these same countries would have been without European intervention; that the technical equipment, the administrative reorganisation, in a word: the “Europeanization” of Africa or Asia was in no way linked to a European occupation—as is proved by the example of Japan; that the Europeanization of the non-European continents could have been achieved in other ways than under the European boot.^[17]

SOCIAL DARWINISM: THE PRIMACY OF NAKED POWER

Theories of the white man’s burden reflected the growing feelings of moral uneasiness with imperialist policies amongst the enlightened metropolitan elites. However, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century we can witness in Western Europe a rude and cynical

reaction against this new moral criticism with the emergence of legitimation theories based on *social Darwinism*. As the term indicates, these theories were inspired by Charles Darwin, especially by his theories of “natural selection” and the “survival of the fittest,” which he had developed in *The Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin’s theory was biology. It was not sociology or political science. However, already Darwin himself had given his theory a wider interpretation when he applied it to the human world in his book *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). In this work he spoke of the “lower races,” a term that he not only used to refer to colonized peoples outside Europe, but also to some peoples inside Europe. For instance, he quoted uncritically an author who compared the Scots, supposed to be “frugal, foreseeing, self-respecting, [and] ambitious,” with the Irish, who were considered to represent an “inferior and less favored race.”^[18] Many of Darwin’s

contemporaries were eager to grant his theory of the survival of the fittest, including its implicit conclusions of racial superiority and inferiority, an almost universal validity. It was a theory, considered not only useful to explain the biological world, but also human society, and even international relations.

Darwin's theory became popular because it responded to the ideological needs of the imperial powers of his time. Already Marx noted in 1862, "It is strange how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthus' struggle for life. It is Hobbes's bellum omnium contra omnes."^[19] Although for Marx Darwin's biological theory presented a surprisingly accurate *description* of the capitalist society of his time, for many of his contemporaries Darwin's theory provided rather a mandatory *prescription* of policies to be followed. This was especially the case for

recently unified nations, such as Germany and Italy, both aspiring to become colonial empires. These countries were historical *latecomers*. It was only after unification in the second half of the nineteenth century that they had the strength and the ambition to build a colonial empire. By that time, however, apart from Africa, most of the territories of the globe were already occupied by the older colonial powers. What arguments could they bring forward to claim their share? The Christian faith? The established colonial powers had already done this before them, and, in addition, this claim had in the meantime become obsolete. Or should they provide support for their territorial claims by stressing their unique civilizing mission? Could the white man's burden not also be shared by Germany and Italy? The other powers were not convinced. While complaining about the unbearable weight of their burden, they were not in a hurry to share it with others. It was the new theory of social Darwinism that

provided them with a solution. Neither Germany nor Italy needed new moral legitimation theories, such as the white man's burden. These were, according to them, merely hypocritical veils cast over the naked economic interests of the old, established colonial powers. They only claimed a "rightful place under the sun." They just claimed *their* part of the cake. Their only legitimation was their newly acquired power and their military strength, expressions of their racial superiority. This new social Darwinist legitimation theory of the latecomers found a staunch defender in the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896). Treitschke confirmed that "it was the highest moral duty of the state to take care of its power."^[20] However, this was challenged by Friedrich Meinecke, because it "leads, first, to suspending the definitive character of international treaties and, further, to inciting the praising of the glory of war. . . . He [Treitschke] considers war the only remedy for

sick nations on the verge of sinking into egoistic individualism.”^[21] Meinecke commented: “The new German theory says: ‘Our interest is our right,’ the old, very old English theory is: ‘Lawfulness is our interest.’”^[22]

Germany’s and Italy’s claims for colonial expansion were based on the slogan Might Makes Right. In Germany social Darwinism expressed itself also in *pan German* theories, which were “a racist variant of those legitimization and expansion attempts.”^[23]

“Economic advancement and the subjugation of overseas territories seemed due to the ‘natural qualities’ of the nation, ‘that means its racial qualities.’ In any case, massive demands could be deducted from these. Out of the racist pan Germanism, that would heal the world, emerged a pseudo-scientifically ‘disguised legitimization’ for permanent expansion.”^[24]

Theories of the white man’s burden, even if they might have appeared hypocritical, still

preserved a *moral* legitimation for imperial rule and justified this rule by the benefits that this rule was supposed to bring to the colonized populations. Pan Germanism and social Darwinism, on the contrary, did away with any bad conscience and proclaimed loudly and without any moral restraint the right of the strongest. "The general basic values in Imperial Germany," wrote Helge Pross, ". . . were order, obedience, subordination, duty, work, performance, discipline, functioning. In the thinking of very many bourgeois men and women the state, monarchy, national greatness and [Germany's] international standing equally had the status of values, they were desirable and should be realized."^[25] "Many citizens dreamt of German greatness, German international standing, a policy that would give Germany its rightful place as one of the leading world powers. . . . The state became a value in itself."^[26] Worshipping an almighty state that was able to extend its imperial rule overseas

went hand in hand with feelings of racial superiority. According to the historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler the logical conclusion of these theories was *fascism*: “Undeniably since the 1870s–1880s this social Darwinism has spread throughout the western industrial nations and it has exercised a demonstrably great influence, but it reached its apogee only in the racist radicalization by National Socialism.”^[27]

THREE RUSSIAN LEGITIMATION THEORIES FOR IMPERIAL EXPANSION: ORTHODOXY, PAN SLAVISM, AND COMMUNISM

It is now time to turn to Russia and to ask what kind of legitimation theories were used during the expansion of the Russian empire. As was already mentioned, in the first centuries of Russian expansion no special legitimation theory seemed necessary. Territorial expansion was “the normal way of life” of the Russian state. It was something akin to breathing: you

are doing it, but you are not conscious of doing it. This was especially the case when the empire expanded into quasi-empty, sparsely populated territories. However, when the expansion began to take place in territories occupied by foreign populations there emerged a need for legitimation theories. We can distinguish at least three:

1. The Orthodox religion
2. Pan Slavism
3. Communism

Sometimes these legitimation theories overlap. But they will be represented here as different, sequential phases.

The first, Orthodoxy, is a religious legitimation theory, and it resembles, therefore, the religious legitimation theories that played a role in the early colonial expansion of Western Europe, especially of Spain. In Russia religion played an important role from an early stage.

That role, however, was different from that in Western Europe, where Protestantism and Catholicism were not the religions of one state, but of groups of states. In 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, Russia had become the only Orthodox country in the world. This led to a deep sense of Russian religious uniqueness. Moscow began to call itself the “Third Rome,” and a specific Russian messianism emerged: Russia considered itself to be the only real source of salvation for mankind. The resemblance here with the young Soviet Union is striking. In 1917 Russia became, again, the only state in the world with its own creed: communism. As the only communist country in the world, it considered itself to be a beacon for mankind. The messianism of the early communist era, expressed in the phrase “socialism in one country” was, in fact, a secularized version of the messianism of tsarist, Orthodox Russia, expressed in the slogan *svyataya Rus*, “Holy Russia.” To call your country

“holy” is an immense pretention. “To see oneself as potentially ‘a holy nation’ is to link chosenness indissolubly with collective sanctification.”^[28] But Russia was not the first to call itself “holy.” In the West there existed a precedent—and a competitor—in the Holy Roman Empire, headed by the emperor of Austria.^[29] Both the emperor in Vienna and the tsar in Moscow pretended to be the legitimate heirs of the late Christian Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire in the heart of Europe, led by the Austrian emperor, however, was a weak and semifederal construction, a conglomerate of German principalities that would finally be dissolved in 1806 under pressure from Napoleon. The tsars, on the contrary, stood at the helm of a centralized and strong military power, and they were able to conduct an uninterrupted policy of territorial annexation.

THE SYMBIOSIS OF CHURCH AND STATE

The Russian Orthodox religion gained in importance as a legitimation theory for Russian expansion, when, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russia began its southward expansion into the territories of the Ottoman Empire. There Russia was no longer confronting "fellow Christians," such as the Protestant Swedes or the Catholic Poles, but a non-Christian, Muslim power. The peoples over whom the Ottomans ruled, Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Serbs, shared the Orthodox faith of the Russians, a faith of which the Russian tsar considered himself to be the official defender. Consequently Russian imperialist expansion in the south took place under the banner of a defense of the Orthodox religion. The Crimean War, for instance, started with a conflict with the Ottoman Empire and France over Russia's role as a protector of the Orthodox Christians and the Holy Places in Jerusalem. The Orthodox religion could play its role of legitimation theory for imperial

expansion better than other religions in Europe because it was, in the most literal sense, a *state* religion. Tsar Peter the Great had subordinated the Church to bureaucratic state control when he introduced the lay function of Ober Procurator (*Ober Prokuror*) of the Holy Synod, which was a state official who exercised ultimate authority over the episcopal body.^[30] Tsar Peter, the Westernizer, wanted to *dominate* the Church, which he considered, in his heart, a reservoir of primitive beliefs. His successors, however, wanted to *use* the Church and from the middle of the eighteenth century we can witness a growing symbiosis of the Church and the state. At the end of the eighteenth century, under the enlightened tsarina Catherine the Great, this symbiosis was still progressive in nature: she appointed modern, educated bishops who shared her ideas. But under the rule of the reactionary tsar Nicholas I (1825–1855), who was called the *gendarme of Europe*, the Church became the

instrument of a repressive state. The right hand of Nicholas I, his deputy minister of Public Education, Sergey Uvarov, coined the ideological triad Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood,^[31] which was to become Russia's official state ideology. Priests were paid by the state and had the status of civil servants. They were spied upon: "The church itself was firmly under the control of the state so that even sermons were vetted by the police."^[32] In their turn the priests themselves were used as informants. They reported irregular behavior and the emergence of subversive ideas in their local parishes to the police, acting as unofficial spies for the state. "The doctrine of the Church provided Tsarism with a powerful ideological justification, and its priests acted as instruments of police rule in rural areas."^[33] They had also "to report confessions which revealed 'evil intent' towards the State."^[34] The iron grip of the state on the Church was further

strengthened under tsar Alexander III (1881–1894), who made his tutor, the reactionary Pan Slavist Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Ober Procurator of the Holy Synod.

A NEW LEGITIMATION THEORY: PAN SLAVISM

However, with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century there emerged, alongside Orthodox religion, a new legitimation theory. National expansion was no longer the exclusive domain of ruling dynasties. It became increasingly a concern for the populations as well. This growing popular interest in national politics found expression in the *Pan Movements* that aimed to bring peoples of the same language and culture together within the framework of a single nation-state. In Germany this took the form of *Pan Germanism*. In Russia it led, first, to *Slavophilia*, a romantic movement that ascribed unique ethnic and spiritual qualities to the Slavic peoples, and, then, to *Pan Slavism*, a political movement with the goal of

uniting all Slavic peoples under the Russian aegis. The reaction of the tsarist government to this movement was in the beginning somewhat reserved. The reason for this was that the movement gave a quasi-mystical importance to *narodnost*—a word derived from *narod*, which means “people.” *Narodnost* is usually translated as “nationality,” but, in fact, it was more. It referred to a supposed quasi-mystical “essence” of the Russian people, its unique character that would express itself in a supposed inborn, natural goodness, in its patience, in its childlike faith, in its capability to suffer, and its quiet subservience to “father” tsar.^[35]

The government in Saint Petersburg—especially after the revolt of the Decabrists in 1825—feared the democratic potential of the populist *narodniki*, a movement of young radicals who idolized the life of the simple Russian. The incorporation of the word *narodnost* into a national ideology by Sergey Uvarov eight years after the revolt was a clever

attempt by the government to appropriate the new concept of the Slavophiles and change its potentially subversive connotation by making it a pillar of the autocratic, tsarist state. However, the word remained a double-edged sword, because it could refer both to a popular support of the tsar, as well as to a democratic revival. The government, therefore, regarded with mistrust the First Pan Slav Congress, held in Prague in 1848, the year of European revolutions. After the Crimean War, however, things changed. The Pan Slav movement—like its Pan German counterpart—lost its already weak, liberal-democratic credentials and started to accommodate itself with autocratic rule. There were two reasons for this. The first reason was that, unlike in Germany, where the Pan German ideas were supported by a broad middle class, in Russia no such middle class existed. Pan Slav ideals were propagated by a small group of urban *intelligentsia* who were *doubly* isolated: they were isolated from the

people as well as from the autocratic state bureaucracy. There was simply not enough support in Russian society for liberal-democratic ideas. A second reason for the Pan Slav movement's embrace of autocratic rule was that the task of unifying all Slavs was considered more important than internal democratic reforms. A strong and autocratic Russia was thought the best guarantee to liberate the oppressed "brother peoples" in Southern Europe from Ottoman rule.

The position of the tsar, however, was not unequivocal. He was, certainly, quite happy to assume the role of "liberator" of the Slav peoples living under Ottoman rule. At the same time he had to be cautious not to offend Austria and Prussia/Germany, which had large Slav minorities. These countries were not enthusiastic about the Russian Pan Slav liberation fervor that could cause upheaval within their borders. And, finally, there were non-Russian Slavs in the Russian empire, such

as the Poles, who fought for their own independence. To accept “equal rights for all Slavs,” as was demanded at the Second Pan Slav Congress in Moscow in 1867, was, therefore, out of the question.^[36] The nationalism of the tsar was an official “imperial nationalism,” based directly on the existence and the needs of the empire. It had nothing to do with the right of self-determination of the peoples. Because the Russian empire comprised many different peoples with different ethnic backgrounds and different religions, it would not be permissible for the tsar to support an exclusive ethnic Russian or Slav nationalism. However, when the reformist tsar Alexander II was murdered in 1881, his son, Alexander III, under the influence of his reactionary tutor, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, wholeheartedly adopted the ethnic “great Russian” nationalism of the Pan Slavists. The policies of Alexander III were continued after his death in 1894 by his son, Nicholas II. This led to a process of

enforced Russification in Poland and the Baltic provinces, where the national languages were suppressed and assimilation was imposed.

FROM PAN SLAVISM TO RACISM: POGROMS AND ANTI-SEMITISM

The new great Russian nationalism very soon developed ugly features. Not only did it lead to a growing repression of non-Russian nationalities, such as the Poles, but also of other minorities of “foreign race” (*inorodtsy*) that could not be assimilated. In the first place Jews were targeted. The discrimination and scapegoating of Jews became an official state policy. Since 1791, during the reign of Catherine the Great, there had existed already in Russia a policy aimed at restricting the rights of Jews. In that year the Pale of Settlement was introduced. This measure restricted the territory on which the Jews had the right to live. It included the Western border region of the empire (the word “Pale” indicated “border”)

and comprised a territory that approximately covered the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This territory consisted, globally, of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Bessarabia, and only a small part of Russia proper. Eighty percent of the European part of the Russian empire was “forbidden to Jews” (although there were a few exceptions). Additionally, many towns within the Pale itself were closed to Jews. In 1795, after the third partition of Poland, when Russia annexed Eastern Poland and Poland ceased to exist as an independent state, the Jewish population in the Pale Settlement swelled to approximately five million, creating the greatest concentration of Jews in the world. This concentration within a restricted area made them vulnerable to attacks.

This is what happened after the murder of tsar Alexander II in 1881, when immediately the Jews were accused of the murder. It led to a wave of pogroms in the South of the empire,

characterized by looting, rape, and murder. This wave of violence went on for three years. The government not only failed to persecute the offenders, but overtly and secretly supported the movement. The *eminence grise* of the regime, Pobedonostsev, a known anti-Semite, was quoted as having said that “a third of the Jews will be converted, a third will emigrate, and the rest will die of hunger.” He was the man behind many new repressive measures, such as the May Laws, issued in 1882, banning Jews from rural areas and towns with more than ten thousand inhabitants. Jewish property in rural areas was confiscated and at universities quota were imposed restricting the number of Jewish students. Official, state-sponsored anti-Semitism and popular anti-Semitism, fed by resentment, went hand in hand. According to Leonid Luks, “in this struggle to bind the people to the regime anti-Jewish slogans would play an increasingly important role. There was an ever-increasing tendency

amongst the conservatives to associate the sharp social and political conflicts in the country, as well as several foreign policy drawbacks suffered by the tsarist empire (Congress of Berlin, 1878), with the activities of international Jewry.”^[37] A leading role in spreading anti-Jewish sentiments was played by the chauvinist and fiercely anti-Semitic Pan Slav movement that quickly grew in strength at the end of the century and reached its apogee after the lost war with Japan and the subsequent revolution in 1905.

One of the most important anti-Semitic organizations was the *Soyuz Russkogo Naroda* (the Union of the Russian People). Founded in October 1905, it enjoyed a spectacular growth, and soon it had about one thousand local branches. Its virulent anti-Semitism finds its equivalent only in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. One of its theoreticians, V. F. Zalevsky, accused the Jews of parasitism and the secret wish to

dominate the world. "The Jews are a damaging tribe," he wrote, "they don't like heavy work and try to live from the labors of others, letting others work for them." He continued: "Even though the Jews . . . plunder the Russian people, this still seems not to be enough; they want to completely subjugate the Russian people, they want to be their masters."^[38] In the text of a congress resolution of the organization in 1915, prepared by a section with the name "For the struggle against Jewish supremacy," the word "Jews" was consequently replaced by its pejorative equivalent *zhidy* (Yids). In the resolution one can read that it should be forbidden for Yids to have Orthodox Russian employees working for them or to participate in joint-stock companies. Russian schools should not accept Jewish children. And for Russians it should be forbidden to visit a Jewish doctor or to eat together with Jews. The only good solution for the "Talmudic *zhidovstvo*" (Yid people) is "that they be chased

from Russia in the name of the imperial laws.”^[39]

In the program of the anti-Semitic “Union of the Russian People” one could read that “the Russian people, as the gatherer of Russian lands and the creator of the great might of the state, enjoys a preferential position in national life and in national administration.”^[40] One of the demands was that the number of Jewish deputies to the State Duma be restricted to three: “Such limitation is necessary because of the disruptive, anti-state activity of the united Jewish masses, their unceasing hatred of everything Russian, and the unscrupulousness which they so openly demonstrated during the revolutionary movement [of 1905].”^[41] It was added that “Jews could, of course, not be members of the Union.”^[42] In September 1903 *Znamya* (The Banner), which would later become the official paper of the Union, was the first to publish in nine articles the complete

text of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a pamphlet about a Jewish plot to dominate the world that had been forged around 1900 by the head of the tsarist secret police in Paris at the suggestion of Pobedonostsev.^[43] In October 1906 the Union founded the Black Hundreds (*chornye sotnye*), a terror organization with an armed wing, the *Yellow Shirts*—a predecessor and probably even a model for Mussolini's blackshirts and Hitler's *Braunhemde* (brownshirts). The movement mushroomed. At the height of its influence, in the years 1906–07, it had three thousand branches,^[44] which is astonishing in a country with a quasi-non-existent civil society. In effect it was not so much a sign of a developing civil society as of an emerging *uncivil* society, because the movement played an important role in the wave of pogroms that ravaged Russia in this period and in which thousands of Jews were killed. According to Walter Laqueur there were up to *seven hundred* pogroms. However, these were

not only perpetrated by the Black Hundred movement, but equally by the tsarist authorities. “Various parliamentary inquiry committees found that the local authorities were frequently involved; in some places where the Black Hundred did not exist . . . the pogrom was carried out by the police single-handed. . . . It was virtually impossible to establish to what extent pogroms were spontaneous and to what degree they were carefully planned and organized.”^[45]

Hatred against minorities went hand in hand with hatred against foreigners and West Europeans. This xenophobic hatred was often presented as a reaction to a real or imagined *disrespect* on the part of the Europeans. Already in 1841 Stepan Shevyrev, a conservative Slavophile, wrote: “The West . . . expresses to us at every opportunity its aversion, which resembles almost a kind of hatred, and which is offensive to every Russian who enters his country.”^[46] Another writer, Nikolay Danilevsky,

a Russian Pan Slavist who gave Russian nationalism its biological basis, wrote in a famous article, *Rossiya i Evropa* (Russia and Europe), that “Europe does not recognize us as its equal. . . . Everything that is pure Russian and Slav, seems to him to be despicable. . . . Europe considers . . . the Russians and the Slavs as not only a strange, but also an inimical element.”^[47] The Pan Slavist’s xenophobic hatred of foreigners was justified by a—largely constructed—hatred that foreigners were believed to feel against the Russian people. Hatred of the West was, therefore, considered a justified reaction, a sound defense, and a confirmation of one’s own right to exist. If you are surrounded by enemies, is not the only sound reaction that of hating your enemies and preparing for war? According to Hannah Arendt the nationalism of the Pan Slavists was “a tribal nationalism [that] always insists that its own people is surrounded by ‘a world of enemies,’ ‘one against all,’ that a fundamental difference

exists between this people and all others. It claims its people to be unique, individual, incompatible with all others, and denies theoretically the very possibility of a common mankind long before it used to destroy the humanity of man.”^[48]

Masaryk spoke in this context of a *zoological* nationalism that celebrated the supposed natural, innate qualities of the Russian people.^[49] Russian feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the inhabitants of Western Europe are overcompensated by feelings of superiority. In this process Russia’s continental imperialism becomes much more racist than the overseas imperialism of the Western European countries. The Pan-Slav ideology is double edged: it gives the—superior—Russians the right to dominate the “inferior” peoples who already live in the empire. At the same time, it gives them a mission to “liberate” the other Slav peoples. Danilevsky, for instance, “included in a future Russian empire all Balkan countries,

Turkey, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Galicia, and Istria with Trieste.”^[50] Nationalist *racism* was the dominant legitimation theory for imperialist expansion in pre–World War I Russia. This racism, however, was, as such, rather fragile as an ideological foundation—for two reasons. First, by denying the fundamental equality of mankind one exposed oneself to the racism of other peoples that considered themselves—on the same racist grounds—to be superior to the Russians. This is what happened in effect when Nazi racists considered the German race superior to the “inferior” Slavs. Second, to proclaim one’s racial superiority vis-à-vis other peoples living in the empire who, in some cases, had developed a higher culture and standard of living, such as the Balts, reveals an arrogance that can easily be exposed. This was the reason, according to Galbraith, that in continental, territorially contiguous empires, such as Russia,

The tensions were far greater than in the

outlying empires of the Western Europeans because the subject peoples in this colonialism could not be persuaded that they were inferior to their rulers. Rulers and ruled alike, when washed, were white. Many of the ruled were the equal of their colonial masters in education, cultural achievement, economic well-being. Some regarded themselves as superior; this was almost always true of those who were ruled by the Russians. To be governed by one's inferiors or, more exactly, those so regarded is an especially bitter thing.^[51]

HOW THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION FORGED A NEW LEGITIMATION THEORY FOR IMPERIALIST EXPANSION

The October Revolution of 1917 promised a totally new beginning. During his exile in Switzerland Lenin himself was one of the most severe critics of tsarist imperialism and a

staunch defender of the right of national self-determination for the oppressed nations of the empire. However, this idealism was short-lived when, after the Revolution, in the newly independent states anti-bolshevist governments were installed. In the resulting civil war, from 1918 to 1922, the bolshevists reconquered most of the lost territories of the former tsarist empire.^[52] There followed a controversy between Lenin and Stalin over what to do with these territories. Stalin, who headed the People's Commissariat (Ministry) for Nationalities, did not want to grant the Soviet republics even formal independence. He preferred to make them autonomous republics within Russia proper. For Lenin this project smacked too much of the old tsarist imperial dominance, and he proposed to federate the other republics with Russia on an equal basis in a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.^[53] Should Stalin have had his way, it would certainly have made the dissolution of the empire seventy

years later more complicated and possibly bloodier. Lenin's Soviet Union pretended that it was *not* an empire, but a voluntary association of socialist republics. Officially, Pan Slavism, social Darwinist racism, and Great Russian chauvinism fell into disgrace. The Soviet Union did not define itself primarily as a *national community*, but as the representative of a *class*: the working class. Moreover, representative not only of the working class of Russia, but of the working classes of *the whole world*. Russia's inward-looking nineteenth-century nationalism had, apparently, changed into an outward-looking universalism. This universalism, even if it defended only *one* class, was, in theory at least, genuine: because, according to Marxist theory, the end result of the socialist revolution—a communist society—was supposed to be in the interest of mankind *as a whole*—former capitalists included.

However, despite the fundamental

difference between the communist internationalism and the former Pan Slav nationalism, the two had some elements in common. There was, first, their *messianism*. Similarly, communist Russia remained a special nation—not so much because of the supposed spiritual, biological, or cultural superiority of the Russian people, but because of its *vanguard role* in the world revolution. The second common element was its *paranoia*. The encirclement syndrome that characterized the nineteenth-century tsarist regime—at that time engaged in the “Great Game” over Central Asia with the British Empire—was strengthened even further in the young Soviet Union, which was declared the enemy of the capitalist world. The communist leaders, and particularly Stalin, added another, third element that was reminiscent of tsarist times: autocracy. It was not long before these three elements, thoroughly mixed together, produced the same well-known result: Great Russian nationalism

and imperialist expansion. New in all this was that Russia used the *internationalist* communist movement to further its *national* imperialist ambitions, a phenomenon that had already been observed by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942, when he wrote:

The Communist groups and parties all over the world are naturally of the greatest importance for Russian foreign policy. In consequence, there is nothing surprising in the fact that official Stalinism has of late returned to the practice of advertising an approaching struggle between capitalism and socialism—the impending world revolution—the impossibility of permanent peace so long as capitalism survives anywhere, and so on. All the more essential is it to realize that such slogans, useful or necessary though they are from the Russian standpoint, distort the real issue which is Russian imperialism.^[54] . . .

The trouble with Russia is not that she is socialist but that she is Russia. As a matter of fact, the Stalinist régime is essentially a militarist autocracy which, because it rules by means of a single and strictly disciplined party and does not admit freedom of the press, partakes of one of the defining characteristics of Fascism.^[55]

The secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 gave Stalin the opportunity to annex the three Baltic states, a part of Poland, Bessarabia (Moldova), and to attack Finland. All this had nothing to do with the international class struggle, but everything to do with the restoration of the pre-1917 tsarist empire. During the Second World War internationalist and universalist claims were—at least temporarily—put aside. The war was celebrated neither as a “Great Proletarian War,” nor as a “Great Soviet War,” which one might have expected, and even less as a war against

the capitalist “class enemy.” It went into Soviet history books as the *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina*—the Great *Patriotic War*. After the Stalinist Purges of the 1930s^[56] stirring up nationalist fervor was the only effective way for Stalin to unite the people behind the regime. It is telling that even old Pan-Slav slogans emerged during and after the war. According to Hannah Arendt, “Stalin came back to Pan-Slav slogans during the last war. The 1945 Pan-Slav Congress in Sofia, which had been called by the victorious Russians, adopted a resolution pronouncing it ‘not only an international political necessity to declare Russian its language of general communication and the official language of all Slav countries, but a moral necessity.’”^[57]

The Yalta Conference of February 1945, which gave Stalin a free hand in Eastern Europe, was, in fact, the realization of an old Pan Slav dream: the unification of Eastern Europe’s Slav peoples under Russian hegemony. According to

George Kennan, not communism, but territorial expansion was Stalin's ultimate goal:

If Russia could not rely on the Western nations to save her, it then seemed to Russian minds that the alternative lay not only in the utmost development of Russian military power within the 1938 borders, but also in new territorial acquisitions designed to strengthen Russia's strategic and political position, and in the creation of a sphere of influence even beyond these limits. In drawing up this expansionist program, Soviet planners leaned heavily on the latter-day traditions of Tsarist diplomacy.^[58] . . . It would be useful to the Western world to realize that despite all the vicissitudes by which Russia has been afflicted since August 1939, the men in the Kremlin have never abandoned their faith in that program of territorial and political expansion which had once commended

itself so strongly to Tsarist diplomatists. [59]

In fact, despite the recurrent obligatory lip service to the ideal of “world revolution,” the ultimate goal of the Soviet leadership was the defense and enlargement of the Russian empire. This logic guided Soviet foreign policy until the very end of the Soviet Union’s existence, including the—failed—invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 the epoch of Russian imperial expansion seemed to have come to a definitive end. The question was, however, whether Russia was prepared to accept this new post-imperial reality—as other former European colonial powers, such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal, had done before. In the next chapter we will see how Russia struggled with the new status quo and how—after a short period of post-communist *empire fatigue*—the old imperial habits and attitudes soon reemerged.

NOTES

1. Carlos Malamud, *Historia de América* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2005), 66.
2. Voltaire, in his satirical novel *Candide ou l'optimisme* (1759), criticized Leibniz's theorem that we live "in the best of possible worlds" and gave as one of his counterexamples the case of a slave in Surinam whose leg had been cut off because he had tried to escape. Diderot, in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), criticized French Admiral Louis Antoine de Bougainville who, in 1767, visited Tahiti and had laid claim to the island for France. Diderot let an old and wise Tahitian man describe the French visitors as follows: "ambitious and evil men: one day you will know them better. One day they will return . . . to put you in chains, slit your throats, or subjugate you to their extravagancies and to their vices, one day you will serve under them." The (French) text is available at

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/8spvb10>

3. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (London: BBC, 1977), 111.

4.

The expression “the white man’s burden” came from the 1899 poem by Rudyard Kipling in which he appealed to the United States to shoulder Britain’s imperial responsibilities:

Take up the White Man’s Burden
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard.

(Quoted in Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 369.)

5. H. F. Wyatt, “The Ethics of Empire,” April 1897, in *Nineteenth Century Opinion: An Anthology of Extracts from the First Fifty Volumes of The Nineteenth Century 1877–1901*, ed. Michael Goodwin (Harmondsworth:

Penguin, 1951), 267.

6. Wyatt, "The Ethics of Empire," 268.

7. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1991), 72.

8. Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty*, 124.

9. Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty*, 127.

10. Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty*, 127.

Galbraith, who, in the beginning of the 1960s served as US ambassador to India, recounted that he often met with the Indian leader Nehru and that "Nehru made no secret of his British background and its influence on his political thought. He once said, 'You realize, Galbraith, that I am the last Englishman to rule in India.'" (John Kenneth Galbraith, *Name-Dropping: From F.D.R. On* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 132.)

11. In 1923, when this policy was at its apogee, the Dutch historian C. Te Lintum wrote: "The ethical course or enlightened despotism that had, since 1870 (at least officially), replaced the old egoistic exploitation policy, had also

brought for the native more transport facilities and more education, especially on Java.” (C. Te Lintum, *Nederland en de Indiën in de laatste kwart eeuw* (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme & Cie., 1923), 254.) The author added—paternalistically, “They were a people living traditional lives, submissive and quiet, who held the Dutch rulers in high regard.”

12. Cf. J. A. A. van Doorn, *Indische lessen: Nederland en de koloniale ervaring* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1995), 43. This Dutch self-satisfaction was still present in 1941, when—during the German occupation!—a book titled *Daar wérd wat groots verricht* (Over there something great has indeed been achieved) was published, in which one could read: “We brought peace and prosperity, under our government the population on Java has grown tenfold, Indonesia has become one of the first countries of the world in terms of production. We can point with pride to what we have achieved in Indonesia” (ibid.). In spite of these

fine words the Dutch—unlike the British—were too obstinate to recognize the new post–World War II realities and, some years later, would fight two colonial wars—euphemistically called “police actions”—which would cost the lives of thousands of Dutch soldiers and tens of thousands of Indonesians.

13. Van Doorn, *Indische lessen*, 38. Van Doorn added: “That these high sentiments did not fit the existing colonial interests, was still the least objection one might make. More questionable was the sense of superiority hidden behind the ethical responsibility: the certainty that it was the Netherlands especially that had had the calling to ‘elevate’ the indigenous population and, after a while, the conviction, just as strongly held, that it had completed this task in an excellent way. The myth of the Netherlands as a *gidsland* (guiding country) would, in particular, block the ability to assess the emerging nationalism in a positive way, or even merely to notice it” (Van Doorn, *Indische lessen*,

38–39).

14. Hendrik Spruyt, *Ending Empire: Contested Sovereignty and Territorial Partition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 57.

15. V. G. Kiernan, *America: The New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World Hegemony* (London: Zed Press, 1978), 269.

16. Vilfredo Pareto, *Trattato di sociologia generale*, Volume secondo, “I residui” (Milano: Edizione di Comunità, 1981), 123–124.

17. Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme suivi de Discours sur la Négritude* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004), 27–28 (emphasis in original).

18. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 148.

19. Karl Marx, Letter of June 18, 1862, *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1974), Band 30, 249.

20. Quoted in Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, Werke Bd. I, Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von

Walther Hofer (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1976), 466.

21. Meinecke, *Staatsräson*, 466.

22. Meinecke, *Staatsräson*, 466.

23. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 181.

24. Wehler, *Kaiserreich*, 181.

25. Helge Pross, *Was ist heute deutsch?: Wertorientierungen in der Bundesrepublik* (Reinbek-Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982), 62.

26. Pross, *Was ist heute deutsch?* 49.

27. Wehler, *Kaiserreich*, 179.

28. Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 37. Cf. also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49–50.

29. Herfried Münkler drew attention to the fact that for Roman authors, such as Virgil and Horace, “empires are of world-historical importance, in a cosmological or salvationist

sense, as well as in terms of power politics. . . . Empires take it upon themselves to shape the course of time. The strongest expression of this is the sacral charge of the imperial mission. . . . In an age when decline and fall were seen as the natural tendency of history, the world-historical role of empire was to arrest the decline and to prevent the end of the world. . . . Once Christianity became the state religion, it was necessary to give up some of the sacral components of the imperial mission But the sense of sacrality remained so strong that in the eleventh century the Hohenstaufen chancellery began to speak of the *sacrum imperium*—a term that then passed down into the Holy Roman Empire (of the German Nation).” (Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 88–89.)

30. Cf. Laura Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path* (Ithaca: Cornell

University Press, 2009), 103.

31. In Russian: *Pravoslavie: Samoderzhavie: Narodnost*. On the exact connotation of the Russian word *narodnost* (nationality), see note 35.

32. Alexander Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire - A History of Imperial Russia* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 61.

33. David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1974), 186.

34. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979), 347.

35. The German equivalent of *narodnost* is *Volkstum*. *Volkstum*, however, has a more cultural connotation: it stands mainly for the *cultural* expression of the people (*Volk*) in folklore, customs, language, poems, popular myths, and so on. The Russian word *narodnost* has a more *spiritual* connotation and refers to the unique psychological and spiritual qualities that are ascribed to the Russian people. This

different focus probably results from the fact that, unlike Germany's population, the majority of the Russian population was illiterate and excluded from (higher) culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, both German *Volkstum* and Russian *narodnost*—originally conceived as counterconcepts against the cosmopolitanism of the French Revolution—would acquire clearly *racist* overtones.

36. Cf. Frank Golczewski and Gertrud Pickhan, *Russischer Nationalismus: Die russische Idee im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Darstellung und Texte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 36.

37. Leonid Luks, "Die politisch-religiöse 'Sendung' Russlands," in *Freiheit oder imperiale Größe: Essays zu einem russischen Dilemma*, ed. Leonid Luks (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2009), 48. Dostoevsky fully shared this anti-Semitism and did not hesitate to use the pejorative word "Yid" in his *Writer's Diary*. In a chapter titled "The Jewish Question," he depicts a Jewish plot for world dominance, writing, "the Jews reign

over all the stock exchanges there . . . they control the credit . . . they are the ones who control the whole of international politics as well; and what will happen hereafter is, of course, known to the Jews themselves: their reign, their complete reign, is drawing nigh!” (Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *A Writer's Diary, Volume II: 1877–1881*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 914.)

38. V. F. Zalevsky, “Chto takoe Soyuz Russkogo Naroda i dlya chego on nuzhen?” Excerpts published in Golczewski and Pickhan, *Russischer Nationalismus*, 210–216.

39. “Resolution of the ‘Section for the Struggle against Jewish Supremacy’ of the Congress of the Union of the Russian People in Nizhny Novgorod, November 1915,” in Golczewski and Pickhan, *Russischer Nationalismus*, 216–221.

40. V. Ivanovich, ed., *Rossiyskie partii, soyuzy i ligi* (Saint Petersburg, 1906), 117–122.

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/a.k.harrington/urpprog.ht>

41. Ivanovich, *Rossiyskie partii*.
42. Ivanovich, *Rossiyskie partii*.
43. Cf. Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 35. Cf. also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 241.
44. Laqueur, *Black Hundred*, 20.
45. Laqueur, *Black Hundred*, 21.
46. Stepan Shevyrev, 1841, "Vzglyad Russkogo na sovremennoe obrazovanie Evropy" (A Russian's View of the Contemporary Development of Europe). In Golczewski and Pickhan, *Russischer Nationalismus*, 163.
47. Nikolay Danilevsky, "Rossiya i Evropa" (Russia and Europe), in Golczewski and Pickhan, *Russischer Nationalismus*, 181–183.
48. Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 227.
49. Quoted in Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 224.
50. Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 226.
51. Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty*, 136.
52. According to Yegor Gaidar, "Russia is unique

in restoring a failed empire, which it did in the period 1918–22. This required an unprecedented use of force and violence. But that was not the only factor in the Bolshevik's success. Messianic Communist ideology shifted the center of political conflict from a confrontation between ethnic groups to a struggle among social classes. That struggle garnered support from people in the non-Russian regions, who fought for a new social order that would open the way to a brilliant future, and played a large role in forming the Soviet Union within borders resembling those of the Russian Empire.” (Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 17.)

53. Cf. Robert Service, *Penguin History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 129.

54. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers

Publishers, 1947), 404.

55. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism*, 404.

56. On the devastating consequences of the purges, not only for the general population, but also for the communist elite, George Kennan wrote: "And the great old names of communism had not died alone. With them had gone a full 75 percent of the governing class of the country, a similar proportion of the leading intelligentsia, and over half of the higher officers' corps of the Red army." (George F. Kennan, "Russia: Seven Years Later," Annex to George Kennan, *Memoirs 1925–1950* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 503–504.)

57. Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 222.

58. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925–1950*, 519.

59. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925–1950*, 519.

Chapter 3

Putin and the End of Russian “Empire Fatigue”

In retrospect, 1991 offered the first real chance in modern Russian history to break the infernal cycle of imperialist expansion and colonial subjugation of neighboring peoples. It was not a war that caused the breakup of the empire. The empire collapsed because of its *internal* tensions: its inefficiently planned economy, its lack of freedom, its corruption, and its bureaucratic overload. “Many Russians were weary of supporting and subsidizing the economies of poorer regions of the USSR, such as Central Asia, and argued that economic reforms and modernization in Russia had a better chance if Russian statehood was dissociated from its colonial past.”^[1] For the young, liberal reformers the loss of empire was a real liberation, it was like the loss of a

historical ballast. They knew, intuitively, that Russia could only proceed further on the road toward a liberal, Western-style democracy if it were able to shake off its centuries-old legacy of imperial conquest and oppression. According to Igor Yakovenko, “the collapse of the USSR was the luckiest event in the past half-century.”^[2] Why? Because, as Brzezinski rightly remarked, “Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both.”^[3] Democracy and empire mutually exclude each other.^[4] According to Charles Tilly, “segments of empire can in principle achieve some democracy but *whole empires remain undemocratic by definition*; at an imperial scale their segmentation and reliance on indirect rule bar equal citizenship, binding consultation, and protection.”^[5] Zbigniew Brzezinski, therefore, was right when he wrote: “In not being an empire, Russia stands a chance of becoming, like France or Britain or earlier post-Ottoman

Turkey, a normal state.”^[6]

EMPIRE FATIGUE: A CHANCE OF BECOMING A “NORMAL STATE”?

The demise of the Russian empire was an atypical event. Apart from an independence movement in the Baltic republics that had started earlier, it found its basis not so much in the periphery—in the nationalism of the colonized nationalities—as in the nationalism of the colonizing *center*: Russia. This was one of the contradictory outcomes of the Soviet Union, in which ethnic Russians were in control of the party, the army, the KGB, and the heavy industry, but, at the same time, the Russian national identity was suppressed in favor of an invented, mostly artificial “Soviet” citizenship. Indeed, “a strong Russian nationalist movement . . . was in fact the most potent mobilizing force against the Soviet state. It was the merger of the struggle for democracy, and the recovery of

Russian national identity under Yeltsin's leadership in 1989–91, that created the conditions for the demise of Soviet communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union.”^[7]

There existed in the center even a certain *resentment* against the other nationalities, some of which had a higher standard of living.^[8] Others, poorer ones, got subsidies from Moscow to balance their budgets. In the end *all* profited from the center by buying their energy at cheap, subsidized prices. The subsidies were significant. In 1991, for instance, seven Soviet republics received substantial subsidies from the Union Budget, which, in the cases of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan amounted to almost one half of their state budgets (46.6 percent and 42.9 percent, respectively).^[9] It was, therefore, no surprise that in the eyes of the average Russian the empire was no longer considered to be advantageous, but, on the contrary, a heavy burden that only cost them

money.^[10] Russian nationalism, instead of being a motor of Russian expansionism, had become the motor of the Soviet Union's disintegration in a process of *empire fatigue*. This empire fatigue could have been the starting point for a revival of the Russian nation on a fundamentally new basis—that of a democratic Russia that had freed itself from its imperialist drive. Severing the old colonial ties can be advantageous for both the colonial power and the former colonized peoples. Adam Smith had already written during the American Revolution:

“Under the present system of management, therefore, Great Britain derives nothing but loss from the dominion which she assumes over her colonies. To propose that Great Britain should voluntarily give up all authority over her colonies, and leave them to elect their own magistrates, to enact their own

laws, and to make peace and war as they might think proper, would be to propose such a measure as never was, and never will be adopted, by any nation in the world. No nation ever voluntarily gave up the dominion of any province, how troublesome so ever it might be to govern it, and how small so ever the revenue which it afforded might be in proportion to the expense which it occasioned. . . . The most visionary enthusiast would scarce be capable of proposing such a measure with any serious hopes at least of it ever being adopted.” . . . If Great Britain, however, would decide to do so and would sign a free trade treaty with its former colony, it would not only save money, but “by thus parting good friends, the natural affection of the colonies to the mother country which, perhaps, our late dissensions have well nigh extinguished, would quickly revive. It might . . . favour us in war as well

as in trade, and instead of turbulent and factious subjects to become our most faithful, affectionate, and generous allies.”^[11]

Adam Smith spoke wise words. But he also considered it unthinkable that a colonial power would voluntarily give up its colonies. However, this was what happened in 1991 in Soviet Russia. It was not only a huge historical opportunity for developing a democracy in Russia, it was also a unique opportunity for Russia to establish new, friendly relations with the former Soviet republics.

HANDLING POST-IMPERIAL PAIN

Unfortunately the reality was different. The empire fatigue was of short duration. Almost immediately after the empire had actually collapsed, it was followed by post-imperial *pain*. This is a natural syndrome in former empires. As early as the nineteenth century British

authors predicted a national—and international—disaster if the British Empire should ever cease to exist.^[12] After the Treaty of Saint-Germain, in September 1919, and the dismemberment of the Hapsburg Empire by the Allies, the inhabitants of the new rump state of Austria experienced, apparently, such a “shock of lost empire.” They lived “in a climate of apathy and general depression.”^[13] In the Netherlands, after World War II, there was a popular proverb, “Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren” (“If Indonesia is lost, it will be the beginning of catastrophe”).^[14] A similar feeling of national disaster could also be found in decolonizing France, where it led to the emergence of the OAS, a right-wing terrorist resistance organization. Yegor Gaidar described this post-colonial pain in Russia as follows:

There is a medical phenomenon in which a person who has had a limb amputated perceives that limb to be still causing pain.

The same phenomenon applies to the post-imperial consciousness. The loss of the USSR is a reality. It is a reality that has led to social pain caused by separated families, the suffering of fellow-countrymen abroad, nostalgic reminiscences of former glory, longing for the geography of the homeland that has shrunk or been lost.^[15]

Decolonization is always a painful process. According to the Dutch sociologist Van Doorn, “to colonize is to ‘imprison’ others, but it is also to imprison oneself.”^[16] This is because to colonize is for the colonizing nation “an investment, not only in the economic sense, but also culturally and morally.”^[17] Van Doorn spoke of the “broad, almost total deception” of the Dutch after the loss of Indonesia, which could explain why “the mourning process of the end of [Dutch] Indonesia has been so difficult.” He mentioned as “an additional fact . . . that

Indonesia was almost our entire empire. All colonial powers have wrestled with decolonization after World War II, but while England and France in particular were driven step by step from their global positions, the Netherlands lost everything at once.”^[18] This fact, to lose “everything at once,” played a role also in Russia. The decolonization was sudden, unexpected, and total. The Russian frontiers were completely redrawn, and after centuries of almost uninterrupted expansion, the map of the country resembled that of sixteenth-century Russia.

TWO REACTIONS TO THE LOSS OF EMPIRE: TO ACCEPT OR NOT TO ACCEPT

There are two reactions to the loss of empire: to accept or not to accept the loss.

Unfortunately, in the Russian situation, after a short period of shock, the loss of empire did not result in a gradual acceptance, but in a

swelling tidal wave of chauvinism and nationalism. It resulted in nostalgia for lost greatness mixed with revanchism and hatred of the “enemies” who had brought the Soviet Union down. Yegor Gaidar, Yeltsin’s reform minister, told how this process took place. “In Russia,” he wrote, “the peak of the post-imperial syndrome mixed with radical nationalism did not come immediately after the collapse of the USSR, as I had expected, but later.”^[19]

And he continued:

[W]e had assumed that overcoming the transitional recession and the beginning of economic growth and an increase in real income for the population would allow people to replace the impossible dreams of empire restoration with the prosaic cares of personal well-being. We were mistaken. Experience showed that in times of profound economic crisis, when it is not

clear whether there will be enough money to feed the family until the next paycheck and whether there will be a next paycheck or whether you will be fired, most people do not worry about imperial grandeur. On the contrary, when economic security is growing and confidence that this year's salary will be greater than last year's, and that unemployment . . . will not affect you, and you see that life has changed but is returning to stability, you can come home and watch a Soviet film with your family in which our spies are better than theirs, where we always win, and the life depicted onscreen is cloudless, and then talk about how enemies have destroyed a great country and we'll still show them who's best. [20]

Gaidar shows very clearly that the Russian nationalist revival was not the consequence of some quasi-Marxist *Verelendung* of the

population, but, on the contrary, developed parallel to a growing material well-being and security that enabled people to look further than the worries of their daily life. But the growing material security was not the only factor that explained the emergence of the new Russian nationalism. There were at least two additional factors that played a role. The first was the almost predictable *counterrevolutionary drawback* that takes place after *every* revolution and, second, the *deliberate* nationalist propaganda campaign that was conducted by the political leadership.

PITIRIM SOROKIN AND THE ETERNAL CYCLE OF IDEOLOGIES IN REVOLUTIONS

The counterrevolutionary drawback that takes place after every revolution has been described by Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968), who, before World War I, was a young liberal opponent of the autocratic tsarist regime. Imprisoned several times under tsar Nicholas II, he became

in 1917 the personal secretary to Kerensky, the leader of the democratic Provisional Government that was installed after the February Revolution. He was sentenced to death by the Bolsheviks, but ultimately exiled in 1922. He went to the United States, where he became one of the leading sociologists and founded the sociology department of Harvard University. His personal experiences led him to analyze the phenomenon of revolution and its implications for society. In his book *Man and Society in Calamity* (1946) he distinguished different phases in revolutions.

Theoretically, we can distinguish in any revolution two phases: first, destructive and “liberating,” second, constructive and “restraining.”^[21] . . . [In the first phase] all ideologies that attack the oppressing institutions and values from which the revolutionary group suffers gain rapidly in popularity and acceptance.^[22] . . . If the

revolution is mainly political, the ideologies are primarily political; if the revolution is also economic the ideologies have an economic character; and if the revolution is religious, the ideologies assume a religious nature.^[23] . . . However, since economic revolutions are much deeper than political ones, they hardly ever occur without having at the same time their political, religious, or nationalistic aspects. Ordinarily the greatest revolutions become economic.^[24]

Sorokin mentioned the Paris Commune and the October Revolution of 1917 as examples of such economic revolutions. It is clear that the Russian Revolution of 1991, that put an end to communism with its planned economy and, after an absence of more than seventy years, reintroduced a market economy, was not a purely political revolution, but equally an *economic* revolution and

consequently as deep and fundamental in impact and scope as the October Revolution of 1917 that it, finally, buried.

But revolutions are *dialectical* processes. They carry, as a rule, their negation—the *counterrevolution*—in their womb. After the first period of revolutionary fervor follows a second period in which the pendulum swings in the opposite direction. Sorokin described this process as follows:

Everyone knows the refrain “It was the fault of Rousseau and Voltaire,” sung in the second period of the French Revolution, when the ideologies of the first phase were giving way to those of Chateaubriand, J. de Maistre, de Bonald, and others. The story repeated itself in the Russian revolution [of October 1917]. In the first period bourgeois science, philosophy, Pushkin, Tchaikovsky and other representatives of the “degenerate

aristocracy” and the “bourgeoisie” were assailed. Religion, the emperors and the great military generals of the past, the family, marriage, and sexual chastity were likewise attacked. In the second period, the Revolution banned the Marxian texts of history, restored the family, praised sexual chastity, and elevated Pushkin and Tchaikovsky to even higher positions than they had before. It idealized the great Russian Czars, the famous generals, and even the religious leaders of the past. It exalted patriotism, “Our Soviet Fatherland.” . . . Soviet Russia resumed exactly the same foreign policy as that of the Czarist regime.^[25]

According to Sorokin, “ideologies of the second stage represent a revival of the living ideologies of the prerevolutionary society in new dress and colors. The revolution itself, when successful, inherently and necessarily

consumes its earlier ideologies and resurrects the living prerevolutionary ideologies. This explains why in practically all great revolutions the ideologies of the first phase turned out to be unpopular in the second.”^[26] This process may explain why in present-day Russia the capitalist liberalism of Milton Friedman’s “Chicago Boys,” which guided the reforms of the early 1990s, has fallen into disgrace, together with the protagonists of the perestroika period. Not only of its leaders: Gorbachev and Yeltsin, but also of the liberal reform ministers, such as Yegor Gaidar and Andrey Kozyrev, who are now accused of being responsible for the economic breakdown and the loss of empire. Putin is clearly the representative of Russia’s “restoration” after the chaotic transformation years. It was Putin who called the loss of empire “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century.” Although he does not want to restore communism, he is the man who exalts in the second phase what had been

destroyed in the first: a centralized, strong state, a positive assessment of Stalin's "geopolitical genius," a leading role for the secret services, and the eternal glory of the Russian empire.

THE USE OF NATIONALIST PROPAGANDA BY THE LEADERSHIP

A second factor that played a role in Russia's reemerging nationalism and nostalgia for the lost empire is the *deliberate use* of chauvinist and nationalist propaganda by the leadership. Putin was not only the providential man, welcomed as the leader who would "restore order" in the second cycle of Russia's anti-communist revolution, he was also a lucky man, because of the huge rise in export prices of oil and gas that coincided with his first two presidencies. It led the Russian population to ascribe its newfound wealth and prosperity not to blind market forces, but to their active president, who, while not deserving their

praise, was quite eager to accept it. His popularity helped him spread the nationalist message. Stalin was rehabilitated as the *vozhd* (leader), the genial brain behind the victory in the Great Patriotic War. His massacres, purges, executions, and genocides were reduced to historical details, necessary to modernize a backward country, or—even better—they were forgotten and banned from public debate. The archives of the KGB, which had been temporarily opened, were closed again. The great autocratic and imperialist tsars, especially Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Nicholas I, and Alexander III, were rehabilitated and reestablished in their full glory. In September 2000 tsar Nicholas II was canonized and became an official Orthodox saint. This official revival of old imperial pomp and glory coincided with an increasingly aggressive behavior vis-à-vis the former Soviet republics.

The deliberate nationalist propaganda employed by the new power elite of *siloviki*

who—like the *nomenklatura* in old Soviet days—once again ruled both the state and the economy, served another goal: *to create foreign and internal enemies* in the good, old Stalinist tradition. The regime needed *vragi naroda* (enemies of the people) to absorb the aggression that was building up in a society where there exists no independent judiciary, where democratic freedoms have become a farce, political parties are created by the Kremlin, elections are stolen, the police is not considered as a security force but as a threat by the population, and journalists and human rights activists are regularly murdered. Nationalism is a well-known *Ventil*—a safety valve—for oppressed populations. This policy of the Russian power elite to *deliberately* foster nationalism and to propagate fear has been analyzed by the Russian sociologist Lilia Shevtsova, who wrote that “the regime is deliberately trying to keep the minds of the public in a schizophrenic state, obstructing the

formation of a civic culture and legal mentality. If the demand for a 'special path' and an 'iron hand' strengthens in Russia, it will not be because of the inability of Russians to live in a democratic and free society, but because they have been deliberately disoriented and trapped by fears, phobias, and insecurity intentionally provoked by the ruling elite."^[27] By propagating nationalism and stirring up xenophobia—not only against foreigners, but also against Russia's Muslim minorities, who are often indiscriminately depicted as "terrorists," the leadership is trying to unite the people under what Hayek has called a *negative program*.

It seems to be almost a law of human nature, that it is easier for people to agree on a negative programme, on the hatred of an enemy, on the envy of those better off, than on any positive task. The contrast between the "we" and the "they," the common fight against those outside the

group, seems to be an essential ingredient in any creed which will solidly knit together a group for common action. It is consequently always employed by those who seek, not merely support of a policy, but the unreserved allegiance of huge masses. From their point of view it has the great advantage of leaving them greater freedom of action than almost any positive programme. [28]

This officially propagated nationalism with its xenophobia and enemy stereotypes (Chechen terrorists, NATO, investigative journalists, democratic opposition, NGOs, and human rights activists) is not only meant to bind the people in an unconditional way to the “negative program” of the regime (its positive program is still today largely kept secret from the Russian population—and possibly also from the regime itself). It also has another, second, function, which is to legitimate the *suppression*

of democratic rights. This mechanism is described by Ulrich Beck as follows:

In all previously existing democracies, there have been two types of authority: one coming from the people and the other coming from the *enemy*. Enemy stereotypes empower. Enemy stereotypes have the highest conflict priority. They make it possible to cover up and force together all the other social antitheses. One could say that enemy stereotypes constitute an alternative energy source for consensus, a raw material becoming scarce with the development of modernity. *They grant exemption from democracy by its own consent.* [29]

Apart from these two aspects, mentioned above—binding the people to the regime and suppressing democracy—the propagation of nationalism by an autocratic leadership serves

yet another goal. Because nationalist fervor can be used in two ways: first, as an instrument for its *internal policy*, and second, as an instrument for its *foreign policy*. In the first case nationalism and xenophobia are used to meet objectives of domestic policy: to divert the attention of the people from the real problems in the country, to knit them together behind the regime and to repress democracy and/or to stifle demands for (more) democracy. In the second case nationalism and xenophobia, while still serving the first function, additionally promote a *revisionist and neoimperialist* foreign policy agenda that aims to change the international status quo. The key question is, therefore, is Russia's new nationalism of the first kind or of the second kind? Yegor Gaidar had dark forebodings, when he wrote:

It is not difficult to exploit that pain [of the loss of empire] politically. Say a few words that make the point that "we were stabbed

in the back,” “it’s all the fault of foreigners who have misappropriated our wealth,” or “now we will take their property and live well again,” and the deed is done. You do not have to make up the phrases; read any textbook on Nazi propaganda. Success is guaranteed. Such populist tactics appealing to social pain are a political nuclear weapon. They are rarely used. Those who do exploit them end up tragically as a rule. Such leaders bring their countries to catastrophe. Unfortunately, for the past few years Pandora’s box has been left open in Russia. The appeals to post-imperial nostalgia, nationalistic xenophobia, the usual anti-Americanism, and even to a not quite habitual anti-Europeanism have become fashionable and might soon become the norm. It is important to realize how dangerous this is for the country and the world.^[30]

The present regime is very secretive about its long-term foreign policy goals and keeps its cards close to its chest. But there are many disconcerting signals. Russia is playing a dangerous “Great Game” in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, destabilizing its neighborhood and trying to reestablish itself as the dominant power. After the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent dismemberment of this small neighboring country, an acceleration of measures and actions could be observed that—taken together—were rather disconcerting. These actions began with the combined massive *Zapad* (West) 2009 and *Osen* (Fall) 2009 maneuvers in August and September 2009 in which up to thirty thousand troops participated. For these maneuvers Khadafi’s son was invited, but not Western observers (OSCE rules for the invitation of observers were circumvented by simply dividing the maneuver into two smaller parts). The *Zapad* maneuver ended in

September 2009 in the Kaliningrad oblast with a simulated tactical nuclear attack on Poland—an action that led to protests from the Polish government. Moreover, Russia's nuclear doctrine was changed, to allow the preventive use of tactical nuclear weapons in local wars—even against nonnuclear states, which is a flagrant breach of the Nonproliferation Treaty. On August 10, 2009, a law was signed by Medvedev, permitting the use of Russian troops in foreign countries “to protect citizens of the Russian Federation.” These measures seemed to be meant as a legal preparation for eventual armed interventions in Russia's Near Abroad and were interpreted as a growing Russian bellicosity, experienced as a threat by its neighboring states. According to the French geopolitician Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, “the Russians seem to be seriously convinced that in the end the empire will always return to where it [once] reigned.”^[31] The existence of the Russian empire is, indeed, for many Russians so

self-evident, that it is almost a law of nature, a necessity hidden in *la nature des choses*. The problem is that this is not self-evident for the formerly colonized peoples, who—at last—have gained or regained their national independence. A reconstitution of the former empire on a new basis will, therefore, necessitate a huge, prolonged, and concentrated effort by the Russian leadership, an effort involving making use of all the means the Russian state has at its disposal: from economic investments and economic cooperation to economic boycotts, from pipeline diplomacy to energy blackmail, from using its “soft power” to diplomatic pressure and corruption of local political elites, from charm offensives to provocative actions and military threats.

IN SEARCH OF A NEW LEGITIMATION THEORY FOR A POST-SOVIET EMPIRE

However, this new Russian imperialism needs

an ideological justification. What kind of justification can the Russian leadership give to their neoimperial ambitions? It is clear that it can no longer invoke a specific mission, as in the case of the Soviet Union, which was considered as the global vanguard of the working classes. Nor can it rely on theories of the white man's burden, which have definitively been discredited. Furthermore "spreading democracy" and the defense of human rights cannot be used as an argument. The democratic credentials of Russia are not much better than those of Belarus. What we are seeing rather are elements of the old *Pan Slavism* when the Kremlin calls the Ukrainians or the Belarusians "brother peoples" who should not remain separated from the "mother country" Russia. But the old Pan Slavism was meant to liberate Slav peoples from a foreign yoke. Today Belarus and Ukraine are sovereign countries and are in no need of being liberated. The new Russian Pan Slavism vis-à-vis Belarus and Ukraine has,

therefore, rather the character of an annexationist Pan-*Russianism*. (This finds, by the way, support in the name Russians use for Ukraine: *Malaya Rossiya*—Little Russia.) Do Russia's imperial ambitions stop there? Or do they equally include Moldova, Kazakhstan, the South Caucasus, and the Central Asian republics?

What—in the end—remains as a justification for a renewed Russian imperialism vis-à-vis the former Soviet republics is not much more than the naked Russian *state* interest. I am referring here deliberately to the Russian *state* interest and not to the Russian *national* interest, because the new Russian imperialism is clearly in the interest of Russia's ruling political and military elite, whose positions are strengthened and consolidated by a neoimperialist policy. However, this policy is not in the interest of the average Russian citizen. And this is *a fortiori* the case for the citizens of the other former Soviet republics.

Mongrenier spoke in this context of an “ideology of power for the sake of power.”^[32] Another French geopolitician wrote that “Pragmatism is one of the characteristics of the Russian foreign policy of our early twenty-first century: a pragmatic quest for power characterized by coercive methods and an absence of morals.”^[33] “Power for the sake of power,” “absence of morals”: it is clear that we *have* here a legitimation theory: it is the old social Darwinism of the end of the nineteenth century, the right claimed by the strong to dominate the weak for the sole reason that he is stronger.

A NEW IDEOLOGICAL TRIAD: ORTHODOXY, THE POWER VERTICAL, SOVEREIGN DEMOCRACY

Russia’s return to power politics had already started under Yeltsin, who demanded from the West a *droit de regard* in its “Near Abroad,”

which came close to reestablishing the old Brezhnev doctrine of “limited sovereignty.” The West, however, did not give in to these demands. An overt neoimperial policy would also contradict the liberal democratic principles that Russia at that time still claimed to share with the West. Under Putin the principles of Russian democracy have been fundamentally changed. Russia no longer adheres to a Western-style liberal democracy with fair elections and the alternation of power. It has introduced “sovereign” democracy. This concept, forged by Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s former deputy head of the presidential administration, means that “democracy” is no longer a universal concept, the reality of which can be measured by applying universal criteria that are valid in different countries. On the contrary, “sovereign” democracy means that Russia (i.e., the leadership) itself can determine whether its system fulfills the democratic criteria. The regime is, therefore, immune

against criticism from international organizations, foreign governments, or human rights organizations.

We are here back at the “Russian specificity,” proclaimed in the nineteenth century by Russian Slavophiles, for whom Russia was a special and incomparable country with its own, unique nationhood (*narodnost*). Initially, Putin’s “sovereign democracy” was only conceived as a *defensive* concept against the universalist, Western interpretations of democracy, which made the Russian democratic praxis vulnerable to criticism. Recently, however, sovereign democracy has become an *offensive* concept in the ideological war with the West. Russia considers itself the vanguard of an anti-Western alliance of sovereign democracies (read: autocracies with pseudo-democratic façades). A second pillar of the new Kremlin ideology is the “power vertical,” a euphemism for an authoritarian top-down government. These two pillars are

complemented by a third ideological pillar, which is the Orthodox religion, which has been given a prominent place by the regime in recent years. Surprisingly, this new ideological triad closely resembles the famous nineteenth-century triad Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Narodnost of Sergey Uvarov, the Minister of Education of the reactionary tsar Nicholas I. Orthodoxy has regained its former status of semistate ideology. Autocracy has found its modern translation in the “power vertical,” and Narodnost, expressing a unique Russian specificity, has become “sovereign democracy.” These have become the three ideological pillars of Russia’s internal policy. They combine seamlessly with the renewed social Darwinism of Russia’s foreign policy. Yury Luzhkov, the former mayor of Moscow, wrote:

A paradoxical situation has emerged in Russian politics today. The élite, and society at large, holds predominantly

outmoded ideological notions which surfaced when the layer of communist ideology was removed. Take, for instance, the invented dilemma of “who to be friends with”—the East or the West—which echoes the futile and mainly fabricated arguments of irreconcilable people. . . . This also comes from the lack of a modern vision of the world in the absence of the all-embracing communist idea. Society and the élite have not succeeded in borrowing to any significant degree either Western liberalism or Western social democratic ideas. What we have instead are ideas about a 19th century model of a great power which, unlike communist and liberal ideologies, have nothing useful or practical for the sphere of foreign policy, and moreover, lack an international element.^[34]

Luzhkov, although himself not exactly an

example of a “crystal clear democrat,” has identified very clearly here the weak spot of present day Russia: the ideological void and, especially, the lack of an international (read: universal) element.

NOTES

1. Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 220.
2. Igor Yakovenko, “Ukraina i Rossiya: suzhety sootnesennosti,” *Vestnik Evropy* 26, no. 64 (2005).
3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994), 72.
4. It is not correct, therefore, to speak of an American “empire” as, for instance, the Marxist economists Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy did in their book *Monopoly Capital* (1968). They wrote: “Legitimate differences of opinion will of course exist as to whether this or that country should be counted as belonging to the

American empire. We offer the following list as being on the conservative side: The United States itself and a few colonial possessions (notably Puerto Rico and the Pacific islands); all Latin American countries except Cuba; Canada; four countries in the Near and Middle East (Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran); four countries in South and South-East Asia (Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, and South Vietnam); two countries in East Asia (South Korea and Formosa); two countries in Africa (Liberia and Libya); and one country in Europe (Greece)." (Paul A. Baran, and Paul M. Sweezy. *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 183.) Clearly this hotchpotch of sovereign countries does not make an empire. Alexander Motyl's description of the relationship of the United States with many Latin American countries as a "hegemonic *nonimperial* relationship" comes closer to the reality. (Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The*

Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 20 (emphasis mine.)

5. Charles Tilly, "How Empires End," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, eds. Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 7 (emphasis mine).

6. Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership," 79.

7. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: Volume II: The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 37.

8. In 1990 Estonia's per capita GDP was 119.3 percent, and Latvia's 107.5 percent of Russia's. (Source: *Statistical Handbook: States of the Former USSR*, Studies of Economies in Transformation, Paper No. 3 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1992), 4–5 and 14–15). This also occurred sometimes in other colonial empires. Piers Brendon, for instance, indicated that Hong Kong, at the time of its handover to

China in 1997, had “£37 billion in reserves and inhabitants who were richer per capita than those of the United Kingdom.” (Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 655.)

9. The figures for 1991 for the other republics are: Armenia 17.1 percent, Belarus 16.3 percent, Kazakhstan 23.1 percent, Turkmenistan 21.7 percent, and Ukraine 5.9 percent (*Statistical Handbook: States of the Former USSR*, 14–15). This dependence on the Union Budget could be one of the factors that explain the Central Asian republics’ initial, sometimes almost reluctant, attitude to “accepting” their independence in 1991.

10. The Russian situation resembled, therefore, that of the British in India, of which A. N. Wilson wrote: “[T]he British incursion into India, which had begun as a profit-making enterprise for merchants, had become a drain on British resources.” (A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World*

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 489.)

11. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Volume II, with an introduction by Prof. Edwin R. A. Seligman (London: Dent Dutton, 1971), 112–113.

12. In 1881, for instance, the Earl of Dunraven wrote: “The future of England certainly depends upon her relationship with her colonies. She may remain the centre of a great empire, or become a small, scantily populated, and unimportant kingdom.” A prospect that was considered totally unacceptable by the author: “British possessions will remain British as long as we can hold them, by force if necessary.” (The Earl of Dunraven, “The Revolutionary Party,” August 1881, in Michael Goodwin, *Nineteenth Century Opinion*, 272–273.)

13. Franz Cede, “The Post-Imperial Blues,” *The American Interest*, 7, no. 2 (2011), 118.

14. Despite these doomsday prophecies the Netherlands experienced a protracted economic boom after the loss of Indonesia. This certainly

helped to assuage post-imperial pain, but did not eradicate it. According to Thomas Beaufils, “In the Netherlands the workings of memory still prove difficult Fifty years [!] is a too short period to hope that wounds that are still open can be healed.” (Thomas Beaufils, “Le colonialisme aux Indes néerlandaises,” in *Le livre noir du colonialisme: XVIe–XXIe siècle: de l’extermination à la repentance*, ed. Marc Ferro (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003), 262.)

15. Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, xiv. The same image was used by the Russian sociologist Yury Levada, who said: “The phantom pain from the loss of the Soviet empire remains vivid, like an amputated limb that one still feels.” (Quoted in Marie Jégo, Alexandre Billette, Natalie Nougayrède, Sophie Shibab, and Piotr Smolar, “Autopsie d’un conflit,” *Le Monde* (August 31–September 1, 2008).)

16. Van Doorn, *Indische lessen*, 72.

17. Van Doorn, *Indische lessen*, 72.

18. Van Doorn, *Indische lessen*, 73.

19. Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, xvi.

20. Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, xvi.

21. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity: The Effects of War, Revolution, Famine, Pestilence upon Human Mind, Behavior, Social Organization and Cultural Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1946), 277. Sorokin was not the first to analyze the different phases of revolutions, nor their immanent tendency toward restoration of prerevolutionary trends. In his classic book, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (1938), Crane Brinton made a similar analysis. Sorokin, whose book was published four years later (the first printing was in 1942), did not quote Brinton.

22. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 277.

23. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 277.

24. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 280.

25. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 284.

26. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 283.

27. Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia: Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies* (Washington, DC:

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 320.

28. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 103.

29. Ulrich Beck, "Nation-States without Enemies: The Military and Democracy after the End of the Cold War," in *Democracy without Enemies*, ed. Ulrich Beck (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 143 (emphasis mine).

30. Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire*, xiv.

31. Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, *La Russie menace-t-elle l'Occident?* with a preface by Yves Lacoste (Paris: Choiseul, 2009), 202.

32. Mongrenier, *La Russie menace-t-elle l'Occident?* 98.

33. Michel Guéneq, "La Russie face à l'extension de l'OTAN en Europe," *Hérodote* no. 129 (2008), 224.

34. Yuri M. Luzhkov, *The Renewal of History: Mankind in the 21st Century and the Future of Russia* (London: Stacey International, 2003), 156 (emphasis mine).

Chapter 4

Putin's Grand Design

Many Russians consider Putin a providential man. In July 2011 the Kremlin's political strategist Vladislav Surkov, with no hesitation, said that Putin was sent to Russia by God to save his country in turbulent times. "I honestly believe that Putin is a person who was sent to Russia by fate and by the Lord at a difficult time for Russia," Vladislav Surkov was quoted.^[1] Putin himself, probably, would agree, because Putin—a former KGB Chekist—is a man with a mission. "The Chekists consider themselves completely above the law," wrote Yevgenia Albats. "Worse, they tend to believe they are their homeland's salvation, the only voice of authority amidst the political and economic chaos that has engulfed the country."^[2] Putin came to power almost exactly eight years after what he considered to have been the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of

the twentieth century”: the demise of the Soviet Union. This catastrophe was followed by the chaotic, weak, and erratic rule of Boris Yeltsin and his kleptocratic “Family” (of which, we should not forget, Putin himself was a prominent member). When, in December 1999, Vladimir Putin was appointed acting president by Yeltsin it became immediately clear that his priority was not so much to put an end to kleptocracy and lawlessness, because his first move as president was to grant Yeltsin amnesty and immunity from prosecution. His real priorities lay elsewhere. These were to put an end to Russia’s “humiliation” and to restore the lost empire. This *reconquista* could not, of course, be a simple reconstitution of the former Soviet Union of which the ideological glue that held it together, communism, was no longer available. The neoimperialism of the new Russia had to be based on new foundations. These new foundations were Russian ultranationalism and economic imperialism, a policy that was, in

itself, not totally new. It had already been initiated during Yeltsin's presidency, but could not at that time be fully implemented due to the chaotic economic and political situation. Putin's policy had two main goals:

1. To reestablish at least a Union of the Slav core countries of the former Soviet Union.
2. To reestablish a close economic and political-military cooperation with the non-Slav former countries of the Soviet Union under exclusive Russian leadership.

BACK TO THE USSR? FROM COMMONWEALTH TO THE RUSSIA-BELARUS UNION STATE

When the Soviet Union was dissolved by the presidents of the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Ukraine on December 8, 1991, they immediately created a successor organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This organization—called in Russian

Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv (SNG)—functioned more or less as a receptacle for the broken pieces of the former empire. It was, in reality, not even a faint shadow of the former Soviet Union. The participating countries—including Russia—stressed the fact that it was a commonwealth of *independent* states. In addition, not all former republics were represented. The three Baltic states preferred to remain outside, Ukraine was not a formal member, Turkmenistan only an associate member, and Georgia left the organization in August 2009. Although the CIS managed to play a certain role in the post-Soviet space, especially in the field of collective security, it remained a loosely structured organization that did not satisfy the Russian ambition to strengthen its grip on the former Soviet republics.^[3] Also the economic clout of the CIS was restricted: only 17 percent of Russia's foreign trade took place within this bloc.^[4]

A much more serious and far-reaching initiative was, therefore, the creation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. The initiative for this Union State was taken on April 2, 1996, by the two presidents, Boris Yeltsin and Aleksandr Lukashenko, and a treaty was signed one year later. Apart from the economic benefits the Union was supposed to bring to both countries the two leaders had their own, hidden motives: "Lukashenko hoped to become president of a large Union State and . . . Yeltsin felt guilty for presiding over the dissolution of the Soviet Union. . . . He wanted to be remembered as the leader who started the reunification of the former Soviet republics by signing the Union State agreement with Belarus."^[5] The Union of the two countries was an ambitious project, organized in grand style. It included the creation of a series of common institutions, including a Supreme State Council, a Council of Ministers, a Court, a House of Audit, and a bicameral parliament consisting of

a directly elected House of Representatives and an indirectly elected House of the Union. Neither the House of Representatives, nor the Court, however, ever came into existence. The reason for this was that the objectives of both sides diverged too much. Belarus sought a rapprochement for economic and financial reasons; Russia's motivation was almost exclusively geopolitical. This did not prevent the two countries signing, on December 8, 1999, an even more far-reaching "Treaty on the Creation of a Union State of Russia and Belarus" that resembled the resurrection of a mini-Soviet Union. The Union would have a common president, a flag, an anthem, a constitution, a common currency, common citizenship, and a common army. It was a last attempt of Lukashenko to realize his ambition to become president of the Union State and—in this indirect way—to become the ruler of Russia. This ambition had to be taken seriously, so seriously, indeed, that Anatoly Chubais, who

was the chief of Yeltsin's presidential administration between July 15, 1996, and March 7, 1997, later said: "It was total madness It was a constitutional coup d'état, a change of power, not because of a political conflict, but quite simply because we had seen nothing coming."^[6] According to the treaty the supreme power in the Union State of Russia and Belarus would be shared by the two presidents and the presidents of the respective parliaments. With an ailing Boris Yeltsin and the communist Gennady Seleznev as Russian Duma president, Lukashenko would have had a real chance to become the *de facto* president of the Union State. The Russian press wrote at that time, therefore, that "Lukashenko intends to realize his integrationist plans not with Boris Yeltsin, but through his allies in the Duma."^[7]

However, with the nomination by Yeltsin, on December 31, 1999, of Vladimir Putin as acting president of the Russian Federation, Lukashenko knew that his ambitions were

definitively blocked. Reluctant to become the local satrap of the new Kremlin boss Lukashenko resisted any infringements on Belarusian sovereignty, even after Russia continued to support the economy of his country with generous subsidies. The Russian energy subsidy equalled 14 percent of Belarusian GDP and Belarus was able to buy Russian oil dutyfree, to refine it, and to sell the products on the international market.^[8] Putin's generosity was not without a price. In 2003 he revealed his annexationist agenda when he proposed a fully fledged merger of both states. The proposed model, wrote Dmitri Trenin, was "essentially, *Anschluss* on the model of West Germany in 1990 absorbing the six East German *Laender*. Thus, Belarus received an offer to join the Russian Federation as *six oblasts*."^[9] The offer was flatly rejected by Lukashenko. Thereafter the project for the Union State stalled. Soon conflicts emerged over price rises for imported natural gas from Russia. When

Moscow declared its intention to quadruple the price in 2007, Lukashenko threatened to quit the bilateral project and form instead a Union State with Ukraine, which, under President Viktor Yushchenko, was pursuing a pro-Western course.^[10] Although the proposal was not realistic, the Kremlin did not hide its irritation. Another irritant was the fact that Putin, when he left the Russian presidency in 2008, expected to be appointed president of the Russia-Belarus Union State. Lukashenko, who did not want Putin as his formal superior, only agreed to appoint him prime minister of the Union State.^[11] The sensitivities in Belarus were such that in November 2009 President Medvedev felt himself obliged to reassure his Belarusian neighbor that “Moscow wants to build a closer union with Belarus, but has not invited the country to become part of Russia,”^[12] contradicting Putin’s merger proposal of 2003. Belarus, Medvedev continued, “is an

independent, sovereign state All political life in the country follows its own scenario, and we have nothing to do with this scenario.”^[13]

However, these words did not reassure Lukashenko, nor did they bring more dynamism to the project. In the fall of 2010 Putin declared that the future of the Union State of Russia and Belarus “is increasingly becoming problematic.”^[14]

Despite the reassurances given by Dmitry Medvedev the fears of Belarus of being absorbed by its big eastern neighbor were well founded. This became clear not only from Putin’s annexation proposal of 2003, but also from declarations by Russian politicians and political experts. Pavel Borodin, the state secretary of the Union State and a former member of Yeltsin’s presidential administration, for instance, said that “it would be counterproductive to scrap the Union State due to the recent political disputes between Moscow and Minsk,” adding, “we are the same

people. We have lived together and will continue to live together. We are one country.”^[15] Also President Medvedev continued to express himself ambiguously in his personal blog. He not only called Belarus “the closest of its neighbors,” united with Russia “by a long shared history, culture, common joys and grief,” but added: “We will always remember that our people—I am tempted to say ‘our one people’—endured great losses during the Great Patriotic War.”^[16] It could, indeed, be questioned why the “same people” or “our one people,” constituting “one country,” would need to have two separate national governments. Yuri Krupnov, a Russian political analyst nostalgic of the Soviet past, openly pleaded that the Union State should, ultimately, encompass the *whole* former USSR. Far from criticizing Belarus for its lack of economic and political reforms, he hailed “Belarus’ experience of preserving USSR ‘achievements,’ the best things that existed

during the Soviet period.”^[17] Zbigniew Brzezinski has warned that “Russia’s absorption of Belarus, without too much cost or pain, would jeopardize the future of Ukraine as a genuinely sovereign state.”^[18]

The Kremlin’s policy is one of wait and see, and, in the meantime, to increase its economic and political pressure. The objective of the Union State is firmly maintained by the Kremlin, which is hoping to extend the existing *dance à deux* to more partners. Overtures have been made in the direction of Ukraine that under President Yanukovich pursued a pro-Russian course. The pressure exercised by Russia on Ukraine was such that Volodymyr Lytvyn, the parliamentary speaker of the *Rada*, the Ukrainian parliament, felt himself obliged to declare that “Ukraine’s entry into the Union State of Belarus and Russia is impossible.”^[19] “I think that this is utopia,” he said, adding that “Ukraine and Russia should stop ritual dancing

and give direct answers to direct questions.”^[20] The Kremlin will certainly continue to put more pressure on Ukraine. A sign of this is an article by the German political scientist Klaus von Beyme that has been given a prominent place on the official portal of the Union State (www.soyuz.by). Von Beyme declared himself to be against EU or NATO membership for Ukraine. “From my point of view,” he wrote, “the optimal solution to the issue would be [a] Slavic Federation of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. It would be a natural partner for the EU and NATO, there is potential for widespread co-operation.”^[21] Why such a “Slavic Federation,” a neoimperialist Russian project that under the Kremlin’s leadership would be directed *against* the EU and NATO, would be “a natural partner” for the EU and NATO is not explained. Von Beyme has excellent relations with the Kremlin. The portal of the Union State mentions that Von Beyme is “the first Western politician awarded the title of Honorary Professor of

Moscow State University.” On his Wikipedia curriculum vitae one can read that he was the “first West German university student in Moscow after World War II.”

There are reasons not to underestimate the role of the Union State in the Kremlin’s neoimperialist strategy. The Kremlin’s objectives could be more ambitious than creating only a Slavic Federation. Kazakhstan could also be a candidate that is on Moscow’s wish list. The government of South Ossetia, a halfway annexed part of dismembered Georgia, has already expressed its interest in being incorporated into the Union. “South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity has said that the republic may join the Union State of Russia and Belarus if Minsk recognizes the independence of South Ossetia.”^[22] Another candidate is possibly the Moldovan breakaway region Transnistria. Already in 2003, Pavel Borodin, the secretary of the Russia-Belarus Union, indicated that Russia wanted to expand the Union into *all*

the countries of the CIS. “Mr Borodin said that Russia would first join with Belarus, then Ukraine and Kazakhstan,” wrote the *Financial Times*. “Two, four, then 12 [countries], he said, in a reference to the CIS.”^[23] The Union State may not be a *Soviet Union-bis*, but it will be a Union in which Russian hegemony is assured and in which the formally preserved national sovereignties of the member states are made subservient to Russian geopolitical interests.

A POLITICALLY INSPIRED CUSTOMS UNION

The Russia-Belarus Union State is only one piece in the mosaic of Russia’s neoimperialist strategy. Because this model of a reintegration of the former Soviet Union, focusing on a direct *political* integration, has shown its limitations, being too dependent on the whims of the political leadership of Russia’s partner country, Moscow had already developed a parallel approach, based on *economic* integration.

Although this approach initially seemed less promising than straightforward political integration, it might, in the end, prove more successful. There are two reasons for this: first, because it is more focused on *mutual* economic benefits, and, second, because it is experienced by Russia's partners as *less threatening* to their national sovereignty. Economic cooperation projects had already started under Yeltsin. On March 29, 1996, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) was founded with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan as its members. During Putin's reign, in October 2000, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined, followed by Uzbekistan in January 2006. The goal of the Eurasian Economic Community was to create a Free Trade Area among its six member states.

However, the three founding members of EurAsEc—Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan—decided to go further and form an inner circle with a fully fledged customs union, leading to a single market. The Customs Union

(*Tamozhennyi Soyuz*) was ratified on July 5, 2010. It included plans to adopt a common currency. In this instance, Russia was following the logic of European integration in which a deepening of *economic* integration leads, via a process of functional *spillover*, to a gradual *political* integration of the member states. Unlike the Union State the Customs Union is making progress and Russian officials are busy expanding its scope beyond the existing three members. Ukraine, here again, is the main target. The Ukrainian Economy Minister, Vasyl Tsushko, announced in December 2010 that Ukraine will act as an observer in the negotiations between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan on the creation of a Customs Union.^[24] He emphasized that “it is interesting for us to see what they are discussing there.” According to him, “Ukraine is not yet considering participating in the customs union.” It would be “primarily interested in [the] creation of a free trade zone within the

Commonwealth of Independent States.”^[25] But Russia is constantly raising its pressure on the Ukrainian government. In July 2012 Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich said that Kiev and Moscow “were discussing, are discussing, and will continue to discuss” the question of Ukraine’s joining of the Customs Union, a question, he said, that was “directly connected with national interests.”^[26] Yanukovich was also discussing with the EU. After six years of negotiations he was expected to sign an Association Agreement with the EU during the Eastern Partnership summit, organized on November 28–29, 2013, in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. At the last minute, however, he refused to sign and turned to Moscow. Putin had offered \$15 billion in loans and an important discount in the price of imported gas. Yanukovich’s U-turn led to massive demonstrations in the center of Kiev.

The great geopolitical interests that are at stake here must not be underestimated and the

choices that are made now will have deep and lasting consequences for the future of the European continent. What, exactly, is at stake becomes clear from the comment of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, who said that the “creation of a free trade zone between Ukraine and the European Union, to which Ukraine aspires, is incompatible with Ukrainian membership of the [Russia dominated] Common Economic Area’s customs union.”^[27] Anders Åslund, a political analyst, declared that he “does not believe there are any real economic benefits in the customs union for Russia.”^[28] Economic benefits were certainly not Putin’s main motivation for launching this project. In the long run also the benefits for the eventual partner countries are restricted—in particular for Ukraine. Putin, however, did his best to minimize the benefits for Ukraine of an association agreement with the EU, saying that “Ukraine sells Europe two litres of milk, [while] the Customs Union brings

her 9 billion dollar per year.”^[29] One may ask oneself why the customs union—despite its limited economic rationale for Russia—is so important for Moscow. One reason was possibly Russia’s aspiration to become a member of the World Trade Organization. After the Russian invasion and dismemberment of Georgia it was clear that Georgia, which already was a WTO member, would be inclined to block Russian membership. Putin first declared that Russia was no longer interested in becoming a member of the WTO. Later, however, he changed his tactics, and in June 2009 he announced that Russia wanted to join the WTO as a single customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. This collective application would make it more difficult for Georgia to block Russia’s WTO membership. But this option had to be dropped because there were too many technical obstacles. Thereupon Moscow declared that the three countries would negotiate individually, but harmonize their

positions and enter the WTO together. Putin sought—and got—the support of the United States and the European Union to put pressure on Tbilisi. Things were, however, not so easy. The government of Mikheil Saakashvili said it could accept a Russian WTO membership only if Georgian customs officials would man the border posts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a demand that was unacceptable to Moscow because it would mean that the Kremlin would recognize Georgian sovereignty over the two breakaway territories.^[30] Finally, in November 2011, a compromise was signed, brokered by the Swiss government. The parties agreed on international monitoring of trade along the mutual borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

WTO membership, however, was not the real reason behind the launch of the customs union. The real reason was *political* rather than economic. The customs union served the same goal as the other Russian projects in the post-Soviet space, which is to reestablish Russian

hegemony over the former Soviet republics. Moscow is ready to pay and does not hesitate to take up its former Soviet-era role when it generously subventioned the economies of the other republics. In the year 2011 the price Moscow was ready to pay for its customs union with Belarus, for instance, amounted to cancelling the customs duties for oil exported to Belarus, which cost the Russian budget about \$2 billion.^[31] Putin boasted in July 2012 that due to the low energy prices Belarusian GDP was raised with 16 percent.^[32] In the meantime Russian officials are busy traveling around in the post-Soviet space, proselytizing and spreading the word. One of the envoys, Georgy Petrov, vice president of the trade-industrial chamber of Russia, went to Yerevan in December 2010 to woo the Armenians. According to an Armenian news agency, "Petrov implied Armenia's joining the union will be advantageous for the country."^[33]

THE CSTO: A MINI-WARSAW PACT?

Another vector used to project Russian power in the post-Soviet space is security cooperation. This was originally organized within the framework of the CIS. Immediately after the demise of the Soviet Union, in May 1992, a Treaty on Collective Security, the “Tashkent Treaty,” was signed. It was Putin, who, in May 2002, took the initiative to transform this platform and make it into a new, separate organization and rename it the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Six former Soviet republics became members of this mini-Warsaw Pact: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan (the core states that also form the customs union), plus Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. Uzbekistan joined in 2006. The member states are not allowed to join other military alliances, and there is a collective security guarantee (article 4), similar to article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Membership is made attractive by

Moscow by offering the member states the possibility of buying military equipment in Russia at cost price. With the CSTO Moscow pursued two main objectives:

- First, to bind the participating countries in such a way that it would become more difficult to leave the organization.
- Second, to declare an exclusive zone of operation from which other security organizations and third countries (meaning: NATO, but implicitly also China) are excluded.

The first objective is pursued by a progressive integration of the command and control functions, including a common air defense, and the formation of a CSTO rapid reaction force. The second goal—to claim for the CSTO an exclusive zone of operation from which other security organizations are excluded

—was one of the objectives of President Medvedev's proposal for a new Pan European security treaty, launched in 2008.^[34] Neither NATO, nor the United States, has agreed to grant Moscow via the CSTO such an exclusive *droit de regard* in the former Soviet space. Moscow, however, will continue its efforts to become the "Gendarme of Eurasia."^[35] That this role for the Kremlin also has its limitations became clear in June 2010, when during the ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan the Kyrgyz government asked for Russian peacekeepers in the region and Moscow did not respond— notwithstanding the fact that the events took place in a region in which Moscow claims to have "privileged interests." Apparently the Kremlin knew that peacekeeping in this case would not bring any direct benefits to Russia, but would rather be an ungrateful and costly job. These were not the only problems. After his comeback as president in May 2012, Putin went to Uzbekistan. According to Fyodor

Lukyanov this visit was “an attempt to reset relations with this recalcitrant and most unreliable CSTO ally whose position stands in the way of making this organization a working military and political alliance.”^[36] Putin’s visit did not help. On June 28, 2012, Uzbekistan, the country that has the most significant armed forces in Central Asia, suddenly suspended its membership of the organization. The reason was the deep mistrust in Tashkent concerning the Russian intentions. These intentions evoke the specter of the infamous Brezhnev doctrine, because they include *inter alia* “to lower the threshold for intervention within the organization’s region, shift the respective decisionmaking mechanisms from a consensus to a majority rule, and develop a joint task force.”^[37] According to the defense specialist Vladimir Socor, Uzbekistan’s departure showed that “this organization is purely symbolic. . . . The CSTO is mainly a symbol of Russia’s aspiration to become a great power and to be

regarded as the leader of a bloc.”^[38] But also symbolic organizations can bite. On April 11, 2013, Serbia was granted observer status at the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO (PA CSTO), showing that the CSTO had a certain attraction for a future EU member state. Afghanistan was equally granted observer status. “This is another confirmation,” said Sergey Naryshkin, president of the Duma and the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO, “that the PA CSTO has weight and is taken seriously on the international stage.”^[39]

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD?

Another initiative that needs to be mentioned here is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This forum also has its origin in the Yeltsin era. “Steps toward a closer Russian-Chinese relationship were outlined in March

1992 in a policy paper by Yeltsin's former political advisor, Sergei Stankevich.”^[40] It led to the foundation, in 1996, of the Shanghai Five, consisting of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and emerged from the border talks between China and the Soviet successor states. It was—again—Vladimir Putin, who took the initiative to expand this organization and give it a more powerful structure. In 2001, when Uzbekistan joined the organization, it got its new name and began to implement many activities, ranging from fighting terrorism and drugs trafficking to economic and cultural cooperation and the organization of joint military exercises. Pakistan, India, and Iran were invited as observers, while the United States was refused observer status. The SCO proudly claimed that—including the observer states—it represented “half of humanity.” The organization has an undeniable anti-US and anti-NATO focus. Used by Putin to project Russia's power in the region,

it is, however, a double-edged sword, and for Moscow it also brings inconveniences. Although it may be instrumental to the Kremlin's objective of keeping NATO and the United States out of Central Asia, it simultaneously facilitates the Chinese penetration of the Central Asian republics. This penetration has for the moment a predominantly economic character, but it will undoubtedly soon acquire more political dimensions. For this reason two opposition politicians, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov, severely criticized Putin's China policy. "It would be more appropriate to call Putin's policy toward China 'capitulationist,'" they wrote. "In the years of Putin's rule the Russian military-industrial complex has, in particular, armed the Chinese army."^[41] In the medium term, and certainly in the long run, the SCO could, indeed, become an asset for Beijing more than for Moscow, and their struggle for influence, markets, and energy, in the countries of Central Asia could soon become a zero-sum

game.

BRIC, BIC, BRICS, OR BRIICS?

Putin has “made clear that Russia has no intention of joining anybody else’s ‘holy alliances,’” wrote Eugene Rumer.^[42] This is, indeed, true. Putin prefers to build his *own* organizations. He is a staunch organization builder and undertakes initiatives in all possible directions, building organizations when only the slightest opportunity arises. An example is the first BRIC summit convened in Yekaterinburg on June 16, 2009. BRIC is a term coined by Jim O’Neill of Goldman Sachs to indicate the four most important emerging economies in the world: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. It was meant by him only as an investment term and had nothing to do with politics. Putin, however, jumped at the opportunity, seeing another prominent role for Russia in a global forum. The first meeting of the presidents of the BRIC

countries immediately exposed their fundamental differences. Two of them, Brazil and India, are democracies. The other two, China and Russia, are non-democratic dictatorships. While the first two are in effect newly emerging powers, the other two are already long-established and recognized powers on the world scene, both being permanent members of the UN Security Council. The four disagree on most issues: human rights, democracy, trade, climate change, and the reform of global governance. The year in which the first BRIC conference took place was also the year in which the term “BRIC”—in itself already an artificial construction—lost the last remnants of its initial meaning of fast-growing emerging economies: while in the crisis year 2009 the other countries continued to grow, Russia’s GDP plunged 7.9 percent—which was the worst performance among the Group of Twenty leading economies. Participants at a business conference in Moscow in February

2010, therefore, ironically, suggested changing the name from BRIC into BIC.^[43] This did not prevent the BRIC from organizing its second conference in Brazil's capital Brasilia in April 2010. Even if Russia, with its inefficient state capitalism, cronyism, and rampant corruption, remained the economic dwarf of the four, the BRIC format offered Moscow an extra forum to project its political influence on the world stage.

However—as is the case in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—the BRIC was not only a forum for Russia, but equally for China. In December 2010 South Africa became a member and China sent an invitation to South African President Jacob Zuma to participate in the 2011 BRIC summit in China. The aim was to broaden the BRIC into BRICS, this despite the fact that the size of the South African economy is only a quarter of Russia's and its growth in 2011 would not exceed 3 percent. China especially, which, with South Africa, is the

biggest investor on the African continent, seemed to profit from this enlargement of the BRIC.^[44] However, during the BRICS summit in the South African town of Durban on March 26 and 27, 2013, President Putin succeeded in forging a closer cooperation with his South African counterpart. Vladimir Putin and Jacob Zuma agreed to create a kind of platinum OPEC,^[45] and Putin offered South Africa help with the construction of a nuclear power plant. The two leaders also decided to build a strategic partnership and deepen cooperation in the military sphere, including joint exercises of the armed forces of the two countries. Plans were also announced to set up a joint production of the Ansat light purpose helicopter.^[46] The cherry on the cake was a declaration by both countries “not to participate in any treaties and agreements which have an aim to encroach on the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity

or national security interests of the other party,”^[47] which can be read as a South African pledge to keep its distance from NATO. Another Russian hope: to build a BRICS development bank that would challenge the hegemony of the Western-dominated IMF and World Bank had to be postponed to the summit of 2014.

There are plans to enlarge the BRICS with other emerging economies. The main candidate is Indonesia. Its accession would transform the BRICS into BRIICS.^[48] Another candidate is Turkey. In fact there is a whole series of emerging economies that would qualify for membership. The list of potential new members includes Mexico, Nigeria, South Korea, and Vietnam. However, as Martyn Davies, indicated, “There is a debate within the Brics as to whether to ‘deepen’ or ‘widen’ the grouping. While South Africa and Brazil are keen to expand the number of member countries, China and India prefer to consolidate. Russia is

ambivalent.”^[49] The Russian ambivalence could be explained by the geopolitical rather than economic importance it ascribes to the grouping. It would certainly welcome an old ally, such as Vietnam, and possibly even Turkey, which is considered by the Kremlin to be an independent and critical NATO member. It would certainly be, however, reluctant to admit a close US ally, such as South Korea. All this cannot conceal the fact that the BRICS remain a highly artificial construct, and this will even be more so when the club expands. Ruchir Sharma wrote:

China apart, they have limited trade ties with one another, and they have few political or foreign policy interests in common. A problem with thinking in acronyms is that once one catches one, it tends to lock analysts into a worldview that may soon be outdated. In recent years, Russia's economy and stock market

have been among the weakest of the emerging markets, dominated by an oil-rich class of billionaires, whose assets equal 20 percent of GDP, by far the largest share held by the superrich in any major economy. Although deeply out of balance, Russia remains a member of the BRICS, if only because the term sounds better with an R. [50]

NOTES

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Chapter 5

The Eurasian Union

Putin's Newest Imperial Project

On October 8, 2011, Vladimir Putin launched a new project, when he published in the paper *Izvestia* an article with the title “A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future That Is Born Today.” In this article he announced the creation of a “Eurasian Union.” The Union, he wrote, would be “an open project.” The three countries of the Customs Union—Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan—formed the core of this new Union. However, wrote Putin, “we hope for the accession of other partners, and first of all of the countries of the CIS.”^[1] This was the first time, after the establishment of the CIS in December 1991, that the Kremlin launched an integration initiative that intended to incorporate the quasi-totality

of the former Soviet Union. Putin explicitly denied that it was an attempt “to recreate, in one form or another, the USSR.” On the contrary, he said his project was inspired by the example of the European Union. Like the EU the Eurasian Union would develop itself through a process of deepening and enlargement. It would, like the EU, also have its own supranational organs, such as a Commission and a Court.

PRECURSORS OF THE EURASIAN PROJECT: IGOR PANARIN AND ALEKSANDR DUGIN

Ideas about creating a “Eurasian Union” were not new. They had already been circulating for many years in Russia. What was new was the fact that the Russian leadership, after years of hidden support, finally decided to embrace the project openly. One of its main protagonists was Igor Panarin, a former KGB analyst, who, in his capacity as dean of the Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry, became one of the

main ideologists of the Eurasian idea. In an interview in *Izvestia*,^[2] published in April 2009, he had predicted the creation of a powerful “Eurasian Union,” led by Vladimir Putin. This Union, modeled on the EU, would have a parliament in Saint Petersburg and create a single currency. The Eurasian Union, he said, would not only encompass the territories of the former Soviet Union. He predicted that Alaska would return to Russia and that Russia would play a leading role in Iran and the Indian subcontinent. In the end China and the European Union would also become members and form a triumvirate that would dominate the world. Panarin predicted that the global role of the United States was over. According to him this country would soon fall apart.^[3] In a lecture, delivered in Berlin in February 2012—after Putin’s official adoption of the Eurasian Union project—Panarin declared that “the Eurasian Union should have *four* capitals: 1. St.

Petersburg; 2. Almaty; 3. Kiev; 4. Belgrade.”^[4]

He added a timetable also. Armenia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine could join by December 30, 2012; Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia, by December 30, 2016. After this date “Turkey, Scotland, New Zealand, Vietnam, and several other countries

could join.”^[5] When Putin declared that the Eurasian Union is not a reconstitution of the former USSR, he was completely right because the scope of the project seems to be much more ambitious. Panarin mentioned here no fewer than *seven* possible members that were not former parts of the defunct Soviet Union, although New Zealand^[6] and Scotland (after independence) are improbable candidates.

Panarin warned that the West had started the “Second World Information War” against Putin’s Eurasia project. This war would be led by Zbigniew Brzezinski (“an agent of British (!) Intelligence”), Mikhail Gorbachev (“the Judas of

Stavropol,” who must “be brought before a public tribunal in Magadan, for his role in the collapse of the USSR”), and Michael McFaul, the US ambassador in Moscow (“a theoretician and practitioner of coups d’état,” “sent to Moscow to enhance the efficiency of Operation Anti-Putin”).

A similar combination of geopolitical megalomania and wishful thinking could be found in another admirer of the Eurasian idea, Aleksandr Dugin, the founder of an international Eurasian movement. Dugin similarly pleaded for a reconstitution of the Soviet Union. And like Panarin he did not want to stop at the frontiers of the former empire, but wished also to incorporate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (except the former GDR), as well as Manchuria, Xinjiang, Tibet, Mongolia, and the Orthodox world of the Balkans. Dugin’s main focus, however, was Ukraine, the independence of which he

considered to be an anomaly. For him, “the battle for the integration of the post-Soviet space is a battle for Kiev.”^[7] It might not come as a complete surprise that Dugin is an admirer of Italian fascism. In his book *Konservativnaya Revolyutsiya* (The Conservative Revolution) he praised the “third way,” which was “not left and not right” and was embodied in “Italian fascism in its early period and also in the time when the Italian Social Republic [Mussolini’s mini-fascist state at the end of the war—supervised by the Germans] existed in Northern Italy.”^[8] Dugin was also a source of inspiration for the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who in 1994 had spoken out in favor of the formation of a Eurasian Union.

FEAR OF LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY

On November 18, 2011—only six weeks after the publication of Putin’s article in *Izvestia*—the presidents of Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan,

acting as the “Founding Fathers” of the future Eurasian Union, took the first concrete steps. In Moscow they signed a treaty installing a “Eurasian Economic Commission.” This Commission, to be located in Moscow, consisted of nine persons (three from each country), who were given the title of federal minister.^[9] The Commission was headed by a council consisting of the deputy prime ministers of the three participating countries. In Moscow the three presidents also signed a declaration on Eurasian economic integration, a road map that would lead to the Eurasian Union.

However, in the speeches of the three presidents during the ceremony different accents could already be heard. Although Russian president Medvedev reassured his colleagues that “the decision making mechanism in the Commission’s framework absolutely excludes the dominance of any one country over another,”^[10] it was clear that the question of a possible loss of sovereignty was,

indeed, in the back of the minds of Russia's two junior partners. During the ceremony president Lukashenko reminded the audience that at home people were against this process. "One could understand who were standing behind these people," he said,^[11] —a reference to secret foreign enemies that certainly would not have displeased his Kremlin hosts. Lukashenko added: "But we overcame all this and clearly said: yes, we will not lose any sovereignty, nobody is driving anyone anywhere. . . . Any question can be brought to the level of the heads of government (the three of us) and only by consensus can we make any decision."^[12] Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, spoke in the same vein. He was in fact the *auctor intellectualis* of Putin's new project, because in 1994 he had proposed the formation of a Eurasian Union in a speech to students of Moscow University. At that point in time his proposal fell on deaf ears. Yeltsin considered it an unpractical pipe dream. However,

Nazarbayev's proposal met with more sympathy in Putin's Russia, and when he relaunched his project in 2004 he asked the Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin to write a book on the subject. As a result Eurasianism got a prominent place on the political agenda—not only in Kazakhstan, but also in Russia. However—just as in Belarus—in Kazakhstan also not all shared this enthusiasm for integration projects with Russia. “In March 2010,” wrote Laruelle, “175 members of the Kazakh opposition parties, as well as non-governmental organizations and people from the world of the media, signed an open letter to President Nazarbayev asking him to pull out of the [Customs] Union.”^[13] The opposition feared that deeper economic integration would cause not only political, but also economic problems by opening up Kazakhstan to the competition of Russian manufacturing and chemical industries, thereby reducing Kazakhstan to a market where Russia could dump its goods. The opponents argued

that economic integration with Russia would hinder rather than promote the necessary modernization of the Kazakh industry. This criticism of the opposition seemed to be confirmed, when, in 2011, Kazakhstan's exports to Russia and Belarus amounted to \$7.5 billion, while imports from these countries rose to almost \$15.9 billion, causing a large trade deficit.^[14] The higher external tariff barriers that were imposed on Kazakhstan also had a negative effect on its trade with China.^[15]

On November 18, 2011, at the Eurasian summit in Moscow, Nazarbayev addressed his opponents, declaring: "During this time we heard a lot of criticism coming from all sides: from the West, from the East, from within our countries. . . . They say, in the first place, that we will lose our sovereignty. However, nobody mentions the fact that each of us . . . will gain a great sovereignty . . . because we will vote there by consensus, we will solve questions together. That is the first thing. In the second place, they

tell us that Russia is initiating the reincarnation of the Soviet Union—that the empire attacks again. . . . But tell us, please, how one can speak of a reincarnation? The Soviet Union was a rigid administrative command system with total state ownership of the means of production and one communist idea as the embodiment of the communist party. Could you imagine us reinstalling now the Gosplan [committee in Soviet Union responsible for economic planning] and Gosstab [Soviet central State Committee for the allocation of producer goods]? We need to tell people that these are just irrational fears of members of the opposition or simply of our enemies, who don't want such an integration taking place on this territory.”[\[16\]](#)

EURASIAN UNION VERSUS EUROPEAN UNION

Putin, in his *Izvestia* article, had already tried to dissipate fears concerning his new integration

project. “Some of our neighbours have made clear that they don’t wish to participate in advanced integration projects in the post-Soviet space,” he wrote, “because this allegedly goes against a European choice. I think this is a false alternative. . . . The Eurasian Union will be built on universal integration principles as an integral part of Greater Europe, united solely by the values of freedom, democracy and market laws. . . . Now dialogue with the EU will be undertaken by the Customs Union, but later it will be the Eurasian Union. Therefore, entering the Eurasian Union . . . will leave each of its members in much stronger positions to integrate more quickly into Europe.”^[17] In fact in his article Putin used three arguments:

- The first argument was that the Eurasian Union was a project similar to the European Union. It was presented by him as a supranational project with similar institutions to the EU, which would include

a commission, a council, a court, and—in time—a common currency.

- The second argument was that the Eurasian Union—like the European Union—was built on shared values. As examples of these shared values he mentioned freedom, democracy, and a market economy.
- A third argument was his suggestion that no competition existed between the Eurasian Union and the European Union. A choice to adhere to the Eurasian Union, according to him, would not imply a definitive geopolitical choice that would exclude future integration with the EU.

In fact all three arguments were severely biased. In the first place the Eurasian Union is not a European Union *bis*. This is not only because its institutions lack real supranational authority, but also because of the fundamental disequilibrium in particular that exists between

its constituent parts. The EU is a union of four big states, two medium-sized states, and a group of smaller states in which none of the member states would be able to establish a unilateral hegemony over the others. Even Germany, the EU's economic powerhouse, is in no position to dominate the rest. It has to recognize the superior military and diplomatic power of both Britain and France. In the Eurasian Union, on the contrary, the disequilibrium between the member states is striking. Not one of its prospective member states can match the economic and military power of Russia. Even if the whole CIS were to join, Russia's weight would still dwarf the collective weight of the other member states. In addition, there is still another problem. Russia is the former imperial center with a centuries-long history of imperial conquest, which was characterized by the suppression of the national identity and autonomy of the dominated peoples. For this reason, wrote

Umland, the “intellectual elites of the other post-Soviet republics have more or less ambivalent stances, and, sometimes, negative views on their nations past relations with Moscow.”^[18] These reservations also concern Putin’s past. Putin, as a former KGB colonel, is “a representative of those organs previously responsible for the execution of, among other crimes, anti-national policies.”^[19] One could, of course, point to Germany, which from being a European outcast became a respected member of the EU. However this comparison would not be valid for two reasons. The integration process in Western Europe was set up after World War II to heal the scars the war caused. Germany started a painful process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with its past), which led to repentance, official apologies, and compensation payments (*Wiedergutmachung*). In the case of Russia there are few signs that it feels responsible for the crimes committed or the repressive policies in

the former Soviet Union and Soviet bloc (excuses for the Katyn massacre are a rare exception). The European Community, in addition, was not only meant to *heal*. This originally French project was also meant to *bind* Germany to prevent history from repeating itself. Putin's initiative for the Eurasian Union, on the contrary, comes from the former imperial center. It neither heals the crimes of the Soviet past, nor does it bind the former imperial power. On the contrary, it represents a thinly disguised attempt to restore the lost empire on new foundations.^[20]

The second argument, used by Putin in his *Izvestia* article to justify the Eurasian Union, was that the new Union would be built on shared values. He mentioned as such democracy, freedom, and the principles of the market economy. The reader will probably rub his or her eyes: whatever positive things one may say about Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan, one can certainly not say that these three

countries are shining examples of freedom and democracy. All three have “lifelong” leaders kept in place by organizing fake elections. All three have repressive regimes that suppress opposition voices and violate fundamental human rights. All three also lack an important condition of a functioning market economy: impartial courts.

The most amazing argument, however, is Putin’s third argument: a choice to join the Eurasian Union does not exclude integration with the EU, but, on the contrary, “will leave each of its members in much stronger positions to integrate more quickly into Europe.” Putin is playing here a game of words with the concept “Europe.” As members of the Eurasian Union these countries do not integrate into the EU, but in “Greater Europe,” a name he gives to the Eurasian Union and the EU *together*. In fact Putin is referring here to trade negotiations between the EU and the Eurasian Union and the eventual benefits for the member states of

the Eurasian Union if they negotiate with the EU *as a bloc*. However, this has nothing to do with integration into “Europe” or the EU. It is a formulation intended *to conceal* that membership of the Eurasian Union implies an unequivocal geopolitical choice that *excludes* membership of the EU. [21]

THE ULTIMATE GOAL: THE CREATION OF A “BIG COUNTRY”

Putin’s article is a textbook case of active disinformation. What is at stake for the Kremlin in the project for a Eurasian Union remains carefully hidden. However, one week after the signing ceremony by the three presidents in Moscow it was possible to get a clearer idea of the way of thinking of the Russian political elite. On November 24, 2011, they came together to discuss the new project in the building of the Federation Council, the Russian Upper House. The *title* the organizers had chosen for this

roundtable was in itself interesting. It was called “Big Country: Perspectives of the Integrative Processes in the Post-Soviet Space in the Framework of the ‘Eurasian Union.’”^[22] Big country! The first catchword used to describe the new Union was not “economic modernization” or “economic cooperation,” but “big country.” One cannot but think of the centuries-old Russian fixation on territorial expansion. Had not Putin already said in 2009 in a speech before the Russian Geographical Society: “When we say great, a great country, a great state—certainly size matters. . . . When there is no size, there is no influence, no meaning.”^[23] In the same vein, on the occasion of the signing of the treaty, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said: “Yes, we are all different but we have common values and a desire to live in a single big state.”^[24] “A single big state”? It is not sure that the CIS countries, after having been reassured by Putin that their autonomy

would not be jeopardized in the Eurasian Union, would welcome the prospect of living in “a big state.” And certainly they would appreciate even less the prospect of living in “a *single* big state.”

EXPANSIONISM EVEN BEYOND FORMER SOVIET FRONTIERS?

However, for some Russian analysts Moscow’s integrationist fervor should not stop at the frontiers of the former empire. Dmitry Orlov, a political scientist, wrote that the Eurasian Union should not only bring together the countries of the former Soviet Union, but should equally include “Finland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Mongolia, Vietnam and Bulgaria, as well as two countries not in either Europe or Asia, Cuba and Venezuela.”^[25] For Orlov, the Kremlin should not satisfy itself with reuniting the parts of the former Soviet Union, but it should aim higher, trying to restore the

whole former communist bloc—and even beyond (Finland). Dmitry Rogozin, deputy prime minister and former ambassador to NATO, was quoted as saying that the project was designed “to unite not so much lands, but rather peoples and citizens in the name of a common state body.”^[26] Rogozin, a Russian ultranationalist, who always wanted to activate the Russian diaspora abroad and even *create* new Russian diaspora (he was, for instance, in favor of responding positively to the request of the estimated twenty thousand Serbs in Kosovo, applying for Russian citizenship), went even further than Orlov. He wanted not only to assemble a maximum number of *countries* into the Eurasian Union, but also the Russian diaspora “in the name of a common state body.” It led Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to declare that the project represented “the most savage idea of Russian nationalists,” adding that when Russia announces such ideas, “as a rule, they try to

implement them.”^[27]

During the “Big Country” conference former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov was more prudent. According to him the Eurasian Union should start with building a Belarusian-Russian-Kazakh Union. “For the time being one should not go beyond this framework,” he said, [notwithstanding the fact that] Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are knocking on the door.”^[28]

According to him one should not repeat the mistakes of the EU, which was in crisis because of its too rapid enlargement process. In the same vein a Chinese expert warned that building a Eurasian Union “is an uphill road. . . . Former Soviet republics are unlikely to go for integration with Russia gratis. . . . The accession of former Soviet republics to the Eurasian Union will hardly be a boon for Russia. The Belarusian economy is highly unstable and if such poor countries as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan join the Eurasian Union, Moscow may face even bigger problems than the EU does over

Greece.”^[29]

THE EURASIAN UNION AS THE ULTIMATE INTEGRATION EFFORT

Despite these warnings and despite the fact that “the Eurasian Union has only little integration potential and has few attractions to offer the newly independent states,”^[30] the Kremlin does not shy away from spending money—a lot of money—on this project. While in 2009–2010 Russia still refused to transfer loans to Belarus when that country failed to privatize and sell industrial companies to Russian companies, in late 2011 the situation had changed fundamentally. Russia began to provide billions of dollars in oil and gas subsidies and allocated \$10 billion for loans for a nuclear plant in Belarus. It also paid \$2.5 billion for the second half of Beltransgas shares. In addition, it also signed on November 21, 2011, an agreement in Moscow on a loan for \$1

billion.^[31] The willingness of the Kremlin to subsidize Lukashenko's rickety economy was a clear sign of the *political* importance it attached to the Eurasian project.^[32]

In fact, the Eurasian Union is for Moscow the *ultimate* integration effort, crowning and superseding all earlier integration efforts. The Eurasian Union is not just some new integration project *alongside* the other existing integration projects created by Russia in recent years. The Eurasian Union is something different. This new structure is like the crowning synthesis in a Hegelian dialectic: it is not only the most complete realization of earlier Russian attempts at integration, but—while keeping these other structures in place—it *absorbs* them over time. (Hegel calls this process *aufheben*, which means both “to preserve” as well as “to bring to a higher level.”) We can, therefore, expect that the Eurasian Union will gradually take over functions from other existing structures, such as the Russia-Belarus Union State, EurAsEc, the

Customs Union, and the CSTO. Belarusian President Lukashenko hinted at this when he declared that the Russia-Belarus Union State may disappear if the project of the Eurasian Union were to develop further.^[33] This hidden function of the Eurasian Union, to replace and absorb already existing integration structures, is also recognized by Uwe Halbach, a German expert who wrote on the Eurasian Union that “a piece of integration theatre is being played out on multiple stages and levels, which ultimately calls for an ‘integration of the integrations.’”^[34]

The centerpiece of this intended “integration of the integrations” is, undoubtedly, *military* integration. Putin did not mention this in his *Izvestia* article, but Ruslan Grinberg, director of the economic institute RAN, hinted at this at the “Big Country” conference. Grinberg mentioned “the necessity to build supranational structures, [also] partly,

military.”^[35] “The Eurasian Union is primarily an economic project accompanied by Russian efforts toward integration within security policy areas,” wrote Uwe Halbach. “The main recipient here is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an ‘alliance’ of seven [now six, MHVH] CIS states.”^[36] Halbach is right. This hidden ambition of the Kremlin, however, is not trumpeted too loudly in order not to frighten away potential candidate members of the Eurasian Union.

The Eurasian Union, this ultimate integration project of Russia and pet project of Vladimir Putin, has to be taken seriously. It is the last product of the Kremlin’s *funnel strategy* in which countries are invited to participate in an integration project on the basis of a manifest agenda that is different from the Kremlin’s hidden agenda. The hidden agenda behind the Eurasian Union is twofold. In the first place it is the creation—over time—of a military arm of the Union, similar to the defunct

Warsaw Pact. This military arm (the CSTO) will reserve for itself the exclusive right to intervene militarily in the post-Soviet space. Such an exclusive right of military intervention that excludes the intervention of external powers (the United States, NATO, but also China) has found its theoretical elaboration in the *Grossraum* (big space) theory of Carl Schmitt, which was already at the core of Medvedev's proposal for a pan-European security pact.^[37] A Russian *droit de regard* over the post-Soviet space would further imply that Russia wants to introduce qualified majority decision to replace the consensus rule of the CSTO (Article 12 of the CSTO Charter) for substantive decisions on peacekeeping operations or interventions.

BRINGING UKRAINE BACK INTO THE RUSSIAN ORBIT

The second and most important point of the Kremlin's hidden agenda is the incorporation of

Ukraine into the Eurasian Union. For the Kremlin the Eurasian Union is a new instrument to bring Ukraine back into its orbit.^[38] This is also the reason that the Kremlin has a great interest in attracting Moldova, which, in March 2012, was promised lower consumer prices (of up to 30 percent) for gas and oil, and a “big market (comparable with the EU) for Moldovan products.” It was also offered more beneficial conditions for Moldovan workers in countries of the Customs Union if it would adhere to the Customs Union, which functions as the entrance to the Eurasian Union.^[39] Moldova’s membership of the Eurasian Union would, in fact, see Ukraine encircled by three member states of the Eurasian Union: Russia, Belarus, and Moldova, thereby making Ukraine’s membership of this organization more logical and an eventual future membership of Ukraine of the EU more problematic. The Kremlin’s Moldova policy is, therefore, an integral part of its Eurasian Union project. There seems to exist

a clear will in the Kremlin—in case the Moldovan leadership cannot be convinced to join the Eurasian Union and is opting instead for EU membership—to split the country and make the breakaway province of Transnistria independent along the lines of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On July 31, 2012, speaking in the Nashi Seliger camp, Putin said that Transnistria is entitled to self-determination. This “reference to self-determination is a novel one in Moscow’s rhetoric about the Transnistria conflict,” warned Vladimir Socor.^[40] Putin’s declaration was followed by the reappointment on August 2, 2012, of deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin to the additional post of special representative of the Russian President for Transnistria (Rogozin had already been appointed in March 2012 to this post by Putin’s predecessor, Dmitry Medvedev). On the same day, Rogozin received Transnistria’s leader Yevgeny Shevchuk in Moscow. When Rogozin and Shevchuk made a declaration after the

meeting, Russia's flag and Transnistria's "state flag" were displayed on an equal footing—a clear sign of Russian support for Transnistrian separatism. "Moscow's July 31 and August 2 statements," wrote Vladimir Socor, "add further elements of de-recognition [of Moldova's territorial integrity], firming up suggestions for Transnistria's 'self-determination' and acknowledging its 'state' attributes (territory, flag)."^[41] Moscow's support for Transnistrian separatism is directly linked with the Kremlin's Eurasian project. "Moscow declared its intention to build a 'Eurasian economic region' in Transnistria aiming to prevent the weakening of Moscow's control over Tiraspol, in a direct response to EU and Moldova's efforts to attract Transnistria through economic cooperation."^[42]

NOTES

1. Vladimir Putin, "Novyy integratsionnyy proekt dlya Evrazii: budushchee, kotoroe rozhdetsya

segodnya,” *Izvestia* (October 8, 2011).

2. “Professor Igor Panarin: Gosudarem postsovetskogo prostranstva stanet Vladimir Putin,” *Izvestia* (April 1, 2009).

3. On Panarin’s grandiose visions see also Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 82–83.

4. Igor Panarin, “The Information War against Russia: Operation Putin. Part 1. Eurasian Integration: A Pathway Out of the World Crisis.” Lecture in the International Conference Securing Mankind’s Future (February 25–26, 2012), organized in Berlin by the Schiller-Institut. <http://www.schiller-institut.de/seiten/201202-berlin/panarin-english.html> (accessed June 28, 2013).

5. Panarin, “The Information War against Russia: Operation Putin.”

6. New Zealand has expressed an interest in creating a free trade zone with the Eurasian Union, but this is, of course, nowhere near

becoming a full member. (Cf. Letter of Dmitry Shtodin, Minister Counsellor at the Russian Embassy in Rome, published as an appendix to Mauro De Bonis, "Urss? No grazie, Putin sogna l'Unione Euroasiatica," *Limes* (September 3, 2012). Shtodin corrects the statement of De Bonis that New Zealand would become a member.) More viable candidates—mentioned by Panarin in another article—are Cuba and Venezuela. This "might sound like something out of a novel today," he rejoiced, "far more than my own idea about Serbia joining, but we are living in very dynamic times" (Cf. Igor Panarin, "Eurasian Union: Stage 1," *RT* (November 18, 2011)). In another article even war-torn Syria is mentioned as "seeking a free trade zone" with the new emerging Union. (Cf. Svetlana Kalmykova, "Eurasian Union Idea Takes Shape," *The Voice of Russia* (October 20, 2011).)

7. Dugin quoted by Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 117.

8. Dugin, *Konservativnaya Revolyutsiya*, 1994. <http://anticompromat.ru/dugin/3put.html>.
9. Cf. "Evraziyskie komissary poluchat status federalnykh ministrov," *Tut.by* (November 17, 2011).
10. "Vstrecha prezidentov Rossii, Respubliki Belarus i Kazakhstana," *Official Website of the President of Russia* (November 18, 2011).
11. "Vstrecha prezidentov Rossii, Respubliki Belarus i Kazakhstana."
12. "Vstrecha prezidentov Rossii, Respubliki Belarus i Kazakhstana."
13. Marlène Laruelle, "When the 'Near Abroad' Looks at Russia: The Eurasian Union Project as Seen from the Southern Republics," *Russian Analytical Digest* no. 112 (April 20, 2012), 9.
14. "Evraziyskiy tamozhennyi soyuz i ego vliyanie na Tsentralnuyu Aziyu," *Analiticheskiy Forum Tsentralnoy Azii* no. 4 (February 2013), 2.
15. "Evraziyskiy tamozhennyi soyuz i ego vliyanie na Tsentralnuyu Aziyu."
16. "Evraziyskiy tamozhennyi soyuz i ego

vliyanie na Tsentralnuyu Aziyu.” Putin, in his speech, said: “The combined GDP measured in purchasing power parity of countries such as India and China is already greater than that of the United States. And a similar calculation with the GDP of the BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India and China—surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. And according to experts this gap will only increase in the future.” (Cf. “Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43d Munich Conference on Security Policy,” *The Washington Post* (February 12, 2007).)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/conter>

17. Putin, “Novyy integratsionnyy proekt dlya Evrazii: budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya.”

18. Andreas Umland, “The Stillborn Project of a Eurasian Union: Why Post-Soviet Integration Has Little Prospects,” *Valdai Discussion Club* (December 7, 2011).

19. Umland, “The Stillborn Project of a Eurasian Union.”

20. Tatyana Valovaya, minister responsible for the main areas of integration and macroeconomics of the Eurasian Economic Commission, reacting to the remark that “the idea of unifying the countries of the CIS is often called the realization of the imperial ambitions of our country’s leadership,” said: “In this space some ‘unity’ has always existed.” She added: “The original six countries of the EEC were, in fact—precisely the empire of Charlemagne.” Valovaya saw no problem in comparing the empire of Charlemagne, which ended in 814—this is 1,200 years ago!—with the Russian Empire, which ended only twenty years ago. (Cf. “Integratsiya obedinyaet vsekh: ot kommunistov do ‘Edinoy Rossii’ i pravyykh,” *Izvestia* (July 20, 2012).)

21. Putin’s argument is repeated by Yevgeny Vinokurov, who wrote that “one should not consider European and post-Soviet integration to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the regionalism of the CIS is a step along the way

toward integration with the European Union.” (Y. Yu. Vinokurov, “Pragmaticheskoe evraziystvo,” *Rossiia v Globalnoy Politike* (April 30, 2013).)

22. Tropkina, Olga. “Yevgeny Primakov nazval usloviya dlya uspekha Evraziyskogo soyuza,” *Izvestia* (November 24, 2011).

23. Putin quoted by Maria Antonova, “State Lays Claim to Geography Society,” *The St. Petersburg Times* (November 20, 2009). The speech was held on November 18, 2009, when Putin became head of the Society’s Board of Trustees. Putin’s sudden interest in Russia’s oldest organization seemed less motivated by scientific than by geopolitical reasons. According to Antonova, “Tsar Nicholas I created the Russian Geographical Society in 1845 as part of the imperial drive for geographical expansion and exploration of the country’s natural resources.”

24. Gleb Bryanski, “Putin, Medvedev Praise Values of Soviet Union,” *Reuters* (November 17,

2011).

25. "Moscow Fleshes Out 'Eurasian Union' Plans," *EurActiv* (November 17, 2011).

26. "Moscow Fleshes Out 'Eurasian Union' Plans."

27. "Eurasian Union Proposal Key Aspect of Putin's Expected Presidency," *EurasiaNet.org* (October 7, 2011).

28. Tropkina, "Yevgeny Primakov nazval usloviya dlya uspekha Evraziyskogo soyuza."

29. Prof. Sheng Shiliang, "Putin's Eurasian Chess Match," *Valdai Discussion Club* (October 31, 2011).

30. Katharina Hoffmann, "Eurasian Union: A New Name for an Old Integration Idea," *Russian Analytical Digest* no. 112 (April 20, 2011).

31. Andrei Liakhovich, "The Reasons behind Putin's Unprecedented Generosity Towards Lukashenka," *Belarus Digest* (January 5, 2012).

32. Andrew Wilson wrote that Lukashenko "might find a new role with Putin by selling Belarus as an exemplar in Russia-supported

integration schemes such as the Eurasian Union. Russia cannot allow Belarus as a member of the Eurasian Union to go bust because that would seriously undermine the whole idea of Russian-sponsored integration projects.” (Cf. “Andrew Wilson on His Belarus Book and Lukashenka’s Survival,” *Belarus Digest* (December 4, 2011).)

33. “Russia-Belarus Union State May Take Backseat if Eurasian Union Project Pans Out: Lukashenko,” *RIA Novosti* (November 18, 2011).

34. Halbach, “Vladimir Putin’s Eurasian Union: A New Integration Project for the CIS Region?”

35. Tropkina, “Yevgeny Primakov nazval usloviya dlya uspekha Evraziyskogo soyuza.”

36. Halbach, “Vladimir Putin’s Eurasian Union: A New Integration Project for the CIS Region?”

37. On the influence of Carl Schmitt’s geopolitical *Grossraum* theory on Medvedev’s proposal, see my paper “Medvedev’s Proposal for a Pan-European Security Pact: Its Six Hidden Objectives and How the West Should Respond.”

http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marc_European_Security_Pact.pdf.

38. This part of the Kremlin's hidden agenda is also emphasized by Marlène Laruelle, who wrote: "Putin's Eurasian Union project is aimed mainly at Central Asia, less at the South Caucasus, *with the ultimate aim and supreme reward being the potential reintegration of Ukraine into the Russian bosom*" (emphasis mine). (Cf. Marlène Laruelle, "When the 'Near Abroad' Looks at Russia: the Eurasian Union Project as Seen from the Southern Republics," 9.)

39. "Posol RF: Moldaviya i Tamozhennyi soyuz: vozvrat v proshloe ili proryv v budushchee?" *Regnum* (February 7, 2012).

40. Vladimir Socor, "Putin Suggests Transnistria Self-Determination, Rogozin Displays Transnistria Flag," *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 9, no. 149 (August 16, 2012).

41. Socor, "Putin Suggests Transnistria Self-Determination."

42. George Niculescu, “The Myths and Realities of Vladimir Putin’s Eurasian Economic Union,” *The European Geopolitical Forum* (January 8, 2013).

Part II

The “Internal War”

Consolidation of Power

Chapter 6

Russia as a “Pluralist” One-Party State

When Yeltsin told Putin in the summer of 1999 that he had chosen him to be his successor and Putin had to prepare for the presidential elections of 2000, Putin was upset. “I don’t like election campaigns,” he said. “I really don’t. I don’t know how to run them, and I don’t like them.”^[1] This exclamation would, in fact, become the profession of faith of Putin’s regime, because the realization of Putin’s imperial project was dependent on two conditions. The first of these was the unhampered continuation of his regime in order to be able to realize his long-term projects. The second condition was the necessity of upholding a formal democratic façade to facilitate the acceptance of his regime in the West, thus avoiding the West mobilizing

against the emergence of a new “Russian danger.” This meant that he would strictly adhere to the letter (though not the spirit) of the constitution. He would maintain the external characteristics of a democratic regime, such as elections and a free press, but at the same time he would do anything to avoid an alternation of power from taking place, which is the litmus proof of democratic governance. The repression of opposition forces in Russia, therefore, was considered a necessary condition for the continuation of his regime. Winning this “internal war” was for Putin a precondition for winning his first war: the reconstruction of the empire. How Putin conducted this “internal war” we will analyze in this section.

A ONE-PARTY STATE WITH FOUR PARTIES?

Each time visitors from the West questioned the reality of Russian political pluralism, Putin reacted with visible irritation. During the Valdai conference in September 2009, for instance, a

Western participant asked: “To what extent do you think the Western model for political and economic development would suit Russia? Or do you think Russia needs to adopt some other model, which would better suit local historical, geographical and geopolitical realities?” Putin answered—not amused—in a brusque tone: “Russia’s fundamental political and economic system is fully in line with international standards. If we are discussing the political system, I am referring to free election(s) and (an) effective multi-party system.”^[2]

Apparently, the Russian leadership did not consider reestablishing a one-party system to be a sensible strategy. The historical precedents—not only in fascist countries, but also the experience with the communist party in the former Soviet Union—had too negative an image.

**EAST GERMAN COMMUNIST “PLURALISM”:
A MODEL FOR PUTIN?**

The former communist regime legitimized the existing one-party system by referring to the emergence of a “classless society” in which the old capitalist class cleavages would no longer exist. Interestingly, even in the former communist bloc there were still some countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic, which did not follow the Soviet example, but maintained (quasi-)pluralist systems. In East Germany, for instance, alongside the SED, the official communist party, there existed four other political “parties.”^[3] However, these parties were not allowed to compete with each other or with the communist party, nor to participate in elections as independent bodies. Candidates from all parties appeared on a prefabricated list of the so-called “National Front”^[4] under the aegis of the communist party, and in the (obligatory) elections the only act expected from voters was to throw this list in the ballot

box.^[5] Putin lived and worked as a KGB agent in Dresden in the German Democratic Republic between 1985 and 1991. Asked about his activities there, he answered that he “looked for information about political parties, the tendencies inside these parties, their leaders. I examined today’s leaders and the possible leaders of tomorrow and the promotion of people to certain posts in the parties and the government.”^[6] Putin might have been impressed by the astuteness of East Germany’s pseudo-pluralism.

Of the four parties that on December 2, 2007, were elected in the State Duma, United Russia got 64.30 percent of the vote, A Just Russia got 6.80 percent, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation got 11.57 percent, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia got 8.14 percent. If we take into account that A Just Russia was an artificial construction, set up by United Russia to attract additional votes, the governing bloc collected as much as 71.1

percent of the votes (and 78.44 percent of the seats). This sweeping majority exceeded even the percentage the ANC got in the South African elections on April 22, 2009 (the ANC got 65.9 percent). The well-oiled and generously financed United Russia party machine was explicitly set up to support Putin, although Putin himself was not a party member. This did not prevent Putin accepting, on April 15, 2008, the position of chairman.

Not only did United Russia have a comfortable majority at that time, but, additionally, the two “opposition” parties, Zhirinovskiy’s crypto-fascist Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party, had long since abandoned playing a serious opposition role. These parties, instead, fully supported the government. The resulting system, therefore, in practice came close to a one-party state. Richard Sakwa had remarked that already *Unity*, United Russia’s predecessor^[7] was “neither a modern political party nor a mass movement

but was instead a political association made to order by power elites to advance their interests. [It] . . . could become the core of a new type of hegemonic party system in which patronage and preference would be disbursed by a neo-*nomenclatura* class of state officials loyal to Putin. Unity could become the core of a patronage system of the type that in July 2000 was voted out of office in Mexico after seventy-one years.”^[8] Unity’s successor, United Russia, indeed, succeeded in establishing itself as the inheritor of the old monolithic CPSU. Former president Gorbachev called it “the worst version of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.”^[9] This was a rather harsh accusation from the mouth of the last president of the Soviet Union, who made his career inside the defunct CPSU and knew better than anyone else how rotten the old system was. But Gorbachev made a mistake: United Russia was *not* a remake of the old CPSU. Because, quite simply, communism in Russia was definitively dead. The

new pluralistic façade might hide the same monolithic political structure, but it was situated in a rather different environment: not the former environment of a communist, centrally planned economy, but the new environment of a state capitalist economy. This made a big difference and was one of the reasons not to look back to Soviet times for historical analogies.

THE USE OF FAKE POLITICAL PARTIES

On October 28, 2006, a new party was introduced into the Russian party landscape. Its name was *Spravedlivaya Rossiya*, or A Just Russia^[10] —at first sight a promising name, because many Russians deplored the loss of the former socialist model of the defunct Soviet Union and craved a more just and fair society.^[11] What was A Just Russia? A new opposition party? A party that would challenge the near monopoly of United Russia? One

should forget this illusion. According to the *Moscow Times*, “Russia . . . [has] become possibly the first country in history with a two-party system in which both parties share the same overriding principle, that the executive is always right.”^[12] In a report for the American Congress, Stuart D. Goldman wrote: “The platforms of United Russia and A Just Russia consisted of little more than the slogan, ‘For Putin.’”^[13] He added that the “second pro-Kremlin party, A Just Russia—[is] widely believed to have been created by Kremlin ‘political technologists’ . . . to draw leftist votes away from the Communists.”^[14] Goldman was right. The instigator of the new party was Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s deputy head of the presidential administration and a prominent Kremlin ideologue. Surkov was the inventor of the new political concepts of the Putin era, such as the “power vertical” and “sovereign democracy” (which had nothing to do with

democracy, but meant merely that no foreign power had the right to define what democracy is). Anna Politkovskaya characterized Surkov as follows: “The deputy head of Putin’s office is a certain Vladislav Surkov, the acknowledged doyen of PR in Russia. He spins webs consisting of pure deceit, lies in place of reality, words instead of deeds.”^[15]

Surkov’s “master idea” behind the creation of A Just Russia was to establish a two-party system as existed in the United States, but with one important difference: neither party would embody political alternatives, nor would they lead to an alternation of governing elites. Instead, they would guarantee political continuity by supporting the Putin regime. The hidden aim was that A Just Russia, as the new “left wing” party, would draw votes away from the Communist party. However, even circles close to the Kremlin were not convinced. One of them was former prime minister Primakov, who wrote “proposals can be heard to create in

Russia a two-party system. The center left party A Just Russia could aspire to the role of lead second party. But the realization of this project, the idea behind it being attributed to the Kremlin, presents great difficulties. When United Russia was created, the administrative potential was used to the maximum. Many regional and local leaders felt obliged to become members of this party. Might they this time take at least a neutral position, or even support A Just Russia at the Duma elections? And that while V. V. Putin has become leader of United Russia?"^[16] Primakov's skepticism was justified. In the December 2007 Duma elections the strategy did not work out as was planned. Although A Just Russia was secured a place in parliament, the Communist Party resisted better than expected. However, we have to take into account that the Communist Party, although an "opposition party," did not play a serious opposition role. The party "knows its place" in the existing system and does not

transgress its (narrow) limits, as it is dependent on the government for registration, fund-raising, and access to the state controlled TV channels. The same is true for Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party, of which it is said that "according to insider accounts [it] was established by the Soviet KGB to serve as a nationalist pseudo-opposition."^[17]

The Duma that was elected in 2007 exhibited another important defect: this was the absence of liberal parties, such as Yabloko and the Union of the Right Forces. The Kremlin wanted this anomaly to be "repaired" in the run-up to the Duma elections of December 2011. By the beginning of 2010 rumors were already emerging about a new initiative. In February 2010 Owen Matthews, the Moscow correspondent of *Newsweek*, wrote about "a new liberal pseudo-opposition party the Kremlin is rumored to be cooking up."^[18] However, in the regional elections of March 13, 2011, suddenly another party popped up. It was

the *Patrioty Rossii* (Patriots of Russia). Founded in 2005 by Gennady Semigin, a former member of the Communist Party, it had until then led a mainly dormant existence. The party, using the slogan “Patriotism is superior to Politics,” managed to win nearly 8 percent of the vote in Dagestan. Its program was left-wing, nationalist, and anti-Western.^[19] In a comment *The Economist* wrote: “Analysts say the party is another Kremlin product, tested now with a view to being deployed in the parliamentary election in December [2011]. . . . Its real purpose, it seems, is to act as a spoiler for the Communist Party and another party, Just Russia, which itself was originally created as a double for United Russia but has since become a genuine challenger. Engineering clone and fake opposition parties is one of the Kremlin’s favourite political ‘technologies.’”^[20] All this confirmed what Anna Politkovskaya had written in 2004: “There is a great fashion at the present for bogus political movements created by a

directive of the Kremlin. We don't want the West suspecting that we have a one-party system, that we lack pluralism and are relapsing into authoritarianism.”[\[21\]](#)

UNEQUALLED ELECTION FRAUD

A fake pluralist system cannot be maintained without massive election fraud. This fraud, however, must not transgress certain limits if it is to keep the pluralist system “credible.” On October 11, 2009, when local elections were held in seventy-five regions for seven thousand eligible posts, something unexpected happened. The strategy of the Kremlin's “political technologists” of creating a fake two-party system seemed to be surpassed by a new reality: the total hegemony of United Russia, which obtained almost 80 percent of the votes. The other parties were completely marginalized in the local councils. The background to this new political fact was the greatest election

fraud ever committed in post-Communist Russia. In the Moscow City Duma, for instance, United Russia got thirty-two out of thirty-five seats. However, exit polls by VTsIOM, the state-owned pollster, had predicted that support for United Russia in Moscow was only 45.5 percent. Strangely enough, the party got 66 percent of the vote.^[22] According to observers “the campaign was called one of the dirtiest ever in Russia. . . . Almost everywhere parties complained of the abuse of absentee ballots and the rather old fashioned abuse of ‘carousel’ voting, in which buses ferry volunteers from one polling station to the next to vote several times.”^[23] However, according to *Novoe Vremya* (New Times)—a weekly magazine critical of the Kremlin—the use of absentee ballots and the carousel system were only *detskiye metody* (children’s methods) of election fraud. They could change the results by only 5 to 7 percent. However, United Russia’s results were in many cases “improved” by up to 40 percent. The

method used for this, wrote the weekly, was quite simple: it consisted in removing “troublesome observers” at the moment that the ballot boxes were opened and in presenting the “end results” directly.^[24] Ex-president Mikhail Gorbachev on this occasion abandoned his usually prudent and discrete attitude vis-à-vis the leadership in the Kremlin. In an interview in *Novaya Gazeta*, of which he is one of the owners, he said that “in the eyes of everybody, the elections have turned into a mockery of the people.”^[25]

Apart from this massive fraud committed *during* the elections, there was also the fraud committed *before* them. Parties outside the “official opposition,” such as, for instance, *Drugaya Rossiya* (the Other Russia—a coalition headed by former chess champion Garry Kasparov), could not participate. According to Dmitry Oreshkin, an independent political analyst with the Moscow-based Mercator research group, “they are on the periphery,

marginalized. . . . They have no access to the media. They are not allowed to register as candidates or even as parties, as players in the electoral process. They exist outside the system that is called politics.”^[26]

Putin’s goal, to create two pro-Kremlin parties and in this way to maintain a pluralistic political façade, began to run the risk of being drowned in the “electoral successes” of United Russia, which—helped by the careerism of the regional leaders, the manipulated media, excessive financial funding, and, last but not least, massive, nationwide, organized fraud—might become “the only show in town.” United Russia was in danger of becoming a victim of its own success, undermining the very democratic façade the leadership had been so carefully trying to construct over the years. That the Kremlin was *really* worried about the turn of events became clear after the regional elections, which took place on March 14, 2010. Despite widespread fraud,^[27] this time United

Russia did not repeat its success. It lost about 20 percentage points across the board. In Sverdlovsk the party got only 39 percent, and Irkutsk elected a Communist mayor with over 62 percent. One would have expected grim faces in the Kremlin, but the opposite was the case. "A happy defeat for the Kremlin," wrote Julia Ioffe in *Foreign Policy*.^[28] According to another Western observer it was a "Victory in defeat."^[29] The fact that the three "opposition parties" together had gotten more votes than United Russia seemed to be extremely good news for the Kremlin: the democratic façade had been saved without in any way jeopardizing United Russia's power monopoly. Due to the fact that the biggest party gets extra seats in the regional legislatures, "loser" United Russia could quietly continue to rule the regions in tandem with the Kremlin-appointed governors.

MIKHAIL PROKHOROV'S REVOLT AGAINST

THE KREMLIN “PUPPETEERS”

The Kremlin's efforts to build fake parties alongside United Russia, however, continued. The Kremlin needed a multiparty system, but only in the way the former German Democratic Republic needed it: as a democratic façade. It should by all means be prevented from developing into a real multiparty system and leading to what the Kremlin wanted to avoid at all cost: political alternation. However, creating even a fake two-party system could be risky for the Kremlin, because a big opposition party—even if it was originally set up as a *fake* opposition party—could eventually develop into a *real* opposition.^[30] This theoretical possibility seemed almost to become a reality in the summer of 2011, when the Kremlin promoted the billionaire oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, president of the Onexim Group and third-richest man in Russia, to leader of the party *Pravoe Delo* (Right Cause). This party was

founded in 2009,^[31] but had no seats in the Duma. It was set up as a “liberal” party with the objective of capturing the votes of the liberal intelligentsia, the urban middle classes, and the business community. The Kremlin wanted the party to enter the Duma in the elections of December 2011 to make its managed “multiparty” system more credible to the most critical part of the electorate. Mikhail Vinogradov, director of the Petersburg Foundation “Petersburg Politics,” announced that Prokhorov, a talented business tycoon, was “a strong figure, not inclined to participate in imitation projects.”^[32] His prediction came true. Prokhorov went to work energetically. He approached Yevgeny Roizman, who had made a name as an activist, leading a nationwide campaign against narcotics. The Kremlin administration was not pleased with this unexpected activism and advised Prokhorov to sack Roizman. Prokhorov refused. This show of independence could not be tolerated and on

September 15, 2011, Prokhorov was forced out of the party. Prokhorov did not mince his words. In *Kommersant* he attacked Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the presidential administration, head-on, calling him a “puppeteer” who “privatized the political system and disinforms the government of the country.”^[33] Prokhorov asked for Surkov to be sacked—a rather provocative demand, because Surkov the “puppeteer” was not acting alone, but had the full backing of his two masters and “puppeteers-in-chief” Putin and Medvedev who, in reality, were pulling the strings. An analyst commented that Prokhorov, “by refusing to bend to the petty wishes from the Kremlin . . . has qualified as an ‘enemy of the state,’ and his fortune instead of shielding him from persecution, makes it more tempting for the greedy *siloviki* to go after the loot Prokhorov is guilty of revealing how rotten Putinism has grown.”^[34]

The Prokhorov affair brought the Kremlin’s

manipulation fully into the open, ridiculing its system of “managed democracy.” However, it was not to put an end to the Kremlin’s machinations. In May 2011, at the same time that Prokhorov was selected to become a party leader, Vladislav Surkov and his associates were already preparing another plan: the formation of an “All-Russia People’s Front” (*Obshcherossiyskiy Narodnyy Front*), in which United Russia would participate together with other parties and organizations. Putin officially presented the plan on May 6, 2011, at a conference of United Russia in Volgograd. One of the parties invited to participate in this Front was the successor organization of *Rodina*, an ultranationalist and xenophobic party. Its former leader, Dmitry Rogozin, who had become Russian permanent representative to NATO, was called back to Russia to organize its relaunch under the name *Rodina-Congress of Russian Communities*.^[35] For small parties it was attractive to participate in the Front

because, not hindered by the extremely high 7 percent threshold, they would get a guaranteed number of seats in the Duma. For United Russia this formula was interesting because, while keeping its absolute majority, it could plan in advance the “diversity” in the new parliament. Also representatives of Kremlin-friendly trade unions, agricultural associations, veterans’ organizations, and even car-owners organizations were mentioned as possible candidates for joining the Front.^[36] On the website of “United Russia” the Front was welcomed as a “modernization” of the party, which would create a new, broad coalition around the party—some kind of “silent majority” representing different ideological positions: “left-wing people, right-wing liberals, [and] moderate nationalists.”^[37] Up to 25 percent of the positions on the Front list would be reserved for these outsiders. It is certainly no coincidence that this new “All-Russia People’s Front” was a faithful copy of the

“National Front” of the former German Democratic Republic. In the GDR it was the only list in the elections for the *Volkskammer*, the East German parliament.

Andrey Kolesnikov made another comparison in the *Novaya Gazeta*. “Putin’s Popular Front,” he wrote, “is Mussolini’s corporation: everything from Shmakov’s unions [Mikhail Shmakov was the chairman of FITUR, the Russian trade union federation which unites 49 trade unions and counts 25 million members, MHVH] to the women’s organisations, all under one roof. . . . In implementing the idea of a popular front, I see the principle enunciated by Il Duce in 1925: ‘All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.’”^[38] Putin’s Front, however, still left some place for other parties, thereby rescuing Russia’s “pluralism.” *Real* opposition parties, such as the Peoples’ Freedom Party (Parnas) of Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Ryzhkov, and Mikhail Kasyanov, were

eliminated beforehand from this “pluralist” system. On June 22, 2011, the Justice Ministry refused to register the party.^[39] The Duma elections of December 2011 came too early for the All-Russia People’s Front to play a role. But after the election “victory” of United Russia, which was characterized by massive fraud and the growing estrangement of the urban electorate from this party, the Kremlin began to purge the party of its most corrupt elements. At the same time it began to build the All-Russia People’s Front as a political formation to capture the votes of the conservative and anti-Western segment of the Russian electorate in the next election. In order to give the—mostly provincial—representatives of this “silent majority” a chance to enter parliament, Vladimir Putin, on March 1, 2013, submitted a draft law providing for a restoration of a mixed electoral system in which one half of the MPs are to be elected in single-mandate constituencies.^[40] By May 20, 2013, organizing

committees of the All-Russia People's Front were created in all Russian regions. It was telling that Moscow and St. Petersburg would be the last regions where the Front opened offices.^[41] The founding congress of the Front, renamed into "People's Front for Russia," took place on June 12, 2013, the official "Russia Day" holiday. At the end the chairman of the congress said that he still had "a very stupid question." He asked: "Who do we choose as leader of our movement?" In the room they started to chant: "Putin, Putin." "Shall we vote? There are no other candidates? Vladimir Vladimirovich, I congratulate you with all my heart."^[42]

However, the new "People's Front for Russia" was not the only safety valve, invented by the Kremlin, to save the system. When, at the Duma elections of December 4, 2011, the disaffected liberal intelligentsia of Moscow and Saint Petersburg turned away en masse from

United Russia and neither did they vote for the fake “Right Cause” party (which, after Prokhorov left, only got 0.6 percent of the vote), Vladislav Surkov proposed in an interview a new fake party for “angry urban communities.”^[43] In reality, however, the next Kremlin creation was not the promised party for “angry urban communities,” but a party for a quite different audience: the conservative Cossacks and their sympathizers. On November 24, 2012, the Cossack Party of the Russian Federation was founded. There are about 7 million Cossacks in Russia, mostly living in frontier regions. It is a nationalist electorate, deeply Orthodox, and dedicated to Putin, who, in 2005, was given the title of Cossack colonel—a title previously held by the tsars. According to the president of the party, Sergey Bondarev, a former United Russia MP and deputy governor of the Rostov region, “the party is not only for Cossacks, but for all citizens of Russia. We are not left-wing and not right-wing, we are straight ahead.”^[44] The

abbreviation of the new party, CaPRF, was almost the same as CPRF, the abbreviation of the Communist Party, which led to protests from the Communists, who accused the Kremlin of wanting to siphon off voters from their party.

After the Duma elections of December 2012, when the oppositionist blogger Aleksey Navalny denounced United Russia as the *partiya zhulikov i vorov* (party of swindlers and thieves), Putin is relying more and more on building the People's Front, while letting Medvedev take on the job of purging and "modernizing" United Russia. One of Medvedev's "modernizing measures" was a proposal to give opponents of United Russia the opportunity to express their views at the "Civil University," a new educational project for party members, launched by him on March 27, 2013. "If these are people who criticize the party for some mistakes, tricks, lack of activism, for some issues or others, I believe that would only benefit us," Medvedev said.^[45]

This does not mean, however, that Putin was willing to give Medvedev a completely free hand to modernize United Russia. When Putin prepared to use United Russia as a machine for the presidential elections of 2012, Gleb Pavlovsky, head of the Effective Politics Foundation and a close ally of Putin,^[46] said that United Russia needed “to develop a new level of management,” some kind of superstructure *above* the existing leadership. This new group would be a sort of personal *cabinet* of Putin’s. One might be tempted to compare this proposed new structure with the old Politburo of the CPSU, but that comparison would not be totally valid. The Politburo was a collegial organ of *shared* power that was formally controlled by the Central Committee. The superstructure, suggested by Pavlovsky, is not an organ of shared power, nor is it an organ that is formally controlled by the party. It would be the personal *camarilla* of Putin, who, although he resigned as chairman of the party

in May 2012 and never was a member of the party, would stand above the party and avail himself of the party structures. The proposed personal cabinet would be an instrument in his hand to direct the party machine and use it for his own aims. Putin's special position in the party, proposed by Pavlovsky, would come close to the *Führerprinzip*.

Gleb Pavlovsky belongs—with Vladislav Surkov—to the most influential “political technologists” behind Russia's new “electoral democracy,” in which many techniques are used to achieve the preordained results: falsifying elections, erecting legal barriers, harassing opposition parties, monopolizing the media, absorbing other parties, and creating fake parties. These techniques are not new. Many are used by other autocratic regimes that want to maintain a more or less democratic façade. However, the way in which the Kremlin tried to manipulate existing parties by creating new parties, showed, indeed, an interesting

resemblance to the “political technologies” used by Benito Mussolini in Fascist Italy. According to Emilio Gentile, in post–World War I Italy, “the conquest of the power monopoly was achieved in different phases that coincided with the expansion of fascist supremacy in the country. In the first phase, Mussolini set up a coalition policy with the parties that were ready to collaborate; at the same time he did everything to disintegrate them.”^[47] Renzo De Felice described Mussolini’s attempts “to ‘empty’ the traditional parties” by offering their leaders attractive positions in his government or in the state bureaucracy.^[48] In the elections of April 6, 1924, Mussolini went so far as to present *two* lists, a broad “ministerial list” that also contained the names of non-fascist candidates, and a “list *bis*” of the fascist party. These two lists combined gave him an absolute majority of 66.3 percent.^[49] This result is certainly impressive, but it is still 4.8 percent

less than the combined votes (71.1 percent) of United Russia and its “list *bis*,” A Just Russia, in the December 2007 Duma elections.^[50]

ANOTHER PSEUDO-PLURALISM: THE DIARCHY AT THE TOP

Another interesting resemblance between Putin’s and Mussolini’s systems was the diarchy at the top. Mussolini was prime minister and *Duce*, but until the armistice in 1943 Italy was a monarchy and Mussolini had to deal with King Victor Emmanuel III, the Italian head of state. In Mussolini’s case this diarchy was not of his own making. It was forced on him by the specificity of the Italian situation. After the election of Dmitry Medvedev as Russian president in March 2008 and Putin’s appointment to prime minister, there was created, in Russia also, a diarchy, called *the tandem*. But unlike the Italian situation, where the diarchy was an unintended consequence of a historical

situation, the diarchy in Russia was the result of a deliberate *choice*. In the beginning there was a lot of speculation about the reason for this construction. Some Western observers obstinately wanted to believe—even as late as the fall of 2011—that this diarchy did have some real substance. It did not. The reason for Putin installing the tandem was to guarantee Putin's iron grip on power for at least another decade. The second reason was to hide this manipulated usurpation of state power behind a smokescreen of formal legality. The Russian constitution did not permit a president to run for a third term. Putin easily could have changed the constitution, but he chose to step down and leave his place to his young cabinet chief Dmitry Medvedev. Medvedev was the ideal choice for Putin. He had no political experience, no apparent power ambitions, nor an independent power base in society, and he was, moreover, totally devoted to his boss. Playing the game of “the constitutional

president,” who “scrupulously applied the existing legal rules,” Putin planned to become a “legal” ruler who would remain in office longer than any of his foreign colleagues.^[51] Putin served as a prime minister under Yeltsin for almost five months, was subsequently president for more than eight years, remained prime minister for another four years, which already makes altogether twelve and a half years. During Medvedev’s presidency the presidential term for the next president was extended from four to six years. After his reelection on March 4, 2012, Putin had, therefore, theoretically the possibility of remaining at the apex of the Russian power system until 2024, which would make for a reign of almost a quarter of a century. This would bring the total time span of his reign close to that of an average Russian tsar (Alexander II, for instance reigned from 1855 to 1881 and Nicholas II from 1894 to 1917). It even comes close to the almost thirty years’ reign of Putin’s

admired geopolitical genius, Joseph Stalin.^[52]

NOTES

1. Quoted in Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 330.
2. "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Met with Members of the Sixth Valdai Discussion Club," *Ria Novosti* (September 19, 2009).
http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20090914/15611796print.html.
3. These were the Christian-Democratic Union, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Germany, the National-Democratic Party of Germany, and the Democratic Peasants Party of Germany.
4. Apart from the political parties, also representatives of communist mass organizations (youth and women's organizations, the communist trade union FDGB, etc.) were also on the National Front's list.
5. As a member of a delegation of the Dutch

Social-Democratic Party, I personally had the opportunity to visit, on June 14, 1981, a polling station at the Alexanderplatz in East-Berlin, during the elections of the *Volkskammer*, the parliament of the German Democratic Republic. I was able to observe how all voters were given the "National Front" ballot paper and deposited it straight into the ballot box. In a corner was a voting booth covered with white sheets, but nobody entered it. On my question to the director of the polling station why nobody went into the booth, he said that voters "were free to go in the booth, delete some names on the list or even invalidate it." When I said that entering the booth, "might, perhaps, attract some unwelcome attention," he went to a table and came back with a booklet. It was the constitution of the German Democratic Republic. He leafed through the booklet, then read aloud a paragraph that said that elections in the GDR were "free and secret." Next day the party paper *Neues*

Deutschland published the results under the heading “Great Victory for the National Front.” In total 99.86 percent of the electorate had voted for the National Front. East German citizens told me the next day that entering the voting booth and deleting names would diminish your chances of getting an apartment, a promotion, or a permit for traveling abroad. Not one of my interlocutors had, himself or herself, ventured into the booth.

6. Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 69–70.

7. United Russia was formed in April 2001 from a merger between the Unity Party of Russia and the Fatherland-All Russia Party, led by the mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov.

8. Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (London: Routledge, 2000), 187.

9. “Gorbachev alarm at Soviet echoes,” *BBC* (March 6, 2009).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7927920.str>

10. “A Just Russia” was originally a merger of three parties: *Rodina* (Fatherland Party), *Pensionery* (Pensioners’ Party), and *Zhizn* (Russian Party of Life, led by Sergey Mironov, chairman of the Federation Council, the Russian Upper House). The *Rodina* party, led by Dmitry Rogozin, was the most important of the three: it got 9 percent of the votes in the legislative elections of 2003. *Rodina* was barred from the elections for the Moscow City Duma in 2005 for inciting racial hatred after it had broadcasted ads with the slogan “clear our city of trash,” showing a group of Caucasian people littering a park with watermelon rinds. Its xenophobic tradition seems to have been taken over by its successor, A Just Russia, which was accused by SOVA-Center, a Russian NGO, of having three anti-Semites on its list of candidates for the State Duma. One of them, Yury Lopusov, a leader of the youth movement Pobeda, quoted Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in an interview published on the party’s website. (Cf. “Spravedlivaya

Rossiya' beret antisemitov, rogozintsev i lubiteley 'Mein Kampf,'" (A Just Russia is welcoming anti-Semites, Rogozin adepts and admirers of 'Mein Kampf'), *SOVA-Center* (September 24, 2007). <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/45A29F2/9DF6F26>. In 2006 Dmitry Rogozin resigned as party leader of Rodina. His appointment in January 2008 to the important post of ambassador to NATO was a sign of his excellent relationship with Putin.

11. The Gini coefficient, which measures the inequality in a country (0 = total equality and 1 = total inequality) was on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union 0.29. In 2006 it had risen to 0.41—which was above the average of the EU.

12. *The Moscow Times* (October 30, 2006).

13. Stuart D. Goldman, "Russia's 2008 Presidential Succession," *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 2.

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34392.pdf>.

14. Goldman, "Russia's 2008 Presidential Succession."
15. Anna Politkovskaya, *Putin's Russia* (London: The Harvill Press, 2004), 282–283.
16. Primakov, *Le monde sans la Russie? À quoi conduit la myopie politique?* 111. Primakov also criticized the fact that in the Federation Council "one could even find individuals with a criminal past or present."
17. Cf. Anatoly G. Vishnevsky, *Russkiy ili Prusskiy? Razmyshleniya perekhodnogo vremeni* (Moscow: Izdatelskiy dom GU VShE, 2005), 325: "The history of the emergence of the LDPR is surrounded by rumours according to which this party would be a creation of the KGB." Cf. also Dimitri K. Simes and Paul J. Saunders, "The Kremlin Begg to Differ," *The National Interest* no. 104 (November/December 2009), 42.
18. Owen Matthews, "Moscow's Phoney Liberal," *Newsweek* (February 26, 2010).
19. The party program can be found at <http://www.patriot-rus.ru/#partyProgramm>.

20. "Attacks of the Clones," *The Economist* (March 19, 2011).

21. Politkovskaya, *Putin's Russia*, 282.

22. Cf. Roland Oliphant, "Another Blow to Russian Democracy," *Russia Profile* (October 13, 2009). According to Oliphant, "VTsIOM's General Director Valery Fyodorov tried to anticipate the discrepancy in a press release, citing the experimental use of SMS technology and saying that such differences are 'normal,' because 'the goal of the exit poll is not to check the work of electoral commissions, but to capture the general trends of the vote and report them to the public as soon as possible.'" "That may be so," wrote Oliphant, "but a 20 percent margin of error is well beyond the generally accepted standard, as some commentators have already pointed out." In the exit polls the Communist Party got 17.7 percent, Yabloko got 13.6 percent, and A Just Russia 8.4 percent. The two last parties were above the 7 percent hurdle and should,

normally, have been represented in the city council. Cf. also “Oppozitsiya budet protestovat protiv itogov vyborov v Mosgordumu,” *Newsru.com* (October 16, 2009).

23. Oliphant, “Another Blow to Russian Democracy.”

24. Mikhail Tulsy, “Falsifikatsii: narusheniya i vbrosy v tsifrach i faktakh,” *Novoe Vremya* no. 37 (October 19, 2009).

25. “Mikhail Gorbachev: Na glazakh u vsekh vybory prevratili v nasmeshku nad ludmi,” *Novaya Gazeta* no. 116 (October 19, 2009).

26. “Regional Elections Go According to the Kremlin’s Script,” *RFE/RL Newsline* (October 12, 2009).

<http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1849659.h>

27. According to *Gazeta* these elections were no cleaner compared with those of October 2009. Pressure was exerted on state-sector workers. There was also manipulation of absentee voting and early voting. (Cf. Kynev, Aleksandr. “Preodolevaya Vertikal,” *Gazeta* (March 15,

2010).)

28. Julia Ioffe, "A Happy Defeat for the Kremlin," *Foreign Policy* (March 16, 2010).

29. Robert Coalson, "Victory in Defeat," *RFE/RL* (March 15, 2010).

30. There is a Russian joke that the only political alternation the country has known is between bald and not bald leaders. This is, indeed, striking, if one considers the following succession: tsar Nicholas II—Lenin (bald)—Stalin—Khrushchev (bald)—Brezhnev—Andropov (bald)—Chernenko—Gorbachev (bald)—Yeltsin—Putin (bald)—Medvedev—Putin (bald). As a matter of fact, *this* kind of alternation worked well over the last century.

31. It was the result of a Kremlin-inspired merger of three parties: the liberal Union of Right Forces, Civilian Power, and the Democratic Party of Russia.

32. Yekatarina Vinokurova, "Yo-Partiya: Mikhail Prokhorov gotov vozglavit 'Pravoe Delo,'" *Gazeta.ru* (May 16, 2011).

33. Maria-Luisa Tirmaste and Natalya Bashlykova, "Mikhailu Prokhorovu pora zanyatsya svoim delom," *Kommersant* (September 16, 2011).
34. Pavel K. Baev, "Moscow Dithers over New Scandal and Forgets the Old Tragedy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 171 (September 19, 2011).
35. Cf. "Rogozin's New Rodina Registered," *Moscow Times* (August 22, 2011).
36. Cf. Robert Coalson, "United Russia, Putin Prepare For National Elections," *RFE/RL* (May 12, 2011).
37. "Ignatov: Narodnoy front: modernizatsiya 'Yedinoy Rossii,'" *Yedinaya Rossiya ofitsialnyy sait partii* (May 10, 2011).
38. Andrey Kolesnikov, "Tea with Putin-2," *Novaya Gazeta* (May 12, 2011).
39. Cf. Ilya Kharlamov, "Court Refuses to Register Russia's PARNAS Party," *The Voice of Russia* (June 23, 2011).
40. Cf. Jadwiga Rogoza, "The Kremlin's New Political Project," *Eastweek*, Centre for Eastern

Studies (March 20, 2013).

41. "All-Russia People's Front Organising Committees to Be Created in All Regions by May 20," *Itar Tass* (May 6, 2013).

42. "Putin izbran liderom Fronta," *Interfaks* (June 12, 2013).

43. "Surkov and Prokhorov Spin Election," *Moscow Times* (December 7, 2011).

44. Julia Smirnova, "Wie Russlands patriotische Kosaken Moskau erobern," *Die Welt* (November 28, 2012).

45. "Medvedev Invites Opposition to Speak," *RIA Novosti* (March 27, 2013).

46. Cf. Aleksandra Samarina and Ivan Rodin, "Partiyno-politicheskiy modern," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (April 7, 2010).

47. Emilio Gentile, *Qu'est-ce que le fascisme? Histoire et interprétation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 41.

48. Renzo De Felice, *Brève histoire du fascisme* (Paris: Éditions Audibert, 2002), 46.

49. De Felice, *Brève histoire du fascisme*, 46.

50. Possibly different clans are behind the launch of different pro-Kremlin parties. According to Philip P. Pan, Dmitry Medvedev was behind the launch of *Pravoe Delo* (The Right Cause), on February 18, 2009. The core of this new party was formed by a former liberal opposition party, the Union of Right Forces, which had been convinced by Vladislav Surkov to transform itself in a pro-Kremlin party. Leonid Gozman, one of the leaders of The Right Cause, “said he considered the effort an attempt by Medvedev to build a base of support.” But he immediately added that “he saw no serious differences between Medvedev’s and Putin’s policies.” (Philip P. Pan, “Stepping Out From Putin’s Shadow,” *The Washington Post* (February 9, 2009).)

51. Roy Medvedev seemed to anticipate this scenario in a biography of Dmitry Medvedev. “[T]he power question in Russia has been resolved,” he wrote, “and not only for the next four years. One can say with certainty that this

question has also been resolved for the next twelve [years], and, maybe, even more.” (Cf. Roy Medvedev, *Dmitry Medvedev: Prezident Rossiyskoy Federatsii* (Moscow: Vremya, 2008), 5.) That President Dmitry Medvedev was ready to play a subservient role in his relationship with his future prime minister was evident in the words he spoke before being elected: “As the President said, I will work with the government, according to its wishes, like clockwork. I am a man . . . who worked with the President for 17 years” (ibid.). Medvedev was exactly the kind of president Prime Minister Putin needed.

52. This scenario was predicted by Mikhail Kasyanov, who served as Putin’s prime minister for almost four years until 2004, but has since fallen out with the leadership and now heads an opposition party. “I am convinced,” said Kasyanov in 2009, “that Putin will run in 2012 for two six-year terms.” “Putin’s bid,” he added, “[is] to become the longest-serving Kremlin

leader since Stalin.” (Conor Humphries, “Russian Ex-PM Says Putin Will Rule to 2024,” Reuters (September 25, 2009).)

Chapter 7

Preaching the Ultranationalist Gospel

The Transformation of “United Russia”

The Putinist “dynamic of change” expressed itself not only in the manipulation of the “pluralist” party system by the presidential administration. It was also at work *inside* the parties. This dynamic was characterized by the emergence of an ultranationalist and chauvinist ideology in the ruling party United Russia, as well as in the tolerated “opposition” parties. This development was especially unexpected in the case of the CPRF, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which considered itself as the successor to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.^[1]

THE ULTRANATIONALISM AND REVISIONISM

OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Immediately after its foundation, in February 1993, the party—while still clinging to the old communist symbols and keeping “leftist” demands in its program—took a chauvinist-nationalist course that was not much different from the Liberal-Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. In both cases the party labels were misleading. Like the Liberal-Democratic Party, which was *not* liberal and *not* democratic, the Communist Party was *not* communist. Outward-looking Communist internationalism had been replaced by inward-looking Russian chauvinism. Stephen D. Shenfield wrote that many observers declared that the “ideology dominant within what still goes under the name of the communist movement is no longer communist, but fascist or close to fascist. The most unequivocal of these observers go so far as to claim that ‘the CPRF is in effect a fascist party, both at the top and at the provincial grassroots’

... or that 'the CPRF has for a long time been following the ideas not of communism and socialism, but of national-socialism.'" [2] This opinion was confirmed by Dmitri Furman, an analyst of the Gorbachev Foundation, who wrote: "In the ideology of the largest party, the CPRF, fascistoid features are so salient that one has to be blind and deaf not to notice them." [3] In a report of the Moscow-based SOVA Center, the cooperation between the CPRF and the extreme right (and now forbidden) Movement Against Illegal Immigration, DPNI, has been amply documented. Aleksandr Belov, the leader of the DPNI, and one of the agitators of an anti-Caucasian pogrom in the Karelian town of Kondopoga in the summer 2006, was invited as a speaker by the CPRF. [4] On the list of the CPRF for the municipal elections in Moscow in 2008 were at least thirteen candidates who were members of extreme right organizations. [5]

Gennady Zyuganov, the general secretary

of the CPRF, no longer seems to be interested in the world revolution or in the realization of Marxism-Leninism. Like Zhirinovskiy, his sole interest has become the restoration of the former Soviet empire. Like the former Slavophiles he indulged in “Third Rome” fantasies. Moreover, could one imagine a general secretary of the former CPSU, opening his autobiography with the sentence: “I am Russian by blood and spirit and love my Native land”?^[6] Certainly not. Zyuganov, however, had no problem with this exaltation of his “Russian-ness.” Nicole J. Jackson, referring to Zyuganov’s “extreme nationalist discourse,” wrote:

Gennady Zyuganov promoted a form of national socialism which argued that the class struggle had been replaced by a clash of civilizations between Russia and the West which threatened Russia’s existence. This mix of ideas allowed Zyuganov to promote an alliance of communists and

nationalists, “the red-brown alliance,” which demanded that Russia be allowed to pursue its own unique path of development based upon spiritual values —although the content was mostly unspecified.^[7]

In fact, Zyuganov was not the first to replace the class struggle *inside* a country by the struggle *between* countries. It was done before him by Enrico Corradini, the cofounder of the Italian nationalist association ANI, which would merge with Mussolini’s movement in 1923. According to Corradini “have” and “have-not” nations competed for economic advantage in perpetual war. “This new imperialist theory did not only legitimate fascist wars of conquest, but offered an alternative to Marxist class theories.”^[8] At the same time the foreign policy objectives of the Communist Party were reduced to a mainly *negative* policy of systematically opposing the United States. The

United States was considered to represent the main global power that could obstruct the reestablishment of the former empire. That the latter had become the ultimate goal became clear from the 1995 election platform of the party, which called on the peoples of the “illegally disintegrated Soviet Union to recreate a single unified state in good will.”^[9] What is interesting here is the use of the expression “*illegally disintegrated Soviet Union.*”

Zhirinovskiy described the demise of the Soviet Union in similar words in his book *Last Push to the South*. It is an expression full of sinister consequences. If you consider the Belavezha Accords of December 8, 1991, in which Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine—the original three signatories of the Treaty of the Union of 1922—decided to dissolve the Soviet Union, to be illegal, this necessarily means that you consider all the subsequent treaties, signed by the Russian government with the new governments (e.g., on the delimitation of the frontiers), to be

null and void. Despite the reassuring use of the words “in good will,” it is clear that if one follows the logic inherent in the expression “*illegally* disintegrated Soviet Union,” the use of military means to reintegrate these territories would not be an act of aggression, as defined in the Charter of the United Nations, but a legal act of a central government to reintegrate rebellious provinces.

The dominant Kremlin party United Russia has treated both the Liberal-Democratic Party and the Communist Party as extremes on a *left-right scale* with United Russia in the middle. This had the benefit that it attributed to United Russia the role of a “center” party. It was, as so often in Russia, a pure question of *labeling*. The “liberal-democrats” and the “communists” share essentially the same ultranationalist ideology and form an extreme right bloc in the Duma. The most important difference between the two parties is a difference in style. Zyuganov is a gray party apparatchik who lacks the

personal charisma of Zhirinovskiy. He is also less outspoken and does not share Zhirinovskiy's more extreme positions concerning a Russian expansion into Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan.

“*UNKULTURAUFGSTIEG*”: THE SPREAD OF ULTRANATIONALIST IDEAS

In the first decade of the twenty-first century we can observe in Russia the spread of a new culture and the dissemination of new ideas in society. Sociologists usually describe this as a process of *Kultursenkung*, which means that “high” culture, starting in the elite, “trickles down” from the elite into the general population. However, such a *top-down* process does not seem to apply in this case. It is not so much elite culture, as rather *Unkultur*—a lack of (high) culture—that spreads in society. For this reason it is, perhaps, preferable to call this process *Unkulturaufstieg*: a *bottom-up* process in which nonculture spreads from the lower echelons of society to reach, ultimately, the

elite circles. An interesting historical example of such a process of *Unkulturaufstieg* (without calling it so) is given by Andreas Umland. It concerns the spread of anti-Semitism in pre-World War I Germany.^[10] Umland observed that the development of anti-Semitism in Germany was marked by a fundamental *discontinuity*.

At the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, the young German party system experienced a significant change by the descent of its most explicitly antisemitic components.^[11] [This was surprising, because] only a few years before, some seemingly vigorous ultra-nationalist parties, founded during the 1870s–1880s, had been on the rise, and, together with the increasingly antisemitic Conservative Party, won a majority in the 1893 *Reichstag* elections. Also, a multitude of antisemitic literature had been

circulating in Germany for more than two decades at this point.^[12] [Yet, this did not prevent the fact that] the electoral fortunes of the antisemitic parties, other than the Conservative Party, declined in the first decade of the 20th century.”^[13]

It could be said that this was good news. But was it? Apparently, it was *not*, because “the decline of the antisemitic parties was . . . not symptomatic of a decline in antisemitism, for these particular parties had already performed their historic role of moving antisemitism from the street and the beer hall’s *Stammtisch* into the electoral booth and the seat of parliament . . . The antisemitic parties had rendered themselves moot. They could quietly disappear, leaving the political terrain to more potent successors who were fit for the next upsurge in antisemitic expression and activity.”^[14] In fact, what Umland is describing here is a process of *Unkulturaufstieg*—the spread of uncivilized

ideas “from the street and the beer hall’s *Stammtisch* [table]” to society as a whole—including its higher echelons. Umland also observed an interesting parallel between the situation in Germany in the first decade of the last century and the situation in contemporary Russia. In the second half of the 1990s we could equally observe a generalized *rise* of illiberal trends and anti-Western opinions in the Russian population. However, at the same time, “those anti-liberal Russian parties that in the middle of the 1990s still had relative success at the elections (for instance the Communist Party or the Liberal-Democratic Party), despite these tendencies, could not improve their attractiveness for the electorate.”^[15] Umland rightly concluded that the German experience should be a warning against premature optimism concerning the state of affairs in Russia. As was the case in pre-World War I Germany, the present period in Russia is one in which chauvinist and ultranationalist ideas are

permeating society. This process of *Unkulturaufstieg* is especially visible in the United Russia party, a party that has put so much effort into presenting itself as a moderate “center” party.

PUTIN’S “STATE OF THE UNION”: TOUTING PATRIOTISM

In Russia the mixture of racist street hooliganism, the presence of fascist parties in the Duma, and the spread of fascist and ultranationalist ideas by a multitude of groups, websites, and blogs, have led to a generalized climate in which ultranationalist chauvinism has become acceptable. During Putin’s first presidential term the political elite still tried to distance itself from this overzealous ultranationalist fervor. Responsible for ruling the country, United Russia and the leadership presented themselves as democratic, pragmatic, and middle of the road: not left, not right, trying to keep a safe distance from the LDPR

and the CPRF, as well as from radical right wing groups. This neutral, pragmatic, technocratic attitude was, first of all, displayed by Putin himself. Marlène Laruelle, for instance, characterized Putin in this period as follows: “[T]he new president cast himself as a-ideological. He claimed to be working solely in accordance with technocratic objectives, necessary to promoting Russia’s stabilization and then revival.”^[16] The same assessment was made by two other analysts, who wrote: “On the whole, however, Putin—as a staff employee of state security who had spent his whole adult life working for the KGB under the ideological control of the Communist Party—had no ideology or political program of his own. He confined himself to general populist phrases. Back in 1999, at the beginning of his tenure as prime minister, he had given the following response to a question about his potential platform in the presidential race: ‘My main objective is to improve people’s lives. We will

work out a political platform later.”^[17]

However, was Putin really this a-ideological pragmatist he pretended to be? Another author wrote: “It seemed entirely natural when, asked at a town meeting ‘What do you love most?’ Putin instantly replied: ‘Russia.’”^[18] Russia? It might seem strange for a man saying he loved Russia more than his wife and daughters. On another occasion Putin declared that “Patriotism must become the unifying ideology of Russia,” adding that “patriotism will be vital, when we, citizens of Russia, can be proud of our country today.”^[19] Meeting with representatives of the youth movement *Nashi*, Putin said: “We need our civil society, but one that is permeated by patriotism, a concern for our country.”^[20] Are statements like these, that Russia needs a civil society “permeated with patriotism,” compatible with the image of the pragmatic technocrat that Putin so carefully cultivates? It is time to have a closer look at

Putin's deeper self.

A very interesting document in this context is Putin's programmatic declaration, published on the website of the Council of Ministers on December 29, 1999. At that time Putin still was Yeltsin's prime minister. The timing was important: two days later Yeltsin would appoint him to be his successor as acting president of the Russian Federation. At the time of publication the declaration had the status of a prime ministerial document presenting the government's program for the coming year. As such it would have been no more than a swan song. Yeltsin's prime ministers were, as a rule, short-lived. Even if Putin could have stayed on to the end, his career as prime minister would have ended anyway a few months later when the presidential election took place. Putin's appointment as acting president on December 31, 1999, changed everything fundamentally. The program he had presented was no longer

the program of an ephemeral government shortly before being dismissed. Suddenly it became the *State of the Union* of the young, new president of the Russian Federation. Maybe it was even more: the solemn declaration with which a new tsar accepts the throne of the empire. A comparison that is not as far-fetched as it might seem at first glance, because—as in the case of a royal heir—the throne was literally *offered* to Putin.

The title of Putin's programmatic declaration, "Russia on the Verge of the Millennium" (*Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii*), was up to the challenge.^[21] This text must be considered as one of the most elaborated pieces of the Putin ideology. Although Putin might wish to be seen as a cool, analytical pragmatist, for whom "ideology" smacked of old-fashioned prejudice, his declaration deserves a closer look. After having described Russia's economic woes, Putin wrote, under the heading "Lessons for Russia," "the problem is

not only economic. This problem is also political and, I am not afraid of this word, in a certain sense, ideological. To be more precise: ideal, spiritual, moral.”^[22] He then went on to develop, what he called, his “Russian Idea.” The core of this “Russian Idea” was *consensus*. “The fruitful creative work that our Fatherland [tellingly, Putin wrote fatherland with a capital F] needs so much, is not possible in a society that is permanently divided and internally isolated.”^[23] Putin denied that he wanted to return to the period after the October Revolution when consensus was created by “strong-arm methods.” He emphasized that “any consensus in our society can only be voluntary.” This consensus was vital, “because one of the main reasons behind our reforms proceeding so slowly and with difficulty, consists namely of the lack of civil consensus.”^[24] However, he continued, “I am against the reintroduction in Russia of an

official state ideology in any form.”^[25]

PUTIN’S “RUSSIAN IDEA”: STATE, STATE, AND MORE STATE

So, what should be done? Putin came up with three ingredients for the “Russian Idea” that were expected to promote this consensus: patriotism, “great power” status (*derzhavnost*), and a strong state (*gosudarstvennichestvo*). Regarding patriotism, he went on to explain,

[T]his is the feeling of pride in one’s Fatherland, its history and great events. It is the endeavour to make one’s country more beautiful, richer, more powerful, happier. If these feelings are free from national megalomania and imperial ambitions, there is nothing blameworthy, conservative, in them. It is the basis of the courage, the perseverance, the power of the people. If we have lost patriotism, and the national pride and dignity that go with

it, we lose ourselves as a people capable of great events. [26]

Although Putin paid lip service to democratic freedoms, he stated that the “universal principles of the market economy and democracy” should be “organically integrated with the realities of Russia,” because “every country, Russia included, is obliged to seek its own way of modernization.” To adapt the universal principles of democracy to “the realities of Russia” meant that Putin advocated a Russian *Sonderweg*, a “special course,” implying that these universal principles are in fact *not* universal, but in need to be adapted to the Russian situation. This, in essence, introduces the theory of “sovereign democracy” that some years later would be developed by Putin’s spin doctor Vladislav Surkov. This theory, therefore, was, perhaps, not so original: Surkov was only acting as *his master’s voice*.

Putin’s “Russian Idea” can be summarized

as follows: state power, the aggrandizement of state power, and pride of the citizens in this accumulating state power. The three pillars are: great power status for the state externally (*derzhavnost*), a strong state internally (*gosudarstvennichestvo*), and patriotism: the pride of the citizen in this external and internal state power. On the first element, Russia's great power status, a commentator wrote: "The undemocratic and even authoritarian nature of *derzhavnost* is self-evident. Foreign and security policy implication of this ideology has been so far the assertion of Russia's national interests which in many fields are considered to be conflicting with those of the West."^[27] On the necessity of a strong state internally, Putin wrote:

Russia will not soon, if ever, become a second edition of, let us say, the U.S.A. or England, where liberal values have a long historical tradition. In our country the

government, its institutions and structures, have always played an exclusively important role in the life of the country, the people. A strong government is for the Russian citizens not an anomaly, but, on the contrary, the source and the guarantee of order, the initiator and main force of any change. [28]

Putin's ideology, therefore, begins with the state and ends with the state. The ultimate goal of every Russian citizen should be the aggrandizement of state power and not the aggrandizement of his or her personal freedom and well-being. Putin's words remind us of the words of Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature John Steinbeck, who, after a visit to the Soviet Union, wrote:

It seems to us that one of the deepest divisions between the Russians and the Americans or British, is in their feeling

toward their governments. The Russians are taught, and trained, and encouraged to believe that their government is good, that every part of it is good, and that their job is to carry it forward, to back it up in all ways. On the other hand, the deep emotional feeling among Americans and British is that all government is somehow dangerous, that there should be as little government as possible, that any increase in the power of government is bad, and that existing government must be watched constantly, watched and criticized to keep it sharp and on its toes. [29]

NATIONAL REBIRTH AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

It is telling that Putin defined patriotism as the “endeavor to make one’s country more beautiful, richer, more powerful, happier”—as if *happiness* can be attributed to a country

instead of being the exclusive domain of the human individuals who inhabit it. It is a clear indication of the *personification* of the state by Putin, for whom the state is the ultimate value, an object of worship and veneration. By paying lip service to democracy he conceals the fact that his ideal of a strong state inevitably clashes with the democratic freedoms of the citizens. He expects Russian citizens not to hamper the expansion of state power by political dissension (e.g., by voting for political parties that propose an alternative to Putin's program). Instead they should remain unified and stand—as one bloc—behind the leader whose supreme task it is to enhance the power of the state, which is the incarnation of the mythical Fatherland (with a capital F). Therefore Putin continuously stresses the necessity of *consensus building*.

How important consensus and patriotism are for him is further clarified in the address read by him six months later on the occasion of the combined session of the Duma and the

Federation Council.^[30] In this text he stressed again “that the growth of society is unthinkable without consensus on common goals. And these goals are not only material. No less important are spiritual and moral goals. It is the patriotism, which is characteristic for our people, the cultural traditions, common historical memory, which strengthen the unity of Russia.”^[31] In Putin’s exaltation of a strong state and in his emphasis on national consensus building we find a striking resemblance with Mussolini’s Italy. Like Putin, Mussolini wanted to overcome the internal divisions in the population and to build a national consensus around himself, Il Duce, who was the incarnation of a unified people. Only in this way did he think he would be able to build a strong, militarized, and centralized Italian state. It led in Italy to the suppression of political parties, the abolition of the free press, the persecution of political adversaries, and the introduction of a one-party state.

Apart from this emphasis on consensus building and the exaltation of state power, there is, furthermore, a third ingredient in Putin's text that reminds one of Mussolini's Italy. Two days before his appointment to acting president, Putin said: "Today we find the key for a *rebirth and resurrection of Russia* in the sphere of government and politics. Russia needs a strong and powerful government and must have this."^[32] In his address six months later, he spoke of "a new Russia" and "the beginning of a new spiritual elevation."^[33] Here we clearly recognize the *palingenetic* ingredient of a theory of *national rebirth*, which, according to Roger Griffin, is a fundamental element of fascist ideologies.^[34] Curiously enough one can observe a parallel between the positions not only of Putin and Mussolini, but also of Putin and Stalin. According to Aleksandr Yeliseev, "It must be said that neither socialism, nor even the state were in themselves values for him

[Stalin]. The leader of the USSR considered them instruments necessary to guarantee what was most important—national independence. . . . Socialism, in Stalin’s thinking, had to overcome the class divisions inside the nation and make her monolithic and unified in face of all possible foreign challenges.”^[35] It is easy to recognize here Putin’s *derzhavnost* (great power status) and his stress on internal consensus. In the concept of “sovereign democracy” we find the same emphasis on national independence.

UNITED RUSSIA’S ELECTORAL SUCCESS: A CPSU EFFECT?

In 2004 United Russia, the “Presidential Party,” had only one task: to reassure the reelection of Putin as president. Although it was the Presidential Party, Putin was not a member. It was a huge bureaucratic apparatus in the service of the president. The party soon became a victim of its own success. After Putin’s

reelection in 2004 there was a great influx of new members—especially from amongst bureaucrats, civil servants, and regional leaders, who rallied to “the party of power”—just as they had done before, in Soviet times, when they adhered to the CPSU (though at that time the CPSU was the only choice). This “CPSU effect” had three consequences:

- First, a majority of the new members was less driven by ideological considerations than by career prospects.
- Second, the new mass basis made the party ideologically still more nebulous and colorless than it already was. [\[36\]](#)
- Third, the influx of new members brought into the party people with different ideas and ideological backgrounds, which soon led to a pressure for the formation of “party wings.” These problems became more acute in 2008, when Medvedev succeeded Putin as

president and Putin became prime minister. From that moment it was in Putin's interest to change the "President's Party" into "the Prime Minister's Party" or better, into "Putin's Party" *tout court*.

In November 2007, some months before the presidential elections of 2008, Putin began to criticize the party. He said: "Does it [United Russia] look like the ideal political structure? Of course not. There is still no established ideology, principles for which the overwhelming majority of the members of this party would be prepared to fight and to accept its authority."^[37] He added that "it is close to the state. And, as a rule, all kinds of criminals try to infiltrate into such structures The goal of these people is not the welfare of the people, but their personal enrichment. And, of course, by such actions, they compromise the state and the party."^[38] Putin formulated here two new objectives: first, the need for United Russia to

develop its own ideology, and, second, the need to purge the party of unwanted, “criminal” elements. Shortly thereafter, on April 15, 2008, Putin accepted the position of chairman of United Russia. In 2010, however, the announced purge was still waiting to be implemented. The party membership had not diminished, but had grown from 1,980 million in April 2008 to 2,026 million in May 2010. United Russia had become a huge bureaucratic organization with 2,598 local divisions, employing 40,000 employees.^[39] It was clearly on the way to becoming a clone of the Soviet-era CPSU. However, the other goal formulated by Putin in 2007: giving United Russia an ideology, was in full implementation. Marlène Laruelle wrote that

a new wave of Russian nationalism has been emerging that broadly exceeds the influence of older strains of nationalism, whether founded on Slavophilism, Soviet

nostalgia, or Eurasianist theories^[40]
Western observers and political scientists have a tendency to reserve the label “nationalist” only for small extremist groups or political parties, such as Gennady Ziuganov’s Communist Party and Vladimir Zhirinovski’s LDPR. It prevents them from taking stock of the existence of an ideological continuum that encompasses the entire Russian political spectrum. Indeed . . . the presidential party United Russia is itself thoroughly permeated with ideological debates about the nature of the country’s national identity. Owing to its ability to co-opt doctrinaires, to finance them, and to broadcast their messages to media and public opinion, it has even become one of the major actors of the nationalist narrative.^[41]

United Russia, far from distancing itself

from the ultranationalist discourses of Zhirinovskiy's LDPR and Zyuganov's Communist Party, had begun to develop its own version of a "patriotic" ideology. This "ideologization process" had three characteristics:

1. It was related to the formation of "wings" in the party.
2. It was led by the Kremlin.
3. It was not restricted to pure party politics, but embedded in a broader "Gramscian" strategy of securing an overall ideological "hegemony" in Russia.

THE BEAR WANTS TO FLY: HOW UNITED RUSSIA GOT DIFFERENT PARTY WINGS

In 2005 a debate had already started inside United Russia over the possibility of organizing different ideological currents inside the party. The initiative for this was taken by Vladimir Pligin, president of the Constitutional Legislation Committee of the Duma. Pligin

published a text, cosigned by some thirty colleagues, in which they asked for ideological platforms in the party. The party leadership, however, was not in favor of this initiative. Boris Gryzlov, speaker of the Duma and party leader, was categorically against. He declared “that there will be no organizationally formalized platforms or wings in United Russia. Discussion is not only natural and necessary . . . but discussion must not be to the detriment of party discipline.”^[42] And he added: “We cannot and have not the right to divide ourselves into right and left.”^[43] Gryzlov was acting in line with an established Soviet tradition of “democratic centralism.” He reminded his audience that already “Lenin sternly warned about the adverse effects of factionalism.”^[44] Gryzlov went on to repeat the official party ideology, which was, according to him, located in the center. It was “social conservatism,” which intended “to maintain order, social

stability, [and] unconditional defense by the government of legally acquired property.” This “social conservatism,” he went on, “was broader than any political current, because one can find elements of it in the traditional left and right.”^[45] An ideology that finds its elements “in the traditional left and right” is necessarily centrist. In 2005, when Gryzlov wrote these lines, order and status quo were, indeed, still the most important objectives of the regime. This conservatism was logical for a party in power. Would it be enough, however, to stay ahead when competing against the parties and movements that were propagating a passionate brand of patriotism and were animated by great-Russian chauvinism and ultranationalist fervor? Konstantin Kosachev, a Duma member of United Russia, dared to challenge Gryzlov in an article titled “Why Would a Bear Need Wings?” Kosachev wrote: “What some hastened to call ‘wings’— something that, as party leader Boris Gryzlov

said, a bear, which is the party's symbol, hardly needs—should be more aptly seen as working groups . . . and not something generating internal conflict within the party.”^[46] Kosachev won, because Gryzlov's initial negative response could not prevent discussion groups being set up before long within United Russia.

One of these was the Center for Social and Conservative Policy. In 2007 this faction started the Russian Project, led by the popular TV presenter Ivan Demidov and Andrey Isaev, a Duma deputy. The project initiated a discussion on the Russian nation, national identity, and “Russianness” (*Russkost*). Thereupon the Kremlin decided that the time was ripe for ideological discussions in the party and in April 2008 United Russia formalized the authorization for clubs to be created, on the condition that they did not develop into factions. A Political Clubs Charter was signed by three clubs: the Center for Social and Conservative Policy, the Club of 4 November,

and the State Patriotic Club. These three clubs were seen as expressing the new pluriformity in the party. The Club of 4 November—connected with (nonstate) business circles—was considered to represent the “liberal” wing, whereas the State Patriotic Club was more right-wing. The Center for Social Conservative Policy, supported by Gryzlov, took a middle position. But it soon became clear that despite these different labels the differences between the party clubs were only marginal and they all shared the party’s new ideology: ultranationalism (called patriotism). This did not mean that the old ideology centered on the keywords of “status quo” and “order” had been abandoned. These objectives were still present, but they were repackaged and recycled into a more marketable product of national *grandeur*, great power status, historical pride, and imperial ambition.

UNITED RUSSIA’S NEW ULTRANATIONALIST

COURSE

This new ultranationalist course adopted by the leading political party was a consequence of the generalized spread of chauvinist ideas in Russian society that had been prepared by the activities of a multitude of extreme right organizations. The political elite's pursuit of electoral success led to their embracing the prevailing mood of society. The political scientist Vladimir Pribylovsky, director of the critical Moscow-based center for social research Panorama, interpreted the metamorphosis of United Russia as follows:

A segment of the voters in Russia will turn or may turn to parties that do not support the president and the present policy. They are talking particularly about the nationalists. The proportion of the electorate who are receptive to nationalist ideas is, according to some estimates,

some 30–40%. That is a significant part of the electorate, and a section of these people votes for the pro-presidential parties, but a section does not vote or votes for the opposition. In the following six months we will see attempts by the party in power to flirt with nationalist and even xenophobic tendencies in society.^[47]

According to another source the stakes could be even higher. Leonty Vyzov, director of the state sponsored social-political research center VTsIOM, said: “Sociologists divide the nationalists into ‘soft’ ones, who limit their existing hatred to migrants, and ‘hard’ ones, worshippers of the slogan ‘Russia for the Russians,’ who are ready to express their views in public.” “The first . . . makes up 40–45 % of the total number of citizens, the second about 10%.”^[48] This meant that, according to these estimates, in early 2007 ultranationalist feelings were prevalent in a *majority* of the Russian

population.

But this adaptation of United Russia to the prevalent ultranationalist mood was not the result only of (electoral) pressure from below. We have seen that as early as 1999 Putin himself was a convinced protagonist of giving patriotism a central place in the new Russian ideology. The decision, taken on electoral grounds, to choose a more nationalistic course *coincided* with a strategy on the part of the presidential administration to *ideologize* United Russia. The Kremlin was the cockpit of this change: the captain on board was Vladimir Putin, and his copilots were Vladislav Surkov, the deputy director of the presidential administration, and Aleksey Chesnakov, the deputy director of the Department of Domestic Policy of the presidential administration. Another factor implicating the Kremlin's central role was the fact that Ivan Demidov, who introduced the new nationalism in United Russia through his Russian Project and who was

called by the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, “the incubator of patriotism,”^[49] was in 2009 appointed director of the Department of Human Policy and Social Relations of the presidential administration.

This Kremlin-led policy to make United Russia into *the* nationalist party of Russia—leaving the other nationalist parties far behind—was a great success. With hindsight this transformation from a conservative law-and-order party into a nationalist party did not even need to be imposed from the top, because all the new clubs within the party, irrespective of whether they labeled themselves left, right, or center, indulged in the newly embraced patriotism. The so called liberal-conservatives, for instance, were organized within the Club of 4 November (*Klub 4 Noyabrya*). The name of this club was in itself revealing: it referred to November 4, a date that (in 2004) was made by decree into People’s Unity Day, a new national holiday on which Russia’s victory in 1612 over

the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was celebrated (the choice of this day was not really appreciated by the Poles). The club's manifesto included the statement that "the real sovereignty of Russia is today, by far, the most important problem"^[50] and that "patriotism is one of the most important values of Russian society."^[51]

RUSSIA'S FRONTIERS "ARE NOT ETERNAL"

The second club, the *social-conservatives*, openly expressed the nostalgia of its members for the former Soviet Union. In their manifesto they wrote: "We all grew up in the USSR and consider the dissolution of that government a tragedy for all its peoples. We should not consider the current frontiers of our state to be eternal. We are ready to pursue any unification of states on the former territory of the Union, and even beyond its frontiers. However, from this it follows that our readiness to reach out to

peoples who want to unite with Russia, is matched by a readiness to risk a relatively peaceful life or the present level of wealth. Of course, the more prosperous Russia becomes, the sooner neighbors will reach out to her.”^[52] The fact that in the manifesto the present frontiers between Russia and her neighbors are not considered to be eternal, written in a program of the dominant group within Russia’s governing party, is in itself a cause for concern. Even more so, when it goes on to propose that a (re-)unification with the neighboring peoples on the former territory of the Soviet Union and “even beyond its frontiers” would require of the Russian citizens “the readiness to risk a relatively peaceful life.” It echoed openly the dangerous revisionism of the Liberal-Democratic Party and the Communist Party.

RUSSIA’S REBIRTH

Imperial ambition and ultranationalist fervor

were even more prominent in the third club, the State Patriotic Club (*Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskiy Klub*), which began its political declaration with the quote: “The state is not located ‘out there,’ outside of us, it lives in us, in the form of ourselves.”^[53] Having thus defined the state as a quasi-biological ingredient of every single Russian citizen, as essential for the individual’s survival as his liver, stomach, and lungs, it might appear impossible to construct any opposition of interests between the state and the individual, as is the case in Western liberal political philosophies. This is also considered unnecessary, because patriotism is the glue that binds the citizen and the government together. “One of the most important tasks of the politics of the majority party,” one could read, “must be the permanent strengthening of the mutual link between the state patriotism (*gosudarstvennicheskiy patriotizm*) of our people and the government’s policy for the people, for

its interests and national dignity.”^[54] The club declared itself in favor of a “military-patriotic education” and wanted to promote “the propaganda of historical examples of military courage and heroism by the people in defense of the Fatherland.” It equally wanted “to strengthen the prestige of the military service” and was in favor of the adaptation of history books in schools, “with the purpose of providing a fuller and more precise account of events in the history of the Fatherland,” adding that “one of the most important objectives is to work with the young generation.”

The promotion of martial virtues and patriotism, it continued, should lead to a “rebirth of Russian state power” (*vozhrozhdenie rossiyskoy derzhavy*). The members of the State Patriotic Club, like the social conservatives, do not hide their neoimperialist ambitions. The declaration spoke about “the historical unity of the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and other brother republics” and

stressed the fact that “our peoples are bound by many millions of ties: family and kinship ties, friendship bonds, business contacts, creative relationships. Not to mention a shared language, culture, shared holidays and symbols. For precisely these reasons any attempts to draw frontiers not only on the map, but also in society, to split not just property, but a historical heritage, is considered by all of us a tragedy and a great injustice.” The declaration continued: “Today it is Russia in particular that is the most committed guarantor of real sovereignty and democracy for the countries of the CIS, the real defender against external interference and economic crises.”^[55] It remains to be seen, however, if all CIS members would agree with the statement that Russia is the guarantor of their “real sovereignty” and “democracy.”

This ultranationalist chauvinism of the party in power, however, does not appear in

the official discourse of the Kremlin and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Laruelle remarked: “So, notably, even the institutions most attached to the state apparatus can propound discourses that are regarded as relatively radical in their conceptions of national identity, and that do not correspond to the official state narrative.”^[56] This discrepancy, far from being a reassurance, is rather a reason for concern. Aleksandr Dugin, the founder of Russia’s Eurasian Movement, had already advised the Russian leaders to play a *double game*: “The authorities will actively and on a large scale play a double game, outwardly continuing the declaration of adherence to ‘democratic values,’ but inwardly restoring little by little the base for the global autarchy.”^[57] We may conclude that the “dynamic of change” that has taken place in United Russia during the first twelve years of Putin’s reign has moved the party farther away from its supposed center position in the

direction of chauvinist ultranationalism and revisionism.

NOTES

1. Almost until the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia (then called RSFSR), unlike the other fourteen Soviet republics, did not have its own Communist Party, but fell directly under the CPSU. It was only in June 1990 that on the initiative of conservative circles inside the CPSU, a Communist Party of Russia was constituted. After the 1991 August putsch this party was banned, together with the CPSU and the local parties in the other republics. The party was refounded in February 1993 under the name Communist Party of the Russian Federation. (Cf. A. Shlyapuzhnikov and A. Yolkin, *Est takie partii: putevoditel izbiratelya* (Moscow: Panorama, 2008), 67–68.)

2. Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Tradition, Tendencies, Movements* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001), 51.

3. Quoted in Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, 51.
4. Cf. Aleksandr Verkhovsky and Galina Kozhevnikova, *Radikalnyy russskiy natsionalizm: struktury, idei, litsa* (Moscow: SOVA, 2009), 25.
5. Cf. "Ksenofobnye kandidaty KPRF na Moskovskikh munitsipalnykh vyborakh," SOVA (February 22, 2008). <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/29481C8/AA109CD>.
6. Gennady Zyuganov, *My Russia: The Political Autobiography of Gennady Zyuganov* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 3.
7. Nicole J. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions* (London: Routledge, 2003), 40.
8. Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 126.
9. CPRF Platform in *Election Platform of Political Parties Participating in the Elections for State Duma, Moscow*, International Republican Institute, (December 6, 1995), 44. (Quoted in Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS*, 41.)

10. Cf. Andreas Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society? Contextualizing the Recent Decline of Extremely Right-Wing Parties in Russia," WCFIA Working Paper 02–03 (Boston: Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2002).

<http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/sites/default/file:>

Cf. also Andreas Umland, "Rechtsextremes Engagement jenseits von Parteien: Vorkriegsdeutschland und Russland im Vergleich," *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen*, Heft 4 (December 2008), 63–66.

11. Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society?" 10.

12. Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society?" 10.

13. Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society?" 10–11.

14. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 76.

15. Andreas Umland, "Rechtsextremes Engagement jenseits von Parteien," 65.

16. Marlène Laruelle, "Inside and Around the

Kremlin's Black Box: The New Nationalist Think Tanks in Russia," Stockholm Paper (Stockholm: Institute for Security & Development Policy, 2009), 19.

17. Yuri Felshtinsky and Vladimir Pribylovsky, *The Corporation: Russia and the KGB in the Age of Putin* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008), 153. The authors added: "Then, in 2001, in response to a question about how he envisioned the Russia of 2010, he said: 'We will be happy.' If by 'we' Putin meant the people who would be in power in Russia, then he was telling the truth."

18. Gregory L. Freeze, *Russia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 494.

19. "Putin: Ideologiy v Rossii dolzhen stat patriotism," *Gazeta* (July 17, 2003).

20. "Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin: Nam nuzhno grazhdanskoe obshchestvo, pronizannoe patriotizmom."

<http://www.lawmix.ru/content.php?id=182>.

21. Putin, Vladimir. "Rossiya na rubezhe

tysyacheletii,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (December 30, 1999). <http://www.ng.ru/printed/3681>.

22. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 5.

23. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 5.

24. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 6.

25. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 5.

26. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 6.

27. Sergei Medvedev, “The Role of International Regimes in Promoting Democratic Institutions: The Case of NATO and Russia,” *NATO Research Fellowships 1994–1996* (Brussels: NATO, 1996).

<http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/94-96/medvedev/02.htm>.

28. Putin, “Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii,” 6.

29. John Steinbeck, *A Russian Journal*, with photographs by Robert Capa (London: Penguin, 2000), 26. Steinbeck’s *Journal* is a record of a forty-day trip to the Soviet Union between July 31 and mid-September 1947.

30. Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii” (July 8, 2000). <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/07/>

31. Putin, "Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii," 4.
32. Putin, "Rossiya na rubezhe tysyacheletii," 7.
33. Putin, "Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii," 4.
34. Roger Griffin, wanting to define the essence of fascist systems, came up with the following definition of the "fascist minimum": "Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythical core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism." Ideas of national *rebirth* (palingenesis) were, according to him, essential for fascist movements. (Cf. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26. See also Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia*, Part II: The Specter of a Fascist Russia (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).)
35. Aleksandr Yeliseev, "Slavyanofil v Kremle," *Politicheskiy Klass* 12, no. 60 (December 2009),

69–70.

36. The members were not the only ones who were “gray.” Yury Luzhkov, the former mayor of Moscow and himself one of the founders of United Russia, said in an interview, “the leaders of that party are weak and gray in terms of their potential—organizationally, intellectually, and so on. . . . [Duma speaker] Boris Gryzlov, as the boss of the party—not the leader, but the boss—is a gray personality, a person who has always been a servant and who is incapable of having an independent position.” (Cf. “Moscow’s Bitter Ex-Boss Luzhkov Lashes Out at Kremlin, Calls United Russia ‘Shameful,’” *RFE/RL* (October 22, 2011).)

37. Vladimir Putin, “Zachem ya vozglavil spisok ‘Edinoy Rossii’” (November 13, 2007).

<http://www.kreml.org/media/165463628?mode=print>.

38. Putin, “Zachem ya vozglavil spisok ‘Edinoy Rossii.’”

39. Cf. Paul Goble, “United Russia Party Now

- has 40,000 Apparatchiks, Moscow Analyst Says,” *Window on Russia* (May 10, 2010).
40. Laruelle, “Inside and Around the Kremlin’s Black Box,” 5.
41. Laruelle, “Inside and Around the Kremlin’s Black Box,” 7
42. “Boris Gryzlov: u ‘Edinoy Rossii krylev ne budet,’” *Russkaya Liniya* (April, 23, 2005).
43. “Boris Gryzlov: u ‘Edinoy Rossii krylev ne budet.’”
44. Robert Service, *The Penguin History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Penguin, 2009), 127.
45. “Boris Gryzlov: u ‘Edinoy Rossii krylev ne budet.’”
46. Konstantin Kosachev, “Why Would a Bear Need Wings?” *Russia in Global Affairs* (June 20, 2005).
47. Quoted in Pavel Zakharov, “Yedinaya Rossiya sozdaet Russkiy proekt,” *KM.RU* (February 5, 2007).
48. “Yedinoruskiy proekt,” *Obshchaya Gazeta.ru*

(February 5, 2007).

49. Aleksandra Samarina, Natalia Kostenko, and Ivan Rodin, "Yedinaya Rossiya razdelitsya na techeniya," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (November 2, 2007).

50. Konstantin Remchukov, "Liberalno-konservativnoe videnie budushchego Rossii," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (November 18, 2005).

51. Remchukov, "Liberalno-konservativnoe videnie budushchego Rossii."

52. Lev Sigal, "Predlozheniya k platforme rossiyskogo sotsialnogo konservatizma," *Tsentralno-sotsialno-konservativnoy politiki*.

<http://www.cscp.ru/about/manifest/41/>.

53. "Politicheskaya Deklaratsiya Gosudarstvenno-Patrioticheskiiy Klub Vserossiyskoy politicheskoy partii 'Edinaya Rossiya,'" 1.

http://www.gpclub.ru/news/0x1x2_p.html.

54. "Politicheskaya Deklaratsiya Gosudarstvenno-Patrioticheskiiy Klub," 2.

55. "Politicheskaya Deklaratsiya

Gosudarstvenno-Patrioticheskiy Klub,” 4.

56. Laruelle, “Inside and Around the Kremlin’s Black Box,” 58.

57. Aleksandr Dugin, “The Post-Liberal Era in Russia.” <http://arctogaia.com/public/eng/>.

Chapter 8

The Nashi

Fascist Blackshirts or a New Komsomol?

The objective of Putin's internal war was to avoid a democratic alternation of power. This meant that he would not allow nonsystemic opposition parties to develop. These were simply denied official registration. The systemic opposition parties, such as the Communist Party and the Liberal-Democratic Party, were allowed to participate in the elections on the (unwritten) condition that they mounted no real opposition and supported the government in parliament. Other potential independent power centers, such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an oligarch who threatened to become Putin's political rival, were removed and jailed. At the same time an ideological offensive was initiated in which the values of the regime were

emphasized. These were a strong state, ultranationalism, and the “rebirth” of Russia. The undivided support of the population for these values became, in effect, a value in itself in the much touted objective of national consensus. In the Soviet Union the communist youth organization Komsomol had been an important vehicle for spreading communist ideas. In Putin’s Russia, however, such a government-sponsored organization was lacking. Putin knew how important it was to inculcate the values of a regime in the younger generation. Founding the Kremlin’s own youth organization would, therefore, soon become one of his priorities.

“WALKING TOGETHER”: SKINHEADS TO DEFEND THE KREMLIN’S MESSAGE

On July 14, 2000, only four months after Putin had been elected president, a youth organization was registered at the Ministry of the Interior with the name *Idushchie Vmeste*

(Walking Together). The president of this new movement was a young man, Vasily Yakemenko, who worked in Putin's presidential administration as chief of the department for relations with civil organizations. Yakemenko's boss was Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the presidential administration.^[1] Walking Together planned to have 200,000 to 250,000 members and to be represented in Russia's largest cities. The organization had the structure of a pyramid: each new member was obliged to bring five new members with him or her over whom he or she became "commander." Becoming a member was made very attractive: students from outside Moscow were offered free travel to the capital. Also free tickets for the movies and for swimming pools were made available, as well as free access to sports centers and the Internet. The movement had its own travel agency with extremely low prices. According to Sergey Shargunov of the *Novaya Gazeta*, in the first two years there were

“many links between this pro-Presidential youth organization and skinheads. In the first place, leaders of skinhead groups were officials in the movement, bringing their ‘troops’ into action at different events. In the second place, in the movement ‘Walking Together’ there were elements of the skinhead subculture, such as high laced boots and the outstretched arm salute.”^[2] The core of the group consisted of the “Gallant Steeds” football gang, supporters of the Moscow football club CSKA, which was headed by Aleksey Mitryushin, the bodyguard of Vasily Yakemenko. Anna Politkovskaya wrote:

There suddenly appear groups called “Marching Together,” or “Singing Together” or “For Stability” or some other latter-day version of the Soviet Union’s Pioneer Movement. A distinctive feature of these pro-Putin quasi-political movements is the amazing speed with which, without any of the usual bureaucratic prevarication, they

are legally registered by the Ministry of Justice, which is usually very chary of attempts to create anything remotely political.^[3]

Walking Together achieved its first great publicity success with an attack on the writer Vladimir Sorokin, whom they accused of pornography because of an ironic description of a sexual encounter between Stalin and Khrushchev in his novel *Blue Fat*. In the center of Moscow members of the group tore up books by Sorokin, which were thrown into a huge papier-mâché toilet bowl that they had installed on a sidewalk. A member of the movement brought a case against the author, which was taken over by the prosecutor's office. The publicist Fedor Yermolov wrote: "The first image that springs to mind is the destruction of 'dangerous' books by fascists in the 1930s."^[4] He added that there were "deeper roots to the Sorokin scandal. The need to create a new state

ideology means that the ruling classes are faced with the task of defining the extent and the possible ways in which individual key figures of Russian culture can influence the public consciousness. In this respect, what is happening to Sorokin may be seen as a sounding of public opinion, a test of society's reaction to the encroachment of ideology into the cultural process.”^[5] Vasily Yakemenko, the leader of Walking Together, told Radio Ekho Moskvyy that the case was “a first sign of the regeneration of our society” and “a sign that the era of the marginal characters, who use filthy language to describe all kinds of perversions . . . is coming to an end.”^[6]

FOUNDING THE NASHI: A KREMLIN INITIATIVE

When, in the autumn of 2004, in neighboring Ukraine the Orange Revolution took place, this event fundamentally changed the way in which

the Kremlin viewed the role of its youth organization. It was no longer perceived as a presidential fan club, but was to become the Kremlin's bulwark against a color revolution in Russia. This meant, first, that the movement had to become more combative. Second, that, instead of concentrating on moral issues, it should focus more on geopolitical issues. And, third, that it should attack not only internal foes, but also foreign enemies, suspected of supporting opposition groups in Russia. On February 17, 2005—three weeks after the inauguration of Viktor Yushchenko as Ukraine's new "orange" president—Vladislav Surkov met in secret with thirty-five to forty young people in St. Petersburg. The meeting was arranged by Vasily Yakemenko, founder of Walking Together. The goal of the meeting was to set up a new youth organization that would get the name *Nashi* (literally "Ours," but its connotation is something like "Our Guys," making a clear distinction between "us" and "them"—the

outsiders, enemies, and foreigners).^[7] Putin's new militants were conceived as a defense against organized opposition groups, such as *Kmara* in Georgia and *Pora* in Ukraine, that were at the forefront of the popular color revolutions in these countries. These grassroots organizations, fighting for democracy, individual freedom, and respect for human rights, based their actions on nonviolent strategies, such as were described by Gene Sharp in his influential book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*.^[8] The *Nashi* movement was the total *opposite* of these movements. Instead of a spontaneous organization that had its roots in civil society, it was a top-down initiative, conceived down to the smallest detail within the Kremlin walls. Its objective was not to foster democracy, but to support a nondemocratic, autocratic power elite. The new organization received generous funding, not only from the Kremlin, but also from the Kremlin-related company Gazprom.^[9]

In her diary Anna Politkovskaya commented on the Nashi:

The authorities rely on criminal elements to prop up the system of state power. That this really is their doctrine recently received further confirmation when the Presidential Administration created a clone It is called Nashi The stormtroopers of the Nashi youth movement are football hooligans armed with knuckle-dusters and chains They have two units, one consisting of thugs who support the Central Sports Club of the Army football team, and the other of thugs who support the Spartak team. They all have an impeccable record in street fighting.^[10]

Nashi founder Yakemenko openly advocated recruiting skinheads, such as the Spartak fans, who called themselves “The

Gladiators” and wore tattoos of a gladiator with a spear. In a Nashi conference in 2005, he told his audience: “Skinheads—they are the same people as you Skinheads sincerely believe [that] they are patriots of Russia.”^[11] By 2009 the Nashi movement had grown into a nationwide organization with between 100,000 and 120,000 members. It was established in fifty-two towns and had a hard core of 10,000 activists. The members wore red jackets, waved Nashi flags (a diagonal white cross on a red background—mixing tsarist and Soviet symbols), and had their own buses to transport them to their demonstrations. In a country where opposition rallies and demonstrations are systematically forbidden the Nashi could demonstrate at any place and any time with the full cooperation of the police. The organization was drenched in Soviet-era nostalgia. Not only were the group leaders called “commissar”—as in old Soviet times—but also the official website, www.nashi.su, instead of having the

usual country code '.ru', ends with .su (from Soviet Union). As in the case of Walking Together, idealistic motives were not enough to inspire potential members to adhere. Therefore, visitors to the Nashi website were lured with promises "of becoming a new intellectual elite." They were offered interesting study schemes ("Do you deserve to have higher education from the country's best university teachers?"), as well as tempting career possibilities ("Nashi people are already in parliament, in the administration, in the strongest Russian companies").^[12] Aspiring members could choose between different sections, such as "Patriotism," "Ideology," and "Information." Members of the Patriotism section had the task "to disseminate propaganda under the young generation based on the big victories of the Russian people," and "to create models of patriotic education . . . based on the principles of sovereign democracy." They also participated in "patriotic

war games.”

Officially the movement presented itself as anti-fascist. It even had an “Anti-Fa” (anti-fascism) section. The main task of this section was not so much to defend migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia against racist and xenophobic attacks by hooligans and skinheads, but to be vigilant for any criticism of the official version of the history of the Great Patriotic War or any attempt to besmirch the honor of war veterans. On the Nashi website the “Ideology” section introduced itself with the words that “no government on earth can live without a concept of the state.” In Russia, the text continued, this is “the concept of sovereign democracy,” an idea that “must be spread among as many people as possible.”

Everywhere in these texts the inspiration and, possibly, even the hand of Vladislav Surkov was recognizable. Surkov is generally regarded as the godfather of the Nashi. He is a popular speaker at Nashi meetings. In September 2009

he credited Nashi with having helped persuade Obama to scrap the missile defense plans in Eastern Europe. “You are the leading combat detachment in our political system,” he told the activists. “Dominance on the street is also a necessary advantage for us, an advantage that we have thanks to you, thanks to all those who are so brilliant at staging mass actions.”^[13] Was it mere a coincidence that the title “combat detachment,” given by Surkov to his new Nashi troops, had a worrying resemblance to the *fasci di combattimento*, Mussolini’s combat squads?

“PATRIOTIC TRAINING” IN NASHI SUMMER CAMPS

Every year, in July, the Nashi movement organizes a two-week summer camp in a pine wood near Lake Seliger, a popular holiday resort three hundred miles north of Moscow. Everything is done to make the camp attractive to young people: transport, food, and lodging

are free. In 2006 there were five thousand participants; in 2007 this number had doubled to ten thousand. The camps mixed adventure with agitprop. In 2007 paintings were exhibited of internal and external foes of Russia, such as opposition leader Garry Kasparov, clad as a prostitute,^[14] and the foreign minister of Estonia, Urmas Paet, with a Hitler mustache. Apart from geopolitics the future demographic development of Russia was high on the agenda. In 2007 the camp celebrated a mass wedding for about thirty couples. Red tents were arranged in the shape of a heart for the couples to celebrate their wedding night. Dmitry Medvedev and Sergey Ivanov, at that time both deputy prime ministers, called in. Ivanov called for the group to have more babies. One year later, in the summer camp of 2008, a baby was shown who had been conceived at the mass wedding of 2007. This openly proclaimed natalism is resonant of Mussolini's call to the Italian women "to make babies for Italy."^[15] In

2008 the portrait of the Estonian foreign minister had been replaced by a pig in a wooden stall with the name Ilves—the name of the Estonian president.^[16] The 2008 camp, however, attracted only five thousand participants. This diminished enthusiasm was partly due to the fact that in the summer of 2008 the Duma elections and the presidential elections had taken place. But also rumors of free love had made parents more wary. The government intervened. In 2009 the camp was organized directly by the state, paramilitary training was suspended, there was this time no “love oasis,” and also non-Nashi members were given free access.^[17] But these cosmetic changes did not have a real impact on the camp’s core business. According to an observer, “the worry for critics of Seliger is that the older political generation uses it to transmit their own ideology to the new.”^[18]

THE NASHI MANIFESTO AND “MEGAPROJECT

RUSSIA”

One of the Nashi movement’s objectives was, indeed, the transmission of the ideology of the ruling elite to the younger generation. Therefore, the Nashi manifesto” deserves a closer look. It is one of the rare Kremlin-inspired texts that gives a deeper insight into the ideology of the regime. The manifesto starts with inviting young Russians to participate in the “megaproject of our generation, the megaproject Russia.” And the text continues: “The development of the world involves competition between peoples.” In this competition “it is our goal to make Russia a global leader of the twenty-first century.” This leadership is possible, the manifesto continues, because, as one should not forget, “the twentieth century had been Russia’s century.” This was due to three events. The first event is the Russian Revolution, which was “an effort to modernize” the country (no mention is made of

Stalinist mass murders and repression). The second event is the victory of Russia in the Second World War, which saved the world from “a global hegemony by another country” and which accelerated “the disintegration of the colonial empires.” (Here nothing is said about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, nor about the *new* colonization that took place after the war inside the Soviet bloc.) The third event that is mentioned is the end of communism at the end of the twentieth century. It is stressed that this process was “autonomous.”

The manifesto explains why Russia is destined to become a global leader. The text refers to the “Eurasian heartland” theory of Halford J. MacKinder, without, however, mentioning MacKinder’s name.^[19] “Russia,” it states, “is the central military-strategic space of the Eurasian continent. Control over it is important for those who want to dominate Eurasia and the whole world. It was precisely for this reason that Napoleon and Hitler

dreamed of conquering it. Today, it is the United States on the other hand that is trying to control Eurasia and the whole world, and international terrorism on the other.” Against these threats, the text continues, “a strong, independent Russian government” is necessary, which is based on the sound foundation of sovereign democracy. This sovereign democracy is threatened by two internal enemies: the liberals “who are ready to give up the country’s independence in the name of the freedom of the individual” and the communists and fascists who give up personal freedom in the name of a stronger government. There follows a severe criticism of the weak governments of the 1990s, and the next paragraph, entitled “Our Revolution,” praises Putin, who, “after having strengthened the government, was the first to really challenge the regime of oligarchic capitalism.” Because Putin brought the stability the country needed so badly for its modernization, Putin is the natural leader for

the Nashi movement. The Nashi is Putin's avant-garde, because "our task . . . is to be at the head of the modernization of the country." This modernization is not the only task for the members of Nashi. Other tasks include "the defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia," and to counter the "geopolitical games" of the West in the post-Soviet space, with their explicit goal of *vydavlivanie*: pushing Russia out of world politics. Further, the Nashi should fight "extremist organizations of fascist and liberal nature." To accomplish these important tasks for the fatherland Nashi members should have special character profiles and competences. They are expected to be patriotic and optimistic, think strategically, have social responsibility, be constructive and open to new developments, and have leadership capabilities and great professionalism.

HARASSING DIPLOMATS AND INTERNAL FOES

This was the manifesto, but what was the practice? In practice Nashi's activities were concerned less with the modernization of Russian society than with the persecution and harassment of imagined internal and external foes. The first case that gained media attention was that of Anthony Brenton, British ambassador in Moscow. After Brenton had spoken at a conference held by the opposition movement "The Other Russia" in August 2006, he was systematically harassed by Nashi militants. They picketed the British embassy and followed the ambassador for six months with a banner demanding that he apologize. According to *The Sunday Times*, "They shouted abuse as he shopped for cat food, obstructed his car, advertised his movements on the internet and disrupted him when he spoke publicly."^[20] The harassment only stopped temporarily when the British government officially protested, but was resumed after the Duma elections of December 2007, when fifty

Nashi members again picketed the embassy with a portrait of the ambassador with the text “Loser” (referring to Kasparov’s political party, which had not managed to get a seat in the new Duma). The demonstrators handed a letter to the embassy guard destined for the British queen, demanding that she recall the ambassador.^[21]

Another high-placed victim was the ambassador of Estonia, Marina Kaljurand. She was attacked when the Estonian government removed a Soviet-era war monument, the Bronze Soldier, from the center of Tallinn. Starting April 30, 2007, members of Nashi picketed the Estonian embassy in Moscow. They blocked the street on both sides, making it impossible for the embassy’s staff to leave. Rocks and paint were thrown at the embassy building and slogans painted on the walls, such as “We reached Berlin, we will reach Tallinn too.” Day and night Nashi members played loud music in front of the building. The embassy

personnel noted that “the young people were equipped with everything necessary to maintain round the clock presence, including portable toilets, a field kitchen and electricity supply.”^[22] Tents had even been erected in front of the embassy in which the protesters were taking turns to sleep. On May 1, 2007, the Estonian flag was torn down from the embassy and shredded into pieces. On May 2, the ambassador had to break through a Nashi cordon to give a press conference at the offices of the magazine *Argumenty i Fakty*. On her arrival, there were attempts to attack her physically in the press room and gas had to be used by the guards to set her free. On the street outside rioting youths attacked the ambassador’s car and tore off the Estonian flag. These attacks on the embassy were preceded by organized riots in the center of the Estonian capital Tallinn on April 26 and 27 by Estonian Russophones, led by Russian Nashi activists who had come over specially from Russia.^[23]

CYBER ATTACKS

On April 27, cyber attacks started, aimed at paralyzing the web servers of the Estonian government. These attacks originated from Russian state IP addresses. Due to the attacks access by foreign users of the government web pages had to be restricted.^[24] Nashi also seemed to be involved in cyber attacks on the Georgian government's website before and during Russia's war against Georgia in August 2008. In a report of the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in the Estonian capital Tallinn, the authors wrote: "In the case of possible Russian government involvement with the cyber attacks on the Georgian government website in July and August 2008, the available evidence supports a strong likelihood of GRU/FSB [respectively, the Russian military and the internal secret service] planning and direction at high level while relying on Nashi intermediaries and the

phenomenon of crowdsourcing to obfuscate their involvement and implement their strategy.”^[25] The close, almost symbiotic cooperation between Russia’s secret services and the youth movement is particularly interesting. In this context the project of the “Kremlin School of Bloggers,” set up in 2009 by the Fund for Effective Politics of Kremlin ideologue Gleb Pavlovsky, should also be mentioned. The “Kremlin School of Bloggers” sells the Kremlin’s policies to the young Internet community by writing blogs, attacking opposition websites, and posting ideological YouTube videos.^[26] The name of its website (liberty.ru) is Free World (*Svobodnyy Mir*), and its motto is—why not?—“Freedom is better than no freedom.”

Other Nashi attacks were targeted at supposed internal foes, such as independent Russian media, opposition politicians, and journalists daring to criticize the regime. They

were all categorized as fascists.^[27] One of these attacks concerned the paper *Kommersant*, one of the few remaining bastions of the free press in Russia. On March 3, 2008—as a reaction to a critical article on the Nashi movement in this paper—people posing as employees began handing out rolls of toilet paper, emblazoned with *Kommersant*'s logo, outside various Moscow metro stations. The rolls contained the mobile phone number of the reporter who wrote the critical article. Russian websites published a leaked e-mail, written by Nashi's press secretary, Kristina Potupchik, with the following order: "Block their work. Psychologically and physically pester them. Revenge is essential." The e-mail suggested buying up the entire print of the paper and destroying it, picketing its presses, and using hackers to bring down its website.^[28] Editors of the opposition paper *Novaya Gazeta* received a box containing the severed ears of a donkey with a note "from the presidential

administration.”^[29] Then, in October 2009, a persecution campaign started against Alexander Podrabinek, a fifty-six-year-old former Soviet dissident, who had published an article on September 21, 2009, in the online paper *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal* (Daily Paper), in which he criticized Soviet veterans who insisted that a Moscow restaurant with the name *Antisovetskaya* (Anti-Soviet), change its name to *Sovetskaya* (Soviet).^[30] Podrabinek had suggested that those who were proud of being Soviet veterans, seemed to be proud of the repressive, KGB-led gulag system of the former Soviet Union. Nashi activists picketed his house with placards demanding his apology for offending the veterans. They also “visited” the editorial offices of one of the newspapers for which he worked. After receiving phone calls with death threats, Podrabinek went into hiding.^[31] Foreign papers that had dared to suggest that Nashi’s activities resembled those

of the *Hitlerjugend* were sued by Nashi for defamation.^[32] Suing, by the way, became one of the preferred weapons used by Nashi to harass its opponents. Nashi has filed suits against Yevgenia Albats, Boris Nemtsov (more than once), Garry Kasparov, radio station Ekho Moskvyy, the papers Kommersant and Novaya Gazeta, as well as the online paper Gazeta.ru.^[33]

PREPARING FOR MORE MUSCLED ACTIONS: THE NASHI BATTLE GROUPS

In 2008 some foreign observers thought that the Nashi movement was running out of steam and was gradually losing a sense of purpose.^[34] The reality, however, was different. Shortly before this, the Nashi had set up a junior organization, the Mishki (Teddy Bears). This group had the objective of strengthening the ideological grip of the Kremlin on a still younger generation: children aged seven to fifteen. "If

Nashi can be likened to the Komsomol, the Soviet era organization of high school and university students” wrote the *Moscow Times*, “then Mishki is a throwback to the Pioneers, the children’s group of the same period Their essential purpose, just like Nashi, is to support Putin. ‘I love the Mishki! I love Russia! I love Putin! Together we will win.’”^[35] How these young children were manipulated became clear, when, during the conflict over the removal of the Soviet war memorial in Tallinn, a group of Mishki was brought to the Estonian embassy in Moscow and started to color in a giant poster of a statue of a soldier outside the embassy. Masha Lipman, from the Moscow Carnegie Center, expressed her concern. She considered it an alarming development and reminiscent of Soviet-era groups like the Young Pioneers and the Little Octobrists. “I think any youth organization directed and guided from above brings back very unpleasant associations with the Soviet days. And also Nashi, I think, is a very

unsavory organization, given their record of harassing officials, of enjoying complete impunity So [the fact that they are] ideological guides to still younger kids—to me it's a very unpleasant trend.”^[36]

Nashi, at the same time, prepared another plan to strengthen its grip on Russian civil society. At the core of this new development was Stal, a subdivision of Nashi that was in charge of organizing street protests. “Stal” not only means “steel” in Russian, but it has the additional advantage that it evokes the name of Russia’s “man of steel,” Joseph Stalin. According to *Le Monde*’s Moscow correspondent Marie Jégo, “the group Stal . . . has just endorsed the theses of Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda of the Hitler regime. The militants of Stal are asked to know them by heart.”^[37] It is not surprising, therefore, that the leader of Stal, Nadezhda Tarasenko, proudly declared that “one thousand activists in my movement are not afraid of using tough methods to stop

America's influence on Russia.”^[38] Tough methods? Yes, because the movement was still considered too soft for its masters in the Kremlin. While Nashi was used for pro-Kremlin rallies, Stal was used as Nashi's “tough vanguard.” Before, such tough actions had often been outsourced by Nashi to external groups. In August 2005, for instance, violent members of the Spartak soccer fan club The Gladiators attacked leftists of the National Bolsheviks in Moscow with stun guns and baseball bats, after which four of their victims had to be hospitalized. A Gladiators member told the paper *Kommersant* that “the Gladiators work closely with Nashi and provide security for their events.” He added that “the guys receive \$400–\$600 for their services.”^[39] This kind of outsourcing of violence seemed to be happening with more frequency. However, the leaders of Nashi were also determined to set up a pool of fighters *inside* their organization. Stal was one of them. When, for instance, on

December 6, 2011, opposition rallies were organized in Moscow to protest against the rigged Duma elections, a counterdemonstration was organized by Stal, backed by 50,000 police and 11,500 Interior Ministry troops.^[40]

However, the rank and file of Nashi was more difficult to mobilize. Nashi members attending a second demonstration for Putin, organized on December 12, 2011, had to be paid.^[41]

A second subdivision of Nashi that was to contribute to its planned transformation into a tough organization was the DMD (*Dobrovolnye molodezhnye druzhiny*). These “volunteer youth squads” were led by Roman Verbitsky. This Nashi section had the task of providing volunteers to help the local police in keeping order. In March 2008 Verbitsky declared that “the voluntary youth squads operate in 19 regions and comprise 5–6 thousand people. Their main activity is patrolling the streets together with law enforcement authorities.”^[42]

This organization was intended to become the core of a new, federation-wide system of volunteer squads which in three years would become a force that would be present in more than half of Russia's regions and comprise at least a hundred thousand volunteers.^[43] As the godfathers of this new, ambitious project, Vladislav Surkov and Vasily Yakemenko were again mentioned. Both Kremlin confidants would have taken the initiative during the 2009 Nashi summer camp.

ORTHODOX BATTLE GROUPS?

According to this new plan an All-Russian Association of Militias (VAD)^[44] would be formed. The existing Nashi branch DMD would be incorporated into this association. The Nashi militias would be put under the authority of the local police. Yakemenko, who, in August 2008, had been appointed head of the Federal Youth Agency *Rosmolodezh*, a division of the Ministry

of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy, promised that the government and local authorities would provide the necessary start-up funds. The State Duma would be asked to pass a law “[o]n the participation of RF citizens in securing law and order.”^[45] This bill would require militias to have uniforms and carry identification, and it would grant members the right to check citizen’s documents, search private cars, and use physical force and handguns for self-defense. According to Sergey Bokhan, the leader of the Nashi militia project, “We find kids, who are practically living on the streets, who don’t know how to occupy themselves, and who don’t have money or interests. We provide them with gyms, teach them combatant and competitive sports. We work with the at-risk group, who would potentially break a bottle over someone’s head, or throw rocks through windows.”^[46] The prospect of a hundred thousand marginal and potentially aggressive young men on the streets

in order to control citizens and maintain order was considered by many Russians a frightening idea. An additional anxiety lay in the fact that these new militiamen could eventually be armed with so-called stun guns. These are electrical Taser guns capable of paralyzing opponents with a voltage of between 625,000 and 1.2 million volts. In some cases these weapons proved to be lethal.

The debate on the introduction of *druzhiny* (squads) took a special turn in November 2008, when Vsevolod Chaplin, deputy head of the (Kremlin-related) department of external relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, proposed the organization of Orthodox militias. "Now alongside many church communities, parishes, there exist military-patriotic groups who have had good athletic training. They could undertake an active civic role," he said.^[47] His proposal was received positively by the leaders of Nashi and by Valery Gribakin, spokesman for the Ministry of the Interior, who said that the

Ministry was prepared to support the initiative. He added that in the territory of the Russian Federation the police already cooperated with 36,000 civil movements that provided 380,000 volunteers.^[48] Yevgeny Ikhlov, spokesman for the NGO “For Human Rights,” called the initiative dangerous. The militias would attract primarily “boys and girls from militarized party structures,” as well as veterans of regional conflicts, whose nerves “are strongly overwrought.” Furthermore, such faith-based militias might jeopardize the secular character of the state and the initiative could lead to Islamic militias in Islamic regions.^[49] The Orthodox militias, however, were set up—alongside those run by the Nashi. *Newsweek* reporter Peter Pomerantsev described how he met with one of these vigilantes on Moscow’s streets:

“The enemies of Holy Russia are everywhere,” says Ivan Ostrakovsky, the

leader of a group of Russian Orthodox vigilantes who have taken to patrolling the streets of nighttime Moscow, dressed in all-black clothing emblazoned with skulls and crosses. “We must protect holy places from liberals and their satanic ideology,” he tells me. . . . [T]he vigilante sees himself in a fight against cultural degradation. “When I came back from serving in the Chechen War, I found my country full of dirt,” he says. “Prostitution, drugs, Satanists. But now, religion is on the rise.”^[50] Pomerantsev commented: “[A]s Vladimir Putin’s third presidential term comes into focus, the cross-wearing thugs are now right in line with the ideology emanating from the Kremlin—and from the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. . . . [T]he new incarnation of Putin’s rule resembles less a thought-out program than a carnival where spooks dress up in cassocks and thugs adorn themselves with crucifixes, shouting

snatches of medieval theology, Soviet conspiracy theories, and folk-metal choruses.”^[51]

A HISTORICAL PRECEDENT: KHRUSHCHEV'S *DRUZHINY*

The idea behind these volunteer law-enforcing *druzhiny* is not new. In 1913, on the eve of the First World War, they could already be found in tsarist Russia. And the October Revolution, four years later, was made possible by an uprising of spontaneously formed, armed militias of peasants and workers. After the Revolution there even emerged a competition between these militias and the new regular Red Army, organized by the People's Commissar for War, Leon Trotsky. This power struggle—which resembled the competition between the SA and the Reichswehr in Nazi Germany—was in Russia ultimately decided in favor of the army.^[52] Under Stalin the role of the militias was further

reduced, and it was—ironically—in the period of Khrushchev's thaw that the idea resurfaced. In 1958—during the Khrushchev era of de-Stalinization—the criminal law was revised to allow the accused certain procedural guarantees, which would lead to a more liberal punishment regime. Uncertainties concerning the impact of this liberalization effort led to initiatives to accompany this more permissive policy with measures of enhanced preventive social control. As a consequence the 21st Party Congress of the CPSU in 1958 called for the reintroduction of the *druzhiny* volunteer squads,^[53] and on March 2, 1959, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers issued a joint resolution, "On the Participation of the Workers in the Maintenance of Public Order," in which the *druzhiny* were reintroduced. These militias were independent from the police, but worked often in cooperation with police officers. Its members came from the trade unions, the Komsomol, and the local soviets.

This civil police force was especially active in factories and collective farms to fight drunkenness and hooliganism and enhance workers' discipline.

The initiative to introduce nationwide Nashi volunteer squads was certainly inspired by these former Soviet examples. However, between the Krushchev-era *druzhiny* and the Putin-era *druzhiny* there exist two important differences. The first and most important difference is that in Khrushchev's time they were introduced as a measure of a *liberalizing* regime that intended to replace the totalitarian control of civil society of the Stalinist era, characterized by repression and draconic punishments, by a more relaxed and normal authoritarian society. The *druzhiny* were a symbol and an expression of this liberalizing regime, substituting prevention for state repression. Putin's Nashi militias are, on the contrary, the expression of exactly the opposite development: they are the expression of a

society that becomes less democratic and more repressive. A second difference is that Khrushchev's *druzhiny* were rather bureaucratic: they lacked an ideological drive. Its members were, as a rule, appointed. The new Nashi squads, on the contrary, have ideologically driven leaders, who are convinced of the importance of their mission: fighting the internal and external foes of the fatherland.

THE NASHI: KOMSOMOL, RED GUARDS, OR *HITLERJUGEND?*

How should we assess the development of Putin's youth organization? In fact we can distinguish three stages. It started with the organization of Walking Together. This was followed by its incorporation into a bigger, nationwide follow-up organization, the Nashi, which subsequently broadened its scope to include younger children in a new club, the Mishki (Teddy Bears). Finally, Nashi gave birth to a possibly armed youth militia. Walking

Together was still a more or less loosely organized Putin fan club. Its transformation into the Nashi had a threefold aim. It was, first, a deliberate attempt by the Kremlin to create an ideological vehicle for the regime. Second, it was set up to create a new elite. Third, it was meant to prevent a Ukrainian-style Orange revolution in Russia. While the organization seemed to have the capacity to achieve the first two objectives, the Kremlin had doubts about Nashi's ability to counteract broad popular protest movements. After the beginning of the financial and economic crisis of October 2008, when there was a real danger that the opposition might build on popular disaffection, this last role became more urgent. This led in the summer of 2009 to plans to build nationwide Nashi militias. We can, therefore, observe a clear, Kremlin-led dynamic, gradually transforming a loose, nationalist, presidential fan club into a tightly organized, ideologically homogeneous, ultranationalist, paramilitary

organization.

This development was also openly advocated by the Nashi leadership, which echoed the Kremlin's hard approach to dissent. During the Libyan revolution of 2011, for example, Boris Yakemenko, the leader of the Orthodox wing of the Nashi, praised Libyan leader Mouammar Kadhafi. At a time when the International Criminal Court was preparing to investigate Kadhafi for possible crimes against humanity, Yakemenko wrote in his blog that Kadhafi "showed the whole world how one ought to treat provocateurs who pursue revolution, destabilization and civil war. He started to destroy them. With missiles and everything that he has at his disposal."^[54] This solidarity with an international outcast and instigator of terrorism appeared in a new light when it became known that his brother, Nashi founder Vasily Yakemenko, who had become Putin's director of youth policy, was mentioned in a state business database as cofounder, in

1994, of a company called Akbars, together with five convicted members of the Complex 29 mafia group. This mafia group, based in Tatarstan, with over one thousand members, controlled local businesses, factories, and the port of Odessa. Between 1993 and 2001 the gang had been responsible for fourteen murders, cutting off the hands and heads of vendors at street markets who refused to pay.^[55] This episode indicates how thin the line had become between the Nashi on the one hand and thuggish soccer fans and violent organized crime on the other.

The question is: what *is* Nashi? Is it a new version of the old Soviet Komsomol?^[56] Is it a reinvention of the Chinese Red Guards? Or are those critics right who consider it a variant of the Hitler Youth or Mussolini's blackshirts (or Hitler's SA)? According to the Russian-American journalist Cathy Young, who grew up in Soviet Russia and knows the Komsomol from within,

[S]ome have compared Nashi to the Komsomol, the Soviet-era Communist Youth League. But in a way, Nashi is much more frightening. By the 1960s, the Komsomol was largely devoid of genuine ideological zeal, unless you count rote recitation of party slogans. Membership in the organization, while not mandatory, was practically universal, and joining it at 14 was largely a formality. Even Komsomol activists, with few exceptions, were interested in career advancement, not political causes. Today's Nashi undoubtedly have their share of cynical careerists, but they also include a large number of true believers. [\[57\]](#)

Cathy Young is right. After Stalin's death (and possibly already before) the Komsomol had become a bureaucratic organization that lacked the ideological zeal of its beginnings. The Maoist Red Guards had a similar structure, but

they had a different function. They were a weapon in the internal power struggle between different factions in the Chinese Communist Party. This seems not to be the case in Russia, where the opposition is nonsystemic, that is, outside the existing power structure. If the Nashi cannot be compared with the Komsomol or the Red Guards, are they a new variant of the *Hitlerjugend*? Here we must first clarify what kind of *Hitlerjugend* (HJ) we are referring to, because there are big differences between the HJ *before* and *after* Hitler's rise to power. In both cases the organization was, of course, a huge indoctrination machine. But before Hitler's appointment to chancellor in January 1933—and also for some time afterward—membership of the *Hitlerjugend* was voluntary (from 1936 on it would become compulsory). These voluntary members (and/or their parents) were, undoubtedly, ideologically more motivated. Equally important was the fact that since 1926 the HJ had been a part of the

paramilitary SA (*Sturm Abteilung*). Each year on November 9 (the date of the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch) members of the *Hitlerjugend* who had reached the age of eighteen went over to the SA in an official celebration ceremony. The task of the SA was to train street fighters to intimidate political opponents. After the so-called Röhm Putsch in 1934 members of the *Hitlerjugend* no longer went to the SA, but joined Hitler's party, the NSDAP, directly. Moreover, the paramilitary exercises of the *Hitlerjugend* changed in character: they were no longer intended to prepare streetfighters for the National-Socialist Party, but to train aspirant soldiers to fight in the wars of the Reich. The Nashi, therefore, although it is supporting a regime in power, resembles in its structure and objectives more the *Hitlerjugend* during the phase in which the NSDAP still was an opposition party: it aims to create an ideologically motivated youth. However, a further differentiation may take place when the

druzhiny are completed. As a nationwide organized gang of streetfighters, tasked with intimidating civil society, they will be more and more comparable to Mussolini's blackshirts or Hitler's SA. Creating such violent gangs of street thugs to intimidate and harass political opponents carries also, however, big risks, as the Russian sociologist Lilia Shevtsova rightly remarked:

Who is to say that such youth movements as *Nashi* (Ours), *Mestnye* (Locals), and the *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard) will not go the same way as the nationalistic *Rodina* (Motherland) Party? After being likewise set up by the Kremlin, *Rodina* became a loose cannon because of the ambitions of its nationalistic leader, Dmitri Rogozin. The Kremlin had to remove the Motherland Party from the Moscow elections and expel some of its overambitious politicians. It might be more

difficult to keep even the pro-Kremlin youth movements on a leash. The gangs of young Putin supporters created by the Kremlin in the wake of the Ukrainian Revolution started by harassing opposition politicians Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Kasianov and then went after foreign diplomats, attacking the British and Estonian ambassadors. The young are playing the game with evident enthusiasm, becoming more aggressive each time. They have already understood their strength and are eager to do “big projects.” The moment may come when the young wolves will feel they are manipulated and will want to become an independent force. And someone might emerge who will lead this destructive blind force that can be turned into a dangerous political weapon. The Russian authorities may never have read the story of Frankenstein and seem unaware of how experiments creating

monsters may end.^[58]

Unfortunately, sooner than expected, Shevtsova's predictions seemed to come true. In an alarming article about the growth of racist neo-Nazi organizations in Russia, *Newsweek* wrote that "the growth of violent racism in Russia has been encouraged by the Kremlin's dabbling with nationalist ideology and politicized youth groups. . . . The Kremlin's 'political technologists' unwittingly trained a generation of cadres to be conversant in the dark art of rousing masses of young people, organizing demonstrations, manipulating the press, and cutting deals with the authorities."^[59] The magazine added that "[a] *Newsweek* investigation has revealed that many of the organizers of today's extreme nationalist groups learned their tradecraft as 'commissars' of the Kremlin-sponsored youth groups Nashi, Walking Together, and the Young Guard."^[60] This might have raised some doubts in the

Nashi leadership as concerns the desirability of the planned Nashi militias. In the spring of 2013 on the website of Rosmolodezh, the official youth agency, an article was published, announcing that at the end of 2013 the Nashi would be transformed into a new youth organization with a new name. The title commissar would disappear. The former commissars would get a new task: “they become managers, coordinating the movement’s projects.”^[61] The objective of these projects would be “the social adaptation of youth.”^[62] Aleksey Makarkin, a political scientist, commented that “after December 2011 it became clear that the Nashi were not effective in the struggle against the regime’s opponents. Therefore the emphasis is [now] on less ambitious local projects, that are, maybe, more effective projects.”^[63] Does this mean the end of Putin’s *druzhiny* project? Not quite. Because in the meantime Putin had discovered

another group of devoted supporters whom he considered more capable of this task: the Cossacks.

NOTES

1. Cf. “Istoriya voprosa: Saga o ‘Putinjugende,’” *NEWSru.com* (January 14, 2005).
2. *Novaya Gazeta* of September 23, 2002. Quoted in “Istoriya voprosa: Saga o ‘Putinjugende.’”
3. Politkovskaya, *Putin’s Russia* (London: The Harvill Press, 2004), 282–283.
4. Fedor Yermolov, “Free Speech and the Attack on Vladimir Sorokin” (August 13, 2002). Published on Sorokin’s website. <http://www.srkn.ru/criticism/yermolov.shtml>.
5. Yermolov, “Free Speech and the Attack on Vladimir Sorokin.”
6. However, it would not take long before the movement itself would be implicated in a—this time *real*—mini pornographic scandal, when it came out that a leading figure of the Saint

Petersburg branch produced pornographic cassettes, which he sold on the market. This scandal further tarnished the already tainted reputation of the movement. (Cf. “Lider ‘Idushchikh Vmeste’ poiman na rasprostranении pornografii,” *NEWSru.com* (November 4, 2004).)

7. “Kreml gotovit novyy molodezhnyy proekt na zamenu ‘Idushchim Vmeste.’” *NEWSru.com* (February 21, 2005).

8. Some texts by Gene Sharp, such as “The Politics of Nonviolent Action,” can be freely downloaded from the website of the Albert Einstein Institution. <http://www.aeinstein.org>.

9. According to Marie Jégo, Moscow correspondent for *Le Monde*, from 2008 to late 2010 the Nashi received—in addition to other gifts—11.5 million euros directly from the Kremlin. (Marie Jégo, “Fascistes ou fans de foot?” *Le Monde* (December 24, 2010).) The Kremlin has repeatedly accused Western NGOs and governments of having organized and financed the opposition groups that were active

in the color revolutions. However, according to Parol Demes and Joerg Forbrig this support was rather restricted. In Ukraine “the Pora campaign was only sparsely supported by international donors. A mere \$130,000 was distributed in foreign funding: by the Canadian International Development Agency, Freedom House, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. By comparison, Pora’s total financing was \$1.56 million. In-kind contributions in the form of free publications, communications, and transportation exceeded an estimated \$6.5 million.” (Parol Demes and Joerg Forbrig, “Pora: ‘It’s Time’ for Democracy in Ukraine,” in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine’s Democratic Breakthrough*, eds. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 97–98.)

10. Politkovskaya, *A Russian Diary*, 270–271.

11. Charles Clover, “‘Managed Nationalism’ Turns Nasty for Putin,” *Financial Times*

(December 23, 2010).

12. Official website of the Nashi (in Russian).
<http://www.nashi.su>.

13. Quoted in John Follett, "Russia's Past Mobilised to Shape the Present," *Herald Scotland* (October 16, 2009).

14. Tony Halpin, "Winning Young Hearts and Minds: Putin's Strategy for a New Superpower," *The Times* (July 25, 2007).

15. In his famous Ascension Day Speech of May 1927 Mussolini exhorted Italians to increase the population from 40 million to 60 million in twenty-five years. Italian women were called upon to have a dozen children each. Pro-natalist measures included a tax on bachelors, tax exemptions for large families, and restrictions on emigration. (Cf. Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173–174.)

16. Luke Harding, "Welcome to Putin's Summer Camp," *The Guardian* (July 24, 2008).

17. Roland Oliphant, "Seliger Camp's Growing Pains," *Moscow News* (July 20, 2009).

18. Oliphant, "Seliger Camp's Growing Pains."

19. Halford J. MacKinder, an English geopolitician, developed the theory of a Eurasian heartland for the first time in a paper "The Geographical Pivot of History" (1904). According to him the power that dominated this heartland would dominate the world, a theory that became very popular in Russia. (Cf. Halford J. MacKinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, ed. Halford J. MacKinder (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 175–193.)

20. Mark Franchetti, "Putin's Fanatical Youth Brigade Targets Britain," *The Sunday Times* (September 2, 2007).

21. "Vashe Velichestvo, pishet Vam kollektiv russkikh druzey" (Your Majesty, A Collective of Russian Friends Writes to You), *Kommersant* (December 6, 2007). When, on March 28, 2008, the Foreign Office announced that Brenton

would be replaced by Anne Pringle, former ambassador to the Czech Republic, there was speculation on the website of Robert Amsterdam, Khodorkovsky's lawyer, that this was done under pressure from the British energy giant BP that had billions of dollars invested in projects in Russia.

<http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/03/the>

However, the Foreign Office "rejected speculation the change was due to worsening ties between the two countries" (Cf. "Update 1: Britain names Russian envoy, hopes for better ties," *Reuters* (March 28, 2008).)

22. *Estonian Review* 17, no. 16–17 (April 18–May 2, 2007), 3.

23. Even during these Russian attacks the Estonian government had the diplomatic correctness to receive, on April 30, a delegation from the Russian State Duma to discuss the events around the removal of the war memorial. This delegation was headed by the

former FSB director Nikolay Kovalyov, who, on his arrival in Tallinn, bluntly called for the immediate resignation of the Estonian government—a more than ill-mannered intervention in the internal affairs of a neighboring state that awoke memories of a not so distant past. (Cf. Victor Yasmann, “Monument Dispute with Estonia Gets Dirty,” *RFE/RL* (May 8, 2007).

<http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1347550.h>

24. Quoted in Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 246.

25. The attacks were distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in which hundreds of thousands of “zombie” computers overwhelm the target network. According to an Estonian spokesperson the attack on Estonia originated in 178 countries. The Kremlin denied being implicated in the cyber attacks. Afterward, however, direct Russian implication was

conceded through two incidents. The first involved Duma deputy and Kremlin pundit Sergei Markov, who, on March 3, 2009, in a panel discussion with American experts on information warfare, said: “About the cyber-attacks on Estonia . . . don’t worry, that attack was carried out by my assistant. I won’t tell you his name, because then he might not be able to get visas.” The assistant was thought to have been in “one of the unrecognized republics.” Later it was stated that he was in the Moldovan breakaway province of Transnistria—outside the territory of Russia. (Cf. “Sergei Markov Says He Knows Who Started the Estonia Cyber War,” *Intelfusion* (March 6, 2009).)

<http://www.intelfusion.net/wordpress/?p=544>. The name of this assistant was revealed later. It would have been Konstantin Goloskokov, a Nashi commissar. He told the *Financial Times* “that he and some associates had launched the attack.” (Charles Clover, “Kremlin-backed Group Behind Estonia Cyber Blitz,” *The Financial Times*

(March 11, 2009.) Markov wanted to present the unprecedented massive cyber attacks on the government of a NATO member state as a kind of innocent “naughty boys” prank that, apparently, was organized from *outside* Russia. One might confidently assume, however, that this was an attempt at active disinformation aimed at hiding the likely real instigators of the attack: the Russian secret services FSB, GRU, and/or the Russian army.

26. Cf. Evgeny Morozov, “What Do They Teach at the ‘Kremlin’s School of Bloggers’?” *Foreign Policy* (May 26, 2009).

27. In 2005 the movement distributed a brochure titled “Program for Combating Fascism” in secondary schools and universities. The “fascists” named in the brochure included Ilya Yashin, the leader of the liberal Yabloko youth organization; Yukos shareholder Leonid Nevzlin; and the democratic opposition leaders Garry Kasparov and Vladimir Ryzhkov. It is telling that Dmitry Rogozin, who at that time

was chairman of the nationalist Rodina party and, maybe, the only representative of the extreme right on this list, was later appointed ambassador to NATO by Putin. (Cf. Oleg Kashin and Yuliya Taratuta, "Obyknovennyy antifashizm," *Kommersant* (May 12, 2005).)

28. Shaun Walker, "Pro-Kremlin Youth Group Blamed for Attacking Paper," *The Independent* (March 6, 2008).

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/youth-group-blamed-for-attacking-paper-792074.html>.

29. Dmitry Sidorov, "A Mafia-Style Message on Russian Free Speech," *Forbes* (April 7, 2009).

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/07/donkey-ears-press-freedom-opinions-contributors-nashi-medvedev.html>.

30. In his article Podrabinek attacked Soviet veterans. "Your fatherland," he wrote, "is not Russia. Your fatherland is the Soviet Union. You are Soviet veterans, and your country, thank god, has not existed for eighteen years. The

Soviet Union is not at all the country that you described in the school books and your liar press. The Soviet Union—it is not only political leaders, Stakhanov workers, communist superproductive workers, and cosmonauts. The Soviet Union—it is also peasant rebellions, victims of the collectivization and the Holodomor, hundreds of thousands of innocent people who are shot in the basements of the Cheka and millions who are tortured to death in the Gulag The Soviet Union—it is permanent confinement in psychiatric hospitals for dissidents, treacherous murders, and in countless Gulag cemeteries the anonymous graves of my friends, the political prisoners who did not live to see our freedom.” (Alexander Podrabinek, “Kak antisovetchik antisovetchikam ,” *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal* (September 21, 2009).)

31. Cf. Follett, “Russia’s Past Mobilized to Shape the Present.”

32. These papers were the British *The Independent*, the French *Le Monde* and *Le*

Journal du Dimanche, and the German *Frankfurter Rundschau*. The Nashi were demanding 500,000 rubles (11,500 euro) in damages from each of the newspapers. The group's lawyer, Sergey Zhorin, confirmed on October 27, 2009, that four lawsuits had been filed at Moscow's Savelyovsky District Court. (Cf. "Pro-Putin Youth Group Sues European Newspapers," *Euranet* (October 27, 2009).) The first hearing took place on December 7, 2009. The correspondent of *Le Monde*, Marie Jégo, present at the hearing, said: "It is an opinion, it is not slander. To give your opinion is authorized by article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, signed by Russia in 1998." ("Le Monde' poursuivi par les Nachi," *Le Monde* (December 9, 2009).) On April 21, 2010, the Court sentenced *Le Journal du dimanche* to pay the Nashi 250,000 rubles (6,400 euro), although the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which Russia is a member, had confirmed that the

facts reported by the four papers, could, indeed, be described as harassment. (Alexandre Billette, “De jeunes nationalistes russes obtiennent la condamnation du ‘JDD,’” *Le Monde*, (April 24, 2010).) Although the probability that the sentence would be carried out in France was extremely low, the Nashi felt they had won an important propaganda victory in their home country.

33. “Kashin-Yakemenko Feud Heats Up,” *seansrussiablog.org* (March 28, 2011).

34. Cf. Tony Halpin, “Vladimir Putin’s Youth Army Nashi Loses Purpose,” *The Times* (July 22, 2008). Another British journalist, *The Guardian’s* Luke Harding, came to a similar conclusion two days later, when he wrote: “This year’s camp, the fourth, is smaller than last year’s—a sign that Nashi’s days may be numbered.” (Luke Harding, “Welcome to Putin’s summer camp,” *The Guardian* (July 24, 2008).)

35. Cf. John Wendle, “Children’s Movement Fails to Draw Kids,” *Moscow Times* (December 7,

2007).

36. Quoted in Chloe Arnold, "Russia: New 'Teddy Bears' Have Overtones of Soviet-Era Youth Groups," *RFE/RL* (February 15, 2008).

37. Jégo, "Fascistes ou fans de foot?"

38. Anna Nemtsova, "Fear and Loathing in Moscow," *Newsweek* (October 24, 2008).

39. "Batting a Thousand," *Kommersant* (August 31, 2005).

40. Cf. Tom Balmforth, "Moscow Beefs Up Police Presence Amid Opposition, Pro-Kremlin Rallies," *RFE/RL* (December 6, 2011).

41. They were each paid between 200 and 500 rubles (respectively approximately €5 and €12.50). Cf. Daisy Sindelar, "How Many Demonstrated For The Kremlin? And How Willing Were They?" *RFE/RL* (December 13, 2011). The correspondent of the French *Figaro* reported having "witnessed similarly a scene at the end of the meeting where the organizers of the demonstration handed out bills of 100 rubles to adolescents who were queuing up,

waiting for their payment.” (Pierre Avril, “Les manifestants sur commande de Russie unie,” *Le Figaro* (December 14, 2011).)

42. Cf. *Novaya Gazeta* no. 18 (March 17, 2008).

43. Daniil Eisenstadt, “Vertikal Druzhina RF,” *Gazeta* (August 3, 2009).

http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2009/08/03_a_32

44. The full name of the Association is *Vserossiyskaya Assotsiatsiya Druzhin*, abbreviated VAD.

45. “Nashi Looks to Expand Youth Militia,” *Official Russia* (August 11, 2009).

<http://officialrussia.com/?p=6379>.

46. “Nashi Looks to Expand Youth Militia.”

47. Cf. Lev Davydov, “Pravoslavnye druzhiny ispugali pravozashchitnikov,” *Utro.ru* (November 21, 2008).

48. “MVD obeshchaut rassmotret iniciativu Tserkvi o sozdanii pravoslavnykh narodnykh druzhin,” *Interfax* (November 20, 2008).

49. Davydov, “Pravoslavnye druzhiny ispugali pravozashchitnikov.”

50. Peter Pomerantsev, "Putin's God Squad," *Newsweek* (September 10, 2012).

51. Pomerantsev, "Putin's God Squad."

52. Cf. Condoleezza Rice, "The Making of Soviet Strategy," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 652: "Many Bolsheviks were never completely satisfied with Trotsky's Red Army, however. It was created as a temporary device in 1918, to be demobilized and replaced by the militia as quickly as possible after the Civil War."

53. Cf. Darrell P. Hammer, "Law Enforcement, Social Control and the Withering of the State: Recent Soviet Experience," *Soviet Studies* 14, no. 4 (April 1963), 379.

54. Boris Yakemenko, "Vernyy Put" (February 21, 2008). <http://boris-yakemenko.livejournal.com/2011/02/21/>.

55. "Sledstvie podtverdilo, chto glava Rosmolodozh osnoval firmu dlya banditov iz '29-go kompleksa,'" *Newsru.com* (March 23,

2011).

56. The official name of the Soviet youth organization Komsomol was VLKSM = Vsesoyuznyy Leninskiy Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodezhi (All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth).

57. Cathy Young, "Putin's Young 'Brownshirts,'" *The Boston Globe* (August 10, 2007).

58. Lilia Shevtsova, *Russia: Lost in Transition, The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 282.

59. Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova, "Fascist Russia?" *Newsweek* (August 15, 2011).

60. Matthews and Nemtsova, "Fascist Russia?"

61. "Bolshe ne 'Nashi,'" (no date), website of Rosmolodezh,

<http://www.rosmolodezh.ru/novoteka-rosmolodezh/1-novosti-rosmolodezh/1365-boshe-ne-nashi.html>. Accessed May 27, 2013.

62. "Bolshe ne 'Nashi.'"

63. "Bolshe ne 'Nashi.'"

Chapter 9

Send in the Cossacks

In 2012 the Kremlin took steps to diversify its *druzhina* policy. After doubts emerged over the effectiveness of the Nashi groups, the Kremlin polit-technologists identified a new reservoir of public peacekeepers. They found this reservoir in a traditional group: the Cossacks. The Cossacks have a reputation for being independently minded, whip-wielding horseback warriors. Originally, they were runaway serfs, nomads, and adventurers who colonized the southern steppes near the river Don where they were not likely to be caught. The oldest historical records concerning their existence date from 1549, when Crimean Tatars complained to Ivan the Terrible that Cossacks living on the Don were raiding their territory.^[1] Later the Cossacks acknowledged the sovereignty of the tsar. In exchange they got land and the status of a special military

community with its own rights and freedoms. The different Cossack hosts (communities) served as buffers on the borders. They enjoyed great autonomy, had a local democracy with a general assembly (Krug) that elected a leader (ataman), and were recognized as a special estate (*soslovie*) between the serfs and the nobility. During more than two centuries they were engaged in the tsars' armies, and their cavalry played an important role in the expansion of the Russian Empire into Siberia and the Caucasus. They brought their own horses and weapons. Service of the state was a lifelong affair. In the period 1835–1863, for instance, individual Cossacks served the state for thirty years, of which five years in active service and twenty-five years as reservists. [2] Their relative importance becomes clear if one considers the fact that during the war in Turkestan (1877–1878), the Cossacks provided 125,000 soldiers, which was 7.4 percent of the army, while they made up only 2.2 percent of

the total population.^[3] The Cossacks' fortunes, however, were reversed during the Civil War (1917–1923), which followed the October Revolution. Though they fought on both sides, the majority resisted Bolshevik rule. This led to severe repression under communism. In 1919 the Soviet authorities even ordered the genocide of the Don Cossacks.^[4] Thousands of Cossacks fled abroad and went into exile. The fate of those who remained was dramatic. "Their property and livestock were confiscated, over two million Cossacks were repressed, more than 1.5 million were killed Cossack institutions, laws, self-government and customs were abolished."^[5] However, before the Second World War Stalin made some conciliatory gestures toward the Cossacks. He even established a Cossack cavalry division in the Red Army, though a Cossack ancestry did not seem to be required to serve in this division. During the war the Germans also raised some

Cossack units from among their prisoners of war and war deserters,^[6] which only reinforced Stalin's suspicions about this group.

THE REHABILITATION OF THE COSSACKS

The Cossacks had to wait for Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the fall of communism to make a glorious comeback. In 1992 Yeltsin issued Decree 632 on the rehabilitation of the Cossacks, followed, in July 1994, by Decree 1389, establishing a Council for Cossack Affairs. At the end of 1994 Yeltsin went still further, supporting a new law on Cossacks that granted them the status of an *archipelago state* within Russia, consisting of twelve Federal Cossack Regions, each of which corresponded with a Cossack host.^[7] This Cossack archipelago state was headed by a Council of Atamans (Cossack leaders), which was responsible not to the government, but to the president—mirroring the historical special relationship with the

tsar.^[8] Already in the 1990s the Cossacks began to be used as vigilantes, though only locally. In 1995 Mark Galeotti wrote:

Like the Tsars, today's Russian leaders have turned to the Cossacks for internal and external security. Since 1990, Cossack vigilantes have patrolled the streets of many Russian cities, armed with clubs, sabres and *nagaykas* (traditional whips). The regional administration in the southern Russian region of Krasnodar went further, in 1992 hiring armed Cossack units to patrol the countryside on horseback and in armoured vehicles The section on law enforcement in the Law on Cossacks—drafted by the Interior Ministry—formalises this role, establishing the dubious precedent of giving full police powers of search and arrest to untrained, armed vigilantes responsible to their elders rather than the authorities.^[9]

Yeltsin's reforms led also to the creation of Cossack regiments, and some Cossack units were formed within the Border Troops.^[10] Cossacks also got the right to set up security companies, and in 1997 several of these companies were working for the Moscow city government.^[11] However, the rehabilitation of the Cossacks under Yeltsin still remained uncompleted, and their new status was only a pale reflection of their privileged position in the former tsarist Empire. Their real chance, therefore, came with the arrival of Vladimir Putin. The new president was highly appreciative of the Cossacks. He attached great importance to this group and wanted to restore the Cossacks to their traditional function of pillars of the regime. In 2003 he appointed Gennady Troshev, a Cossack general who had served as commander of the military operations in Chechnya, as special adviser for Cossack Affairs in his presidential administration. In 2005 Putin signed the bill "On the State Service

of the Russian Cossacks,” which offered the Cossacks privileged entry to the state service.^[12] Draft-age Cossacks would “gain the right to serve in traditional Cossack military units, as well as frontier and internal forces.”^[13] Lev Ponomaryov, head of the NGO “For Human Rights” did not conceal his concern. “If they want to guard the borders,” he said, “let them do this [However], it is alarming that they may be given the right to maintain law and order within these borders. Experience shows that the Cossacks have their own interpretation of law and order.”^[14] But the Cossacks were satisfied. They showed their gratitude by granting Putin the title of *ataman*—Cossack colonel—a title previously reserved for the Russian tsars. Putin himself became the highest Cossack leader. In 2005 a Cossack regiment was founded in the army together with Cossack military schools where pupils—ages seven to seventeen—attend

classes in army fatigues. The curriculum includes military tactics, patriotism, and moral (i.e., Orthodox) education. In 2013 there existed thirty such Cossack schools in the Russian Federation.^[15] The southern town of Krasnodar, the centre of the Don Cossacks host, became a testing ground for the new Cossack activities. In February 2012, during the presidential election campaign, Putin once more stressed the importance of the Cossacks in an article in *Izvestia*:

Now, a few words about the Cossacks, a large group counting millions of Russians. Historically, Cossacks served the Russian state by defending its borders and taking part in military campaigns of the Russian Army. Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Cossack community was subjected to brutal repression, which was actually genocide. But the Cossacks survived and retained their culture and

traditions. The mission of the state now is to help the Cossacks, draw them into military service and educational activities for youths, involving a patriotic upbringing and initial military training.^[16]

TOUTING “COSSACK VALUES”

The comeback of the Cossacks into Russian public life after an absence of ninety years was accompanied by much publicity, culminating in a Cossack media frenzy in which their martial traditions and supposed virtues, such as courage, loyalty, patriotism, and observance of “traditional values” were touted. “Cossacks protected the Russian Orthodox Church and the Motherland during difficult times,” wrote Olivia Kroth in the pro-Kremlin paper *Pravda*.^[17]

“Today Cossacks continue doing so, educating children and young people according to their high ethical standards.”^[18] Another author, Sergey Israpilov, saw in the Cossacks a bulwark

against the decay of modern Russian society, characterized by individualism that “arrived in Russia from the West” and by a low birth rate. According to him, Russia needed to build “enclaves of traditionalists, who defend or create anew traditional society with its strong family and great fecundity.”^[19] Improving the birth rate and “bearing children for Russia” is also one of the objectives of Putin, who, in his address to the Federal Assembly, in December 2012, said people should “believe that families with three children should become the standard in Russia.”^[20] A BBC correspondent, who visited some Cossack villages in southern Russia, saw families there with seven children. He was told “that Cossack families should be as large as possible.”^[21] He wrote that “Cossack family values are simple, rigid, and to a Western eye, seem to come from another era. The men build the home and provide an income; the women cook, clean and give birth to children.

Traditional Russian values, culture, and Orthodoxy form the bedrock of their beliefs.”^[22] Russian authors and intellectuals, touting the purported traditional values of the Cossacks, resemble the nineteenth-century *narodniki*, urbanites who idealized the supposedly high ethical standards and deep spiritual life of the simple Russian peasant. In 2009, in a speech before the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs, Patriarch Kirill also contributed to this moral glorification of the Cossack. “Without faith, without spiritual eagerness, without true reliance upon spiritual and moral values,” declared the Patriarch, “it is not only impossible to revive the Cossacks, but the Cossack culture itself cannot exist.”^[23] This culture, he added, is “a lifestyle, formed under the spiritual influence of the Orthodox faith.”^[24]

THE ROLE OF THE COSSACKS IN POST-SOVIET LOCAL WARS

However, are the Cossacks really these so-called white knights as depicted by their admirers? It is, for instance, a well-known fact that in the latter half of the nineteenth century the tsarist government used Cossack troops not only to repress uprisings against the state, but also to perpetrate pogroms against the Jews. An Israeli paper expressed its concern. "Famed for leading anti-Jewish pogroms and close ties to the czar," wrote the paper, "the group is making a comeback with Vladimir Putin's support."^[25] In a 1998 Human Rights Watch report the Cossack ideology is described as "virulently anti-ethnic migrant which often degenerates into a general hatred of all minorities."^[26] After the fall of communism Cossacks became active as mercenaries in conflict zones. They fought in the Georgian breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in Chechnya, in Transnistria (Moldova), and in the former Yugoslavia. During the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 Human Rights Watch reported that "officials in

Java [South Ossetia] also said that Russian Cossacks were fighting alongside Ossetian militias.”^[27] This was confirmed by other sources. The *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote on August 6, 2008, that Cossack atamans (leaders) had announced “that in case of necessity the Cossacks could send 10,000 to 15,000 volunteers to the war, and this will be fighters with lengthy experience in active service.”^[28] This announcement was immediately put in practice. “[I]rregular Cossack paramilitaries, said by some reports to have numbered in the thousands, fought on the Russian/separatist side in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.”^[29] “Cossack volunteers . . . crossed the borders to engage Georgian forces. Cossacks in nearby North Ossetia apparently organized a relatively efficient and rapid system for clothing, equipping and transporting their paramilitaries into the breakaway province to feed them onto combat.”^[30] “Cossack volunteers formed the

second major paramilitary force in the war, the first being the South Ossetian militias. According to reports, the Cossack forces fought with dogged determination.”^[31] Militias, active in South Ossetia in August 2008, have been accused of war crimes. Shortly after the war *The Guardian’s* Luke Harding wrote: “South Ossetian militias, facilitated by the Russian army, are carrying out the worst ethnic cleansing since the war in former Yugoslavia.”^[32]

COSSACKS PATROLLING THE STREETS

Cossacks were not only active in the “frozen conflicts” in the former Soviet space. According to Israpilov, Russia needed “more urgently a filter against threats coming from within the country, than from the external borders.”^[33] In effect, inside Russia’s frontiers also the Cossacks proved to be useful to the authorities, taking on tasks that the authorities preferred to outsource. In the southern Krasnodar province,

a Cossack region that includes Sochi, the site of the 2014 Winter Olympics, such practice was already long established. The regional government's program "Cossack Participation in Protecting Public Order" allowed Cossacks "to be used as the main force for displacing the targeted ethnic minority of Meskhetian Turks. The Cossacks were not too picky about the means they used to do their job: ethnic Turks were subjected to mass beatings and ambushes, their gardens were destroyed, homes looted, and the goods and market stalls of Turkish traders were confiscated."^[34] The Cossacks' efforts were successful, and the Turks left the Krasnodar region after the U.S. government granted them asylum. "The exercise in displacing the Turkish minority," wrote Fatima Tlisova, "became an example of how effective Cossacks may be in dealing with the sensitive task of making people's lives hell while maintaining the appearance of law and order and non-involvement on the part of the

Russian government.”^[35]

In the meantime Cossacks patrolling the streets have become a familiar sight in Krasnodar. Aleksandr Tkachev, the governor of the Krasnodar region, said the Cossacks were entrusted with “forcing out” from his region the unwelcome “intruders” (i.e., Muslim migrants) from adjacent Russian territories of the North Caucasus.^[36] To clarify further, he went on to explain “that the Cossacks should act more freely than the police, whose operations are constrained by ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights.’”^[37] “What they can’t do, he said, a Cossack can.”^[38] After the mass demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg in December 2011 and the spring of 2012 it became clear that the Cossacks, with their sabres, high fur caps, epaulettes, and impressive, broad shouldered uniforms, could be useful also in the rest of the Federation. They displayed all the characteristics necessary

for a pro-Kremlin militia with their militant tradition, their socially conservative attitude, their patriotism, their supposed strict observance of the Russian Orthodox faith, and their staunch support for Vladimir Putin. Moreover, they had still another additional advantage that the Kremlin could not neglect: they could more easily be controlled than Nashi hooligans, while in the population at large they enjoyed a rather positive image.

A NEW PRAETORIAN GUARD?

The potential of the new Cossack reservoir is impressive. About 7 million Russians consider themselves Cossacks, which is approximately 5 percent of the population.^[39] This does not mean that the whole group will be engaged by the state. According to Alexander Beglov, the chairman of the President's Council on Cossack Affairs, there are three ways to be a Cossack. The first is to be active as a member of a

Cossack community in order to preserve its traditions; the second is more passive—to be “just a Cossack”; the third is to sign up on the state’s Cossacks register. Only by choosing this last option does a Cossack oblige himself to serve the state. In order to be accepted, a candidate must be a Russian citizen older than eighteen years, he must have no criminal record, drink no alcohol, “share the ideas of the Cossacks,” and be a Christian Orthodox believer, because “a Cossack cannot be an atheist.”^[40] In 2012 the state register counted 426 organizations with a total of 937,000 active members.^[41] At the end of 2012 the eleven existing Cossack armies were merged into a single All-Russian Cossack Army. The army leader (ataman) has his headquarters in Moscow and will directly report to the commander-in-chief, Vladimir Putin. In this way the Kremlin leader will have—like the tsars before him—his own army, loyal only to him. The Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church

form the two pillars of this new praetorian guard, which functions as a “cordon sanitaire” around Putin. The haste with which Putin is building this personal army is a sign that, weakened after the mass protests of 2011–2012, he wants to strengthen his position in the “internal war” with the opposition. It is, furthermore, a sign that, due to growing dissensions amongst the political elite, he is placing less trust in the traditional vestiges of power: the military, the police, and even the secret service.

A COSSACK POLITICAL PARTY

To test the ground in 2011 Cossack squads had already become active in the southwest district of Moscow. On September 12, 2012, a new step was taken when they made their first appearance in the center of the Russian capital. About six hundred Cossacks were assigned to Moscow, which is fifty per district.^[42] The

Cossacks took their new role of moral police seriously, barring visitors from entering a Moscow art exhibition in which the female punk group Pussy Riot's woollen balaclavas were put over Orthodox Christian icons.^[43]

Cossack activists also led a campaign to cancel a staging of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* in St. Petersburg, accusing the organizers of "propaganda for paedophilia." Their action was successful: the play was canceled. This new moral police could also play a prominent role in the homophobic campaign initiated by the "gay propaganda bill," introducing heavy fines for providing information about homosexuality to minors, which was signed by Putin on June 30, 2013. Alexander Mikhailov, a regional deputy from the Zabaikalsky region, said Cossacks should be allowed to punish gay people physically by flogging them in public with a leather whip.^[44] How privileged the Cossacks' position has become in Putin's Russia became clear when on November 24, 2012, the Cossacks

founded their own political party. According to the official website the program of the party is “based on the traditional values of the Cossacks. This is patriotism, the defense of the interests of the government, and the moral principles of society.”^[45] The party’s chairman, Sergey Bondarev, is a former member of the pro-Kremlin party United Russia and deputy governor of the Rostov region.^[46] The abbreviation of this new Cossack Party of the Russian Federation is CaPRF, which resembles the abbreviation of the Communist Party: CPRF (in Russian, respectively, КаПРФ and КПРФ). It has led to protests from the Communists against this “spoiler project.” Vadim Solovyev, secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party, accused the Kremlin of wanting to siphon off voters: “They seek to water down the electorate.”^[47] According to the Russian analyst Alexander Golts, “All the talk that Cossacks represent generations of

pedigreed fighters imbued with a burning desire to defend the motherlands is nonsense.”^[48] “The Kremlin,” he said, “wants to incorporate an invented ‘elite’ group of Russians into the siloviki.”^[49] Golts saw the Cossack patrols as the first step in the creation of a new mafia: the “first step toward their control over such profitable sectors as collection of parking fees in the city center.”^[50] While these profitable practices might motivate individual Cossacks to enter Putin’s Cossack squads, their importance for the Kremlin lies elsewhere: to build a reliable force that is able to prevent and repress mass protest movements.

NOTES

1. Cf. Shane O’Rourke, “From Region to Nation: The Don Cossacks 1870–1920,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*, eds. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatoliy Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

2007), 221.

2. Vladimir Sineokov, *Kazachestvo i ego gosudarstvennoe znachenie* (Paris: Prince Gortchakoff, 1928), 44.

3. Sineokov, *Kazachestvo i ego gosudarstvennoe znachenie*, 28.

4. O'Rourke, "From Region to Nation," 232.

O'Rourke wrote: "This was not a clinical exercise in removing inveterate opponents of the Soviet regime, but the wholesale slaughter of a people" (233).

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<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/c>

6. Grau, "The Cossack Brotherhood Reborn."

7. Mark Galeotti, "The Cossacks: A Cross-Border Complication to Post-Soviet Eurasia," *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin* (Summer 1995), 56.

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Great Cossack Tradition.”

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20. Vladimir Putin, “Address to the Federal Assembly” (December 12, 2012).

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22. Eke, “Russia’s Cossacks Rise Again.”

23. “The Patriarch on the Cossacks” (October 14, 2009), speech by Patriarch Kirill at the session of the Council for Cossack Affairs under the President of the Russian Federation in Novocherkassk on October 14, 2009.

<http://www.fondkazachestva.org/patriarcheng.h>

24. “The Patriarch on the Cossacks.”

25. Max Seddon, “Russia Restores Cossacks to Positions of Power,” *Times of Israel* (November 28, 2012).

26. Quoted in US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Resource Information Center (August 27, 1999).

27. "Georgia/Russia: Use of Rocket System Can Harm Civilians," *Human Rights Watch* (August 12, 2008).
28. "Shashki nagolo: Donskie Kazaki gotovyatsya voevat v Yuznoy Osetii" (Swords drawn: Don Cossacks preparing themselves to fight in South Ossetia), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (August 6, 2008).
29. "The Cossacks Return," *StrategyPage.com* (September 17, 2010).
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31. "The Cossacks Return."
32. Luke Harding, "Russia's Cruel Intention," *The Guardian* (September 1, 2008).
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37. Lipman, “Putin’s Patriotism Lessons.”

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39. Olesya Gerasimenko, “Kazak: eto ne natsionalnost, eto rytsar pravoslaviya” (A Cossack: this is not a nationality, this is a knight of the Orthodox religion), *Kommersant Vlast* no. 46 (November 19, 2012).

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Part III

The Wheels of War

Chapter 10

Three Lost Wars

From Afghanistan to the First Chechen War

Over the past sixty-five years—not counting the armed interventions of the Warsaw Pact in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968)—the Soviet Union/Russia has fought five wars:

1. The Cold War (1945–1989)
2. The War in Afghanistan (1979–1989)
3. The First Chechen War (1994–1996)
4. The Second Chechen War (1999–2009)
5. The war with Georgia (2008)

The first three wars were lost; the last two were won. The two last wars were Putin's wars: these military actions were carefully prepared, meticulously planned, and ruthlessly conducted by the Putin regime. Why did Putin succeed

where his predecessors failed? What are the differences between these wars? And—an even more important question—what role does war play in Putin’s overall strategy? I will try to answer these questions here and in the following chapters.

THE COLD WAR: CONTAINMENT VERSUS EXPANSIONISM

Much has been written about the origins of the Cold War. In September 1944—only three months after the Allied invasion in Normandy and eight months before the capture of Berlin by the Red Army—the American diplomat and Kremlin watcher George Kennan predicted with great foresight not only the advent of the East-West conflict, but he also indicated its origin. Writing about “the Russian aims in Eastern and Central Europe,” Kennan wrote: “Russian efforts in this area are directed to only one goal: power. The form this power takes, the methods by which it is achieved: these are secondary

questions.”^[1] And he continued:

For the smaller countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the issue is not one of communism or capitalism. It is one of the independence of national life or of domination by a big power which has never shown itself adept at making any permanent compromises with rival power groups. . . . Today, in the autumn of 1944, the Kremlin finds itself committed by its own inclination to the concrete task of becoming the dominant power of Eastern and Central Europe. At the same time, it also finds itself committed by past promises and by world opinion to a vague program which Western statesmen—always so fond of quaint terms agreeable to their electorates—call collaboration. The first of these programs implies taking. The second implies giving. No one can stop Russia from doing the taking, if she is

determined to go through with it. No one can force Russia to do the giving, if she is determined not to go through with it. In these circumstances others may worry.^[2]

That there were, indeed, reasons to worry would soon become clear when Stalin's Soviet Russia began to install grim communist dictatorships in the countries that fell into its sphere of influence. In July 1947, eight months before the communist coup d'état in Prague, George Kennan published in *Foreign Affairs* his famous anonymous article, signed "Mr. X," on "The Sources of Soviet Conduct."^[3] In this article he formulated the principles of what was to become the "containment" policy. This policy would be adopted by President Truman and would lead, two years later—on April 4, 1949—to the foundation of NATO. The origins of the Cold War were the unprecedented territorial expansionist greed of Soviet Russia, the undisguised, unfettered imperialism of Stalin's

totalitarian regime that refused to respect the right of national self-determination of its new “brother nations.” For forty years it led to a huge military buildup by the two superpowers. And it ended, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, with the collapse of the Soviet Empire. This collapse was experienced by the Russians as a defeat and by many in the West as a victory (even if, for reasons of expediency, they did not always say so openly).

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: ANDROPOV'S WAR?

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, this was interpreted by the West as a new phase of Soviet imperialist expansion. It was considered a war of conquest with the aim to add new territory to the Soviet bloc. But, with hindsight, things were more complicated. Initially, there was not so much a *push* from the Russian side to intervene militarily, as a *pull* by Afghan communist

factions to draw the Soviet Union into an internal, Afghan conflict. The Afghan Communist Party (PDPA) had seized power in April 1978. Although the plot had been directed and steered by the KGB, it soon became clear that for the Soviet Union the communist coup d'état was an ambiguous event. The Soviet government had always enjoyed a good relationship with the former, noncommunist Afghan governments—not only when Afghanistan was still a monarchy, but also after the king, Zahir Shah, had been deposed by General Mohammad Daoud in July 1973. Communist insurgents killed Daoud in April 1978, and it was the radical *Khalq* faction of the Afghan Communist Party—led by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin—that came to power. Amin became prime minister, and Taraki became president. It was, however, the second faction in the Communist Party, the more moderate *Parcham* faction led by Babrak Karmal, which had the favor of Moscow. The

Khalq soon came to persecute this faction.

The new regime was soon confronted with a growing opposition inside the country. In March 1979, there was a violent rebellion in Herat, Afghanistan's third largest city. During this rebellion several Soviet advisers were executed. The PDPA, fearful of losing control, turned to Moscow with a demand for military support. A meeting was arranged in Moscow on March 20, 1979, between President Taraki and four Soviet heavyweights: Aleksey Kosygin, chairman of the Council of Ministers; Andrey Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Dmitry Ustinov, Minister of Defense; and Boris Ponomarev, head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Taraki not only demanded weapons, but also military personnel, including pilots and tank drivers. Although Kosygin refused any direct military involvement of Soviet troops on the ground in Afghanistan, Moscow became more nervous when the KGB hinted at the

supposed unreliability of the Afghan prime minister, Hafizullah Amin. Yury Andropov, the head of the KGB, feared that Amin could become an “Afghan Sadat,” turning, eventually, to the West.^[4] “Andropov suspects him to be an agent of the CIA: logical if one knows that Amin has passed four years at Columbia University.”^[5] This suspicion led to dramatic events in the late summer of 1979. KGB agents in Kabul told President Taraki that he should arrest Amin. When, on September 14, Amin was invited to Taraki’s palace to talk with Soviet representatives, Taraki’s guards opened fire and tried to kill him. But Amin escaped. He mobilized his own militia and had Taraki arrested. On October 9, 1979, President Taraki was executed. Hereupon the Soviet Union decided to intervene and replace Amin with its own favorite, Babrak Karmal. Amin was killed by *Vympel* Spetsnaz troops. These are KGB special forces consisting of multilingual officers specializing in combat and sabotage in enemy

territory. "Created in 1979," wrote J. Michael Waller, "Vympel served as the shock force prior to the invasion of Afghanistan. In its first foreign operation, Vympel commandos stormed the presidential palace in Kabul and assassinated the inhabitants, including Afghan President Hafizullah Amin and seven of his children. This allowed the Soviet protégé, Babrak Karmal, to "invite" the Soviet army to intervene in his country."^[6] Amin's assassination took place on December 25, 1979. The next day, Karmal declared himself secretary general of the Afghan Communist Party and prime minister.

The Soviet troops were to stay in Afghanistan for more than a full decade with over a hundred thousand troops permanently involved. In this period at least twenty-five thousand Russian troops were killed. Over one million Afghans lost their lives in the conflict. An important question is who pushed Brezhnev, at that time in poor health, to take

the decision to invade Afghanistan. In the politburo meeting of December 12, 1979, in which the decision was taken, Kosygin, who opposed an intervention, was absent. Many point to KGB chief Yury Andropov as the main instigator. Artyom Borovik, for instance, wrote: "Many servicemen and MID [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] workers told me that the script for the events in Afghanistan was written by the KGB. Initially, Andropov was against the idea of an invasion, but eventually he followed the same reflex that he'd learned some twenty years earlier in Hungary, where he served as an ambassador and where troops had to be sent in 1956."^[7] This interpretation is supported by Svetlana Savranskaya, a political analyst.

The decision to send troops was made on the basis of limited information. According to Soviet veterans of the events, KGB sources were trusted over the military intelligence (GRU) sources. This partly

reflected the growing influence of the KGB chairman Yu. V. Andropov, who controlled the flow of information to General Secretary Brezhnev, who was partially incapacitated and ill for most of 1979. KGB reports from Afghanistan created a picture of urgency and strongly emphasized the possibility of Amin's links to the CIA and U.S. subversive activities in the region.^[8]

It seemed, indeed, that the personal memorandum, sent in early December 1979 by Andropov to Brezhnev, determined Brezhnev's decision.^[9] Anatoly Dobrynin, former Soviet ambassador to the United States, shared this view.^[10] This confirms the observation made by Thierry Wolton that "the Kremlin knew the external world over the borders as if over the high walls of a citadel through the prism of what was reported to it by the KGB. The Organs, in this way, could manipulate the members of the Central Committee and the Politburo,

which, in the closed Soviet universe, was a sacred power.”^[11]

The Soviet military, however, was not happy with the decision to invade Afghanistan. When, on December 10, 1979, Dmitry Ustinov, the defense minister, informed the chief of the General Staff, Nikolay Ogarkov, of the plan, the latter “was surprised and outraged by such a decision.” He said he was “against the introduction of troops, calling it ‘reckless.’”^[12] Georgy M. Kornienko, who at that time was deputy foreign minister under Gromyko, wrote, referring to the position taken by his boss in the politburo meeting on December 12, 1979: “From my conversations with him, already after the introduction of troops, I concluded that it was not Gromyko who said ‘A’ in favour of such decision, but that he was ‘pressured’ into it by Andropov and Ustinov together. Which one of those two was the first to change their initial point of view and spoke in favour of sending

troops, one may only guess.”^[13] It is a fair guess to assume that it was ultimately Yury Andropov who pushed his colleagues in the politburo—including General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev—to take this decision. It was, eventually, Andropov’s seven hundred special forces of the KGB, stationed in Kabul, who made the opening move by attacking the presidential palace and killing Amin. The justification given by the Soviet government for its intervention: that it had been asked for support by the Afghan government, was rather dubious. It is true that in March 1979 President Taraki had asked the Soviet Union to intervene by sending troops. At that time, however, the Soviet leadership had reacted negatively to this request. In December Taraki was no longer there, and Amin, who had executed his predecessor and taken his place, was certainly not in favor of a Soviet intervention. It is, therefore, not surprising to hear that “the Soviet troops . . . suffered from the confusion about their goals—the initial

official mission was to protect the PDPA regime; however, when the troops reached Kabul, their orders were to overthrow Amin and his regime.”^[14]

If one reconstructs the events, it becomes clear that neither the Soviet military, nor the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nor even Brezhnev himself, were at the roots of the fatal—and in the end self-defeating—decision to invade Afghanistan, but the KGB. The “Sadat” role that Andropov ascribed to Amin was probably a deliberate attempt at disinformation by this long-serving KGB chief to manipulate the Soviet leadership. It would not have been the first time. Already in 1956, when he was Soviet ambassador in Budapest, Andropov was one of the main instigators of the Soviet intervention, falsely informing Khrushchev, who initially was reluctant to intervene, that the Russian embassy was being attacked. In 1968 Andropov would again be among the hardliners who were in favor of

sending Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring.^[15] Andropov, a highly intelligent man, was an undisputed expert in manipulation. Ion Mihai Pacepa, a former Romanian two-star general, and the highest intelligence officer to have ever defected from the Soviet bloc, a man who knew Andropov personally, characterized him as follows:

Once settled in the Kremlin, Andropov surrounded himself with KGB officers, who immediately went on a propaganda offensive to introduce him to the West as a “moderate” Communist and a sensitive, warm, Western-oriented man who allegedly enjoyed an occasional drink of Scotch, liked to read English novels, and loved listening to American jazz and the music of Beethoven. In actual fact, Andropov did not drink, as he was already terminally ill from a kidney disorder, and

the rest of the portrayal was equally false.^[16]

Andropov may be considered the secret “godfather” of Russia’s war in Afghanistan.^[17] The irony, however, was that this costly, protracted, and unwinnable guerrilla war in a mountainous and hostile environment would soon exhibit the internal weaknesses of Soviet society. This would convince Andropov—even before he became general secretary of the CPSU in 1983—of the necessity of a fundamental and profound reform of the Soviet system. And the man whom he had in mind to conduct these reforms was Mikhail Gorbachev.^[18]

THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR: FOUR DIFFERENCES WITH FORMER WARS

Artyom Borovik wrote: “As a general to whom I became quite close in Afghanistan put it, ‘All of the wars that Russia lost led to social reforms,

while all of the wars it won led to the strengthening of totalitarianism.”^[19] This seems, indeed, to be true in the cases of both the Cold War and the war in Afghanistan. These two lost wars led, first, to Gorbachev’s perestroika, and, subsequently, to the introduction of a market economy and a pluralistic democracy. But one may ask if this reformist dynamic was still operative when the Soviet Union’s successor state, the Russian Federation, lost the First Chechen War (1994–1996). There were, to begin with, four important differences between the Cold War and the war in Afghanistan on the one hand, and the war in Chechnya on the other. These differences concerned the

1. subject of the war,
2. its ideological interpretation,
3. its geopolitical meaning, and
4. the role of the army in the war.

In regard to the first point, the Cold War and the war in Afghanistan were conducted by the Soviet Union. The war in Chechnya, however, was conducted by the Russian Federation. In the latter case, the actor was no longer the world's second superpower, but a (smaller) country that had gone through a process of decolonization and was struggling to maintain its great power status.

The second difference was that the two former wars were still interpreted in the ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism. This meant that both wars were considered expansive wars. Marxism offered an ideological certainty that the world was irrevocably moving toward the socialist world revolution. Even the Cold War was considered only a temporary stalemate between capitalism and socialism, which—in the end—would give way to a historic victory of socialism over capitalism. Yury Andropov, like his mentor, the party ideologue Mikhail Suslov, still saw the war in Afghanistan

through this prism. It was a step in the progressive evolution of the socialist camp. The First Chechen War, however, was completely different. Russia had definitively lost its faith in the socialist revolution. It had accepted the loss of the communist dream and recognized the superiority of the capitalist system. There was, therefore, no longer an ideologically conditioned certainty of a victory. The outcome of the Chechen war was considered unpredictable and contingent.

A third difference was geopolitical. The war in Chechnya was not a war conducted by a proud, expanding empire *outside its borders*, but a war conducted by a recently amputated empire *inside its borders*. Russia, which had shrunk to the size of sixteenth-century Muscovy, fought in Chechnya not an offensive, expansive war, but a *defensive* war against the danger of dismemberment.

A fourth difference was the dire situation of the Russian army. Demoralized by the demise

of the Soviet Union, reduced in numbers, underfunded, undertrained, and deeply corrupt, the Russian army was a shadow of its powerful and feared Soviet predecessor. Additionally, the Russian leadership made important psychological and strategic miscalculations. It was a psychological miscalculation to underestimate the strength of the Chechen drive for national independence. This first miscalculation led to a second, strategic miscalculation, which was to consider the capture of Grozny and the rest of Chechnya as an easy walkover.

THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR: YELTSIN'S WAR

On October 27, 1991, the Chechens chose Djohar Dudayev, a former Soviet general, as their president. Moscow immediately contested the legitimacy of the elections. Five days later Dudayev declared the independence of Chechnya. President Yeltsin reacted on November 8, 1991, by declaring a state of

emergency in Chechnya and sending 2,500 troops of the Interior Ministry and the KGB to the rebellious republic. These troops were blocked at Grozny airport by thousands of demonstrators. Fearing an escalation, Moscow decided to withdraw its troops. The Soviet Union was at that time in complete turmoil and would disintegrate some weeks later. The government was therefore more concerned with other, seemingly more urgent problems. But when, in 1994, the situation had calmed down, Moscow once again turned its attention to the rebellious republic in the North Caucasus that for three years had been *de facto* independent. Hoping to resolve the problem by a simple coup d'état Moscow supported, in November 1994, a rebellion by rival Chechen factions against the government of Dudayev. The putsch, however, failed and the Russian government, which denied being involved in the coup, was embarrassed by the fact that seven hundred regular Russian soldiers were among

the captured rebels. After this humiliation Yeltsin decided to attack, and in the beginning of December 1994 Russian troops invaded Chechnya. Quite unexpectedly, however, these troops met with a fierce resistance.

The Russian government had totally underestimated the power of Chechen nationalism. This nationalism was the result of two factors. The first was the relatively late incorporation of the Chechen (and ethnically related Ingushi)^[20] nation into the Russian empire. Chechnya was only incorporated in the 1860s, after a long and protracted colonial war of conquest that took more than thirty years. A second and even more important source of the Chechen drive for independence was the persecution of the Chechen nation by Stalin's regime. On February 23, 1944, Red Army Day, Stalin deported the Chechen population for alleged treason. Four hundred thousand Chechens—old and young, men, women, and children—were put in trains and trucks and

transported in the freezing cold of the barren winter to unknown destinations in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. A quarter of them, up to 100,000–125,000 Chechens, died in transit or after their arrival due to the harsh conditions.^[21] It was an example of ethnic cleansing with clear racist undertones. Officially, however, racism was absent in the Soviet Union. Eric D. Weitz wrote:

The Soviets explicitly and loudly rejected the ideology of race. . . .^[22] Yet at the same time, traces of racial politics crept into Soviet nationalities policies, especially between 1937 and 1953. The state not only repressed overly fervent and potentially dangerous expressions of nationalism and deported entire national groups. In the Stalin period especially, particular populations were endowed with immutable traits that every member of the group possessed and that were passed

from one generation to the next. The particular traits . . . could lead to round-ups, forced deportations, and resettlement in horrendous conditions. Under Iosif Stalin, the Soviets practiced—intermittently, inconsistently, to be sure—racial politics without the overt concept and ideology of race.^[23]

Only in 1957, in the time of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, were the deported Chechens allowed to return to their home country. This deportation is deeply engraved in the Chechen national consciousness. Most of the Chechen leaders in the 1990s were born in exile. The gruesome Chechen fate, suffered at the hands of Stalin and his executioners, had fundamentally, and probably definitively, compromised any Chechen loyalty to the Russian state. "There is perhaps a special emotional state," wrote Georgi Derluguian, "known only to the peoples that have been

subjected to genocide in the past—the ‘never again!’ sentiment that reduces the whole world to the dilemma of survival. It provided the extraordinary determination and moral edge to the Chechen fighters in the first war.”^[24] The Russians, however, never having come to terms with the crimes of their Stalinist past, had no understanding of the grievances of the Chechen nation.

CHECHNYA: RUSSIA’S WHIPPING BOY

A complicating factor was that the so-called Chechen question would soon become instrumentalized by the Russian power-elite for internal, political reasons. In the Duma elections of December 1993 Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party had won 22.9 percent of the vote—which was much more than the 15 percent of Russia’s Choice, the pro-Kremlin party at that time. The writing was clearly on the wall for Yeltsin, whose popularity at that

time was at a historical low and reached not even 10 percent. A victory for him at the presidential elections of 1996 was far from sure, and some even feared that the communist leader Zyuganov had a chance of being elected. Yeltsin's advisers considered a quick victory in Chechnya would increase the ailing popularity of the incumbent president. The war plans, however, met with opposition in the army that had not yet digested its defeat in Afghanistan. Deputy Defence Minister General Boris Gromov openly declared himself against an intervention, and General Eduard Vorobyev, deputy head of the ground forces, refused to lead the invasion.^[25]

Nevertheless Yeltsin issued on November 30, 1994, presidential decree No. 2137c, authorizing the invasion. This was a *secret* decree—which means that it was unconstitutional. On December 11, 1994, the day of the invasion, this decree was supplanted by another secret, and therefore equally

unconstitutional, decree No. 2169c.^[26] From the beginning, therefore, this war was unconstitutional. When the war did not turn out to be the easy walkover that was expected, opposition to the war escalated. Grozny was only captured at the end of February 1995, after three months of heavy fighting. When the Russians were confronted with many casualties during their first attacks on Grozny (it cost the lives of two thousand Russian soldiers), they started a carpet bombing of the city which led to an unprecedented massacre of the civilian population. According to eyewitness reports, “they continued to pound the rebel-held quarter [of Grozny] with thousands of guns, rockets, and bombs day and night To put the intensity of firing in perspective, the highest level of firing recorded in Sarajevo was 3,500 heavy detonations per day. In Grozny in early February, a colleague of mine counted 4,000 detonations per hour.”^[27] The Russian army could have saved civilian lives by using

precision-guided weapons, which they had in their arsenal. According to Gregory J. Celestan, “the word in the [Russian] higher command is that these highly advanced armaments were too expensive to be wasted’ in Chechnya and needed to be kept for more serious contingencies.”^[28] One may doubt, however, that financial calculations alone were the reason for this indiscriminate bombing of a densely populated city. It seems to have been a deliberate choice with the goal to “bomb the Chechen population into submission.” The bombardments caused a hecatomb that took the lives of an estimated twenty-five thousand to twenty-nine thousand inhabitants—mostly civilians, especially older and disabled people and children, who had been unable to flee the city. As a point of comparison: the Allied bombardment of the German city of Dresden in February 1945 involved a civilian death toll of about twenty-five thousand people. This means that the bombardments of Grozny in the first

months of 1995 were probably the most lethal attack on an open city in Europe since the end of World War II. This war was not even called a war. The Russian government pretended it was a “police action” (*militseyskaya operatsiya*) against a group of its own citizens. Bombarding an open city for months, causing a civilian death toll that equals that of Dresden at the end of World War II, and calling it a police action was not only extremely cynical, it was an outright criminal violation of human rights, and above all of the most basic human right: the right to life.

Despite the fact that Grozny and the other cities were occupied, and despite their heavy losses, the Chechens went on fighting. The war in Chechnya became more and more unpopular in Russia. Instead of promoting Yeltsin’s reelection, the war began to endanger it. On February 9, 1996, four months before the presidential election would be held, the Moscow correspondent of *The Washington Post*

wrote: "President Boris Yeltsin acknowledged today that he cannot be reelected if Russia's 14-month-old war against the separatist movement in Chechnya continues Many Russians have recognized that the war is an enormous liability for Yeltsin."^[29] On March 31, 1996, in a nationwide televised speech, Yeltsin presented a peace plan, consisting of an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of some Russian troops, and mediation with Dudayev. The peace plan received at that time much positive publicity on Berezovsky's pro-Yeltsin TV channel ORT, which may have salvaged Yeltsin's reelection. But in reality the fighting still went on, and, in August 1996, the Chechens even succeeded in recapturing Grozny. Finally, on August 31, 1996, Yeltsin's envoy, General Aleksandr Lebed, signed a ceasefire with the Chechen commander, Aslan Mashkadov, in the Daghestani town of Khasavyurt. The Russians promised to withdraw their troops from Chechnya by the end of 1996 and to postpone a

final decision on Chechnya's status until December 31, 2001.

A GENOCIDE?

Thomas de Waal, an analyst who visited Grozny after the war, described the city in the following words:

The destruction wrought on Grozny makes even the damage to a battle-scarred town like Sarajevo seem light. Wandering through the streets after its ruination during the first Chechen war in 1994–1996, it was hard to conceive how conventional weaponry had done so much harm. The centre of the city was reduced to rubble, with many of the inhabitants of these streets lying in mass graves. Ruins had been swept into tottering piles. Streets had become empty thoroughfares that ran between large areas of sky. If an occasional building had escaped the bombing, it was

only a large windowless façade facing nowhere. It would have seemed more plausible to be told that the place had suffered a nuclear attack or some giant natural catastrophe.^[30]

Why this virulent, brutal overreaction by the Kremlin against a small mountain people? In a seminar organized by the Russian human rights organization Memorial that took place in Moscow in March 1995, shortly after the bombardment campaign on Grozny had started, one of the speakers, Nikolay Kandyba, already spoke of a genocide.^[31] Another speaker, Mara Polyakova, attacked the criminal character of the war. She criticized the formulation of the presidential decree in which President Yeltsin had announced that the war would be conducted “with all the means that the government has at its disposal.”

A President who acts according to the laws

and the Constitution, should say: “with all lawful and constitutional means. . . . [32] He knows very well that not only are such means being used that are allowed by the law and the Constitution, but also those that are not allowed by them. The possibility of the use of such means against the population of one’s own country is not allowed by any legal norms. Thereby, instead of repressing these acts, the President through [his declarations in] the mass media condones them and takes the responsibility for everything that happens there. [33]

Another participant, Vil Kikot from Moscow State Law Academy, referred to the historical relations between Chechnya and Russia, “in the light of which Russia must seem to be a cruel enemy to Chechens.” [34] He asked for what reason it was impossible for Chechnya to secede from Russia, and he referred to the

peaceful secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905.^[35] He could also have referred to another, more recent, example, such as Slovakia's secession from Czechoslovakia. In this case not only did the secession take place in a peaceful way, but also the relative size of the territory and the population was much more important. Chechnya, with its surface of 19,300 square kilometers, occupies a little bit more than 1 *percent* of the territory of the Russian Federation, and its population of about 1.2 million is even less than 1 percent of Russia's total population. Inga Mikhaylovskaya of the Russian-American Project Group on Human Rights stated "that the treaty character of the Russian Federation was illusory, since there is no clear legislative statement on the presence or absence of the right of [the] federative subject to leave the federation."^[36]

Sergey Kovalyov, a widely respected former dissident who was appointed by Yeltsin to chair

the Presidential Human Rights Commission,^[37] remarked that “a negotiated resolution of the crisis was also obstructed by the fact that the federal authorities did not take account of the historical role which Russia had played in the fate of the Chechen people.”^[38] According to him, “the majority of Russians are not inclined to feel personal guilt [for what had earlier happened in Chechnya], and this, in my opinion, is a major obstacle on the path of our evolution toward a civilized civil society.”^[39] It might be going too far, as did Kovalyov, to demand from the Russians to feel a *personal* guilt for what happened to the Chechens during the Stalinist era. One can only experience a personal guilt for one’s own deeds. The Russian population should, however, assume a collective, Russian *responsibility* for what has happened in the small Caucasian republic.^[40] The reason why the Russian population was reluctant to assume a historical responsibility

can be explained by two factors. The first reason would be its feeling of having been itself a victim of Stalin's policies. The second reason would be its disenfranchised status: it never was a responsible subject of history, but rather a malleable object in the hands of authoritarian leaders. However, even taking these facts into consideration, the Russian citizens cannot deny that Stalin's crimes were committed in *their* name.

On the eve of the second Chechen War, on September 8, 1999, Putin said: "Russia is defending itself. We have been attacked. And therefore we must throw off all syndromes, including the guilt syndrome."^[41] The reason why the Russian leadership did not assume any guilt or historical responsibility is different. Their denial was clearly functional. It had to do with the fact that in post-Soviet Russia Chechnya began to play an increasingly important role in Russia's internal policy. The political elite acted upon the maxim that if

Chechnya did not exist, it should have been invented. For Russian politicians Chechnya was the ideal *Prügelknabe*, the ideal whipping boy who could be used to consolidate their own grip on power. Sergey Kovalyov already clearly saw this role of the war in Chechnya.

The real cause of the war in Chechnya is neither Grozny nor in the entire Caucasus region: it is in Moscow. The war pushed aside that corner of the curtain that obscured the real power struggle for control of Russia. Unfortunately, it is not liberal, but the most hard-line forces—those from the military-industrial complex and the former KGB—who are celebrating that victory in the power struggle now, . . . the true goal of the war in Chechnya was to send a clear-cut message to the entire Russian population: “The time for talking about democracy in Russia is up. It’s time to introduce some order in this country

and we'll do it whatever the cost.”^[42]

Kovalyov also pointed to the central role of the FSB—the KGB’s successor organization—in starting the First Chechen War. The FSB was not only in the forefront *before* the war, but equally *during* the war. “In the early months of the intervention, up to early February 1995,” wrote Vicken Cheterian, “it was the generals of the FSB—the intelligence services—who were obliged to lead the military operations, with catastrophic consequences.”^[43] An invisible red line connects, therefore, the war in Afghanistan with the first war in Chechnya, that is, *the leading role* of the KGB/FSB in instigating and conducting both wars. We will see in the next chapter how the spooks of the Russian secret services equally played an important role in the preparation of the Second Chechen War, which started as Yeltsin’s war, but was, in fact, Putin’s war.

NOTES

1. George F. Kennan, "Russia: Seven Years Later," in *Memoirs 1925–1950*, ed. George F. Kennan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 521.
2. Kennan, "Russia: Seven Years Later," 521–522.
3. Mr. X (George F. Kennan), "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947). This article was an elaboration of his "Long Telegram" of February 22, 1946, to the US Treasury Department. In this telegram he answered the question of the US Treasury to the US Embassy in Moscow why the Soviet Union did not support the recently founded World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In the telegram Kennan wrote that the Soviet Union was "impervious to the logic of reason," but that it was "highly sensitive to the logic of force."
4. Cf. Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 353.
5. Andreï Kozovoï, *Les services secrets Russes*:

Des tsars à Poutine (Paris: Tallandier, 2010), 253.

6. J. Michael Waller, *Secret Empire: The KGB in Russia Today* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 127.

7. Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 9.

8. Svetlana Savranskaya, ed., "The September 11th Sourcebooks, Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War: The Soviet Experience in Afghanistan: Russian Documents and Memoirs," *National Security Archive* (October 9, 2001), 1.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBE>

9. "Personal Memorandum, Andropov to Brezhnev, n.d. [early December 1979]," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8–9, (Winter 1996–97), 159–60. In this memorandum Andropov wrote that "alarming information started to arrive about Amin's secret activities, forewarning of a possible political shift to the West." Andropov said to have been "contacted

by [a] group of Afghan communists abroad.” He mentioned the name of Babrak Karmal, “who had worked out a plan for opposing Amin and creating new party and state organs. But Amin, as a preventive measure, had begun mass arrests of ‘suspect persons’ (300 people have been shot).” His conclusion was that the situation was urgent. “We have two battalions stationed in Kabul,” wrote Andropov. “It appears that this is entirely sufficient for a successful operation.” He added that “it would be wise to have a military group close to the border. In case of the deployment of military forces we could at the same time decide various questions pertaining to the liquidation of gangs.” The implementation of the given operation “would allow us to decide the question of defending the gains of the April revolution.”

10. Savranskaya, ed., “The September 11th Source Books, Volume II,” 5.

11. Thierry Wolton, *Le KGB au pouvoir: Le*

systeme Poutine (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 24.

12. Alexander Lyakhovsky, *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan*, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya (Moscow: GPI Iskon, 1995), 109–112. The author, Major General Lyakhovsky, served during the war in Afghanistan as assistant to General V. Varennikov, commander of the Operative Group of the Defense Ministry.
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>.

13. Georgy M. Kornienko, *The Cold War: Testimony of a Participant*, translated by Svetlana Savranskaya (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnie otnosheniya, 1994), 193.
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>.

14. Savranskaya, ed., “The September 11th Sourcebooks Volume II,” 2–3.

15. Cf. Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 389–390: “At the beginning of that month [July] a two-day Politburo meeting found Brezhnev and Kosygin still favouring intense pressure on Dubček—to remove the people in high office whom the Soviet leadership most objected to,

and to crack down on the mass media— whereas several others already favoured the use of force. They included KGB chairman Yury Andropov and the Central Committee secretary (later to be minister of defense) who supervised the military and military industry, Dmitry Ustinov.”

16. Ion Mihai Pacepa, “No Peter the Great: Vladimir Putin is in the Andropov Mold,” *National Review Online* (September 20, 2004).

17. Cf. Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova, *Inside the Kremlin* (London: W.H. Allen & Co Plc., 1988), 246: “We know, then, where to assign responsibility for that occupation [of Afghanistan]. Although it took place in the last phase of the Brezhnev era, the authorship of that deed must be ascribed to the empire’s regent, Andropov (by that time all-powerful), his supporters, and others he could count on.”

18. Cf. Vladimir Fédorovski, *Le Fantôme de Staline* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2007), 227. Before he died Andropov had informed his

entourage that he wanted Gorbachev to succeed him as general secretary. The politburo, however, ignored Andropov's wish and chose, after four days of deliberations, the seventy-three-year-old Chernenko. Andropov's preference for Gorbachev, however, had nothing to do with Andropov's supposed "liberal" or "democratic" leanings. Andropov wanted economic reforms (such as he had witnessed in Kadar's Hungary), while maintaining a repressive political regime. Gorbachev would later remain rather evasive about his close relationship with the former KGB chief. In his conversations with the Czech dissident (and study friend) Zdeněk Mlynář he called Andropov "a very interesting and complex personality. . . . Andropov definitely wanted to start making changes, . . . but there were certain bounds he could not go beyond; he was too deeply entrenched in his own past experience—it held him firmly in its grasp." (Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdeněk Mlynář,

Conversations with Gorbachev on Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 50.)

19. Borovik, *The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan*, 14.

20. The related Chechens and Ingushes lived together in the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. When the Ingush, who constituted a minority, did not want to follow the Chechens on the road toward independence, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation founded, in June 1992, the Republic of Ingushetia.

21. John B. Dunlop quotes the testimony of one of the victims, a Chechen communist, as follows: "Packed in overcrowded cattle cars, without light or water, we spent almost a month heading to an unknown destination Typhus broke out. No treatment was available . . . The dead were buried in snow." According

to Dunlop, “the local populace of settlements at which the special trains stopped were strictly forbidden to assist the dying by giving them water or medicine. In some cars, 50 percent of the imprisoned Chechens and Ingush were said to have perished.” (John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 68.)

22. Eric D. Weitz, “Racial Politics without the Concept: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 3.

23. Weitz, “Racial Politics Without the Concept,” 3.

24. Georgi Derluguan, “Introduction,” in Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches of Chechnya* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20.

25. Cf. Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia’s Troubled Frontier* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 258.

26. John B. Dunlop, “‘Storm in Moscow’: A Plan of the Yeltsin ‘Family’ to Destabilize Russia,” *Project on Systemic Change and International Security in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (October 8, 2004), 2.
27. Frederick C. Cuny, “Killing Chechnya,” *New York Review of Books* (April 6, 1995).
28. Maj. Gregory J. Celestan, “Wounded Bear: The Ongoing Russian Military Operation in Chechnya,” *Foreign Military Studies Office Publications* (August 1996).
<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/v>
29. David Hoffman, “Yeltsin Says a 2nd Term Depends on Ending War; Chernomyrdin Named to Seek Chechnya Settlement,” *The Washington Post* (February 9, 1996).
30. Thomas de Waal, “Introduction,” in Anna Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War*, (London: The Harvill Press, 2007), xiii–xiv.
31. S. Kovalyov, “Neskolko replik po povodu chechenskogo konflikta,” in *Pravovye aspekty*

Chechenskogo krizisa: Materialy seminara, eds. L. I. Bogoraz et al. (Moscow: Memorial, 1995), 82.

32. M. Polyakova, “Kriminalnye aspekty voennykh sobytii v Chechne,” in *Pravovye aspekty*, eds. L. I. Bogoraz et al., 44.

33. Polyakova, “Kriminalnye aspekty voennykh sobytii v Chechne,” 44–45.

34. Kovalyov, “Summary,” in *Pravovye aspekty*, eds. L. I. Bogoraz et al., 179.

35. Kovalyov, “Neskolko replik po povodu chechenskogo konflikta,” 83.

36. Kovalyov, “Summary,” in *Pravovye aspekty*, eds. L. I. Bogoraz et al., 176. Secession was not an option, neither in Imperial Russia nor in the Soviet Union. This fact was recognized by Yeltsin. “The Soviet empire,” he wrote, “spanning one-sixth of the earth’s surface, was built over the course of many years according, without the shadow of a doubt, to an ironclad plan. The internal contradictions were ignored. No one proposed a scenario that allowed the

empire to abandon some of its territories or yield to the formation of new states. They didn't even think of it." (Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 53). The Chechen case was certainly not helped by the inappropriate comparison made by US President Bill Clinton during a press conference in Moscow in April 1996, when Clinton said: "I would remind you that we once had a civil war in our country, in which we lost on a per capita basis far more people than we lost in any of the wars of the twentieth century, over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for, that no state had a right to withdrawal from our Union." (Quoted in Thomas de Waal, "The Chechen Conflict and the Outside World," *Crimes of War Project* (April 18, 2003).)

<http://www.crimesofwar.org/chechnya-mag/chech-waal.html>.

37. Sergey Kovalyov stands out as a unique personality in post-Soviet politics. Born in 1930, he studied biology, was arrested as a dissident

in 1974, and was sent for seven years to a labor camp in the Perm region. This was followed by an exile of three years. In 1990 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) of the Soviet Union, and from 1993 he was a member of the State Duma. As a founder and cochairman of the human rights organization Memorial he was appointed in 1994 by Yeltsin to become chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Commission. He resigned in 1996 because of the war in Chechnya.

38. Kovalyov, "Summary," in *Pravovye aspekty*, eds. L. I. Bogoraz et al., 180.

39. Kovalyov, "Neskolko replik po povodu chechenskogo konflikta," 78.

40. Interesting in this context are Elazar Barkan's remarks on the important role apologies play in improving the relations between nations. Barkan wrote that "the new international emphasis on morality has been characterized not only by accusing other countries of human rights abuses but also by

self-examination. The leaders of the policies of a new internationalism—Clinton, Blair, Chirac, and Schröder—all have previously apologized and repented for gross historical crimes in their own countries and for policies that ignored human rights. These actions did not wipe the slate clean, nor . . . were they a total novelty or unprecedented. Yet the dramatic shift produced a new scale: Moral issues came to dominate public attention and political issues and displayed the willingness of nations to embrace their own guilt. This national self-reflexivity is the new guilt of nations.” (Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), xvii.) Although I would prefer to speak of “responsibility of nations” instead of “guilt of nations” (the latter term is too “psychological” and comes too close to *collective* guilt), I agree with Barkan when he writes that the “interaction between perpetrator and victim is a new form of political

negotiation that enables the rewriting of memory and historical identity in ways that both can share” (viii).

41. Quoted in Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 335. Yeltsin added: “But the guilt syndrome persists. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about Chechnya, even in Russia itself. But more often it’s the West trying to instill this feeling of guilt in us” (ibid.). Yeltsin, tellingly, referred to a *guilt syndrome*, qualifying guilt feelings as some kind of a psychological disorder. Yeltsin apparently rejected any guilt and considered attempts at putting the crimes committed against the Chechen population on the agenda a deliberate policy of the West to weaken Russia.

42. Quoted in Emma Gilligan, *Defending Human Rights in Russia: Sergei Kovalyov, Dissident and Human Rights Commissioner 1969–2003* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 203.

43. Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia’s Troubled Frontier*, 259.

Chapter 11

The Mysterious Apartment Bombings

Detonator of the Second Chechen War

The Second Chechen War was “Putin’s War.” This fact was immediately recognized by Sergey Kovalyov, who chose it as the title of an article for the *New York Review of Books* in February 2000.^[1] Putin’s war would surpass the First Chechen War in cruelty, lawlessness, cynicism, and murderous violence. It would, additionally, become the longest war that was fought in Europe after the Second World War. There were, however, five important differences with the First Chechen War.

1. Unlike the First Chechen War, the Second Chechen War consisted of two phases, the first of which was the

detonator of the second. The first phase was a secret war against the Russian population; the second phase was an open war against the Chechen population. The first phase consisted of an incursion of Chechen rebels into Dagestan in Russia proper and a series of apartment bombings in the Russian Federation of which Chechen militias were accused. However, soon allegations hinted at a possible implication of the FSB, the Russian secret service.

2. The war was given another ideological justification. The First Chechen War was still presented as a war against Chechen “separatists” or “bandits.” The Second Chechen War was presented as a war against “international Islamist terrorism.”
3. In the First Chechen War the Russian soldiers were almost exclusively conscripts. In the Second Chechen War, alongside conscripts, contract soldiers (*kontraktniki*)

also were engaged. This could explain the increased ferocity of the violence against the civilian population.

4. The First Chechen War was, on the Russian side, fought mainly by ethnic Russian soldiers. In the Second Chechen War, however, the Kremlin, after some time, went over to a *Chechenization* of the conflict, in which Chechens fought Chechens. This policy of divide and rule not only secured Russia a “victory”—albeit provisional and still fragile—but it was an additional factor that contributed to the growth in violence against the civilian population.
5. When the First Chechen War started, Russia was not a member of the Council of Europe. It became a member only on February 28, 1996—one month before Yeltsin presented his peace plan that ended the First Chechen War. During the Second Chechen War, however, Russia was

a fully fledged member of the Council and there was a flagrant contradiction between the humanitarian obligations required by the membership of this organization and the situation on the ground in Chechnya.

THE DETONATOR: A SECRET WAR AGAINST THE RUSSIAN POPULATION?

The official reason, given in September 1999 by the Russian government, which, at that time, was headed by prime minister Vladimir Putin, for starting the second war in Chechnya was a series of events. These events started with an incursion by the radical Chechen leader Shamil Basayev with two thousand armed men into the neighboring republic of Dagestan on August 8, 1999. This attack was followed by a series of terrorist explosions in apartment buildings in Buikansk, Moscow, and Volgodonsk in September. These explosions were immediately ascribed to Chechen terrorists. There remain,

however, many unanswered questions concerning the Chechen incursion into Dagestan, as well as the apartment explosions, that cast doubt on the official version. From different sides, the Russian authorities have been accused of presenting an official version of the events that was, in effect, a smokescreen behind which another, darker and murkier reality was hidden. The Second Chechen War was presented by the Russian authorities as a spontaneous Russian response to an unexpected Chechen attack. However, the facts do not completely fit this narrative. Different authors suggest that, as in the case of the First Chechen War, the military attack was carefully planned within the Kremlin walls—only this time better.

When Yeltsin started the First Chechen War he had two objectives: first, to end the political instability in this region, and, second, to safeguard his reelection. The purpose of the Second Chechen War was to defend the

interests of the Kremlin, especially of the “Family,” the group around Yeltsin’s daughter Tatyana Dyachenko. This group included oligarchs, such as Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich, but also Aleksandr Voloshin, the head of the presidential administration, and his two predecessors Valentin Yumashev (who would marry Tatyana in 2002) and Anatoly Chubais. On May 25, 1998, Vladimir Putin was appointed first deputy head of the presidential administration. Three months later, on July 25, 1998, he became director of the FSB, the secret service. Putin was considered by the members of the Family to be one of them. He certainly *was* one of them, although he had his personal agenda.

PANIC IN THE FAMILY

In the spring of 1999 the Family had a sense of urgency that was bordering on panic. This time the situation was even more pressing than in 1994—before the start of the First Chechen

War. Soon, in December 1999, there would be elections for the State Duma, followed by the presidential election in the spring of 2000. According to the constitution, Boris Yeltsin, having served two terms, would have to leave the Kremlin. This imminent change of the country's leadership was extremely threatening. Yevgeny Primakov, who was appointed prime minister in September 1998 under the pressure of a hostile Duma, was working closely together with Yury Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow. Both men had a good chance of winning the parliamentary elections in December. And one of them could become the next president. Primakov had already threatened to sue all oligarchs who illegally had enriched themselves. This happened at the same time as the Swiss authorities had opened an investigation into the so-called Mabetex affair. Mabetex was a construction company that was said to have paid \$15 million in kickbacks to Yeltsin, his two daughters, and senior Kremlin officials, in order

to receive a renovation contract for the Kremlin buildings. At the same time US investigators alleged that \$10 billion in funds from Russia had been illegally deposited in the Bank of New York. It was suspected that part of it came from a \$20 billion loan the IMF had paid to Russia since 1992 to stabilize the economy. Members of the Family were not only afraid that the new leadership would strip them of their newly acquired wealth, but—even worse—they feared that they could end up in prison. There were ominous signs on the wall. Russia's highest investigator, Procurator General Yury Skuratov, had already begun a series of investigations that included the Mabetex affair and irregularities at Aeroflot and the Russian Central Bank, which were all connected with the Family.^[2] It was in this context of a regime in panic that felt itself increasingly cornered, that the search for a suitable successor to Yeltsin began.

In his memoirs Yeltsin wrote about his

attempts to find a suitable successor, where “suitable” meant a person who was capable and strong-willed, and at the same time trustworthy enough to give the Family a guarantee that its members would not be persecuted in the courts after Yeltsin would have left office. However, whether or not such a successor could be found in time was very uncertain. Therefore Yeltsin and the Family also prepared for a second option: to declare a state of emergency, disband the Duma, ban the Communist Party, and postpone the elections. On May 16, 1999, however, the option of such a Bonapartist coup d'état was dropped. On this day the Communist opposition in the State Duma failed to muster enough votes to start an impeachment procedure against Yeltsin. (One of the five charges against Yeltsin was, ironically, that he had started the first war against Chechnya.)^[3] Immediately after the vote Yeltsin sacked Primakov as prime minister and appointed Sergey Stepashin, minister of the

interior and former FSB chief, in his place. It seemed at first that Stepashin was Yeltsin's ultimate choice for "Operation Successor." But Yeltsin soon had doubts about the new man. "Stepashin was soft," Yeltsin wrote in his memoirs, "and he liked to pose a bit. He loved theatrical gestures. I wasn't certain he could hold out to the end or display that tremendous will and resolve needed in a fierce political battle. I couldn't imagine a president of Russia without these tough character traits."^[4] Within three months Stepashin was sacked and, on August 9, 1999, he was replaced by the reserved and uncharismatic *apparatchik* Vladimir Putin.

Whatever option the Family would choose: a Bonapartist coup d'état or "Operation Successor"—in *both* cases an appropriate climate would have to be created in Russia: in the first case to justify a state of emergency, in the second case to boost the popularity of the Family's presidential candidate.^[5] And again—

as in 1994—the Chechen option was chosen. At the end of March 1999 a meeting of the “power ministers” was held in which Sergey Stepashin, at that time still minister of the interior, Igor Sergeyev, minister of defense, Anatoly Kvashnin, head of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, and Vladimir Putin, director of the FSB, participated.^[6] They adopted a plan to intervene militarily in Chechnya. The original plan, considered in March 1999, was more modest than the one that would ultimately be chosen. It intended just “to seal Chechnya off” by creating a *cordon sanitaire* around the republic. The plan included the occupation of about one third of the Chechen territory north of the river Terek—but it did not include the capture of the capital, Grozny. Additionally, the border zone of Chechnya with Georgia would be occupied. In April the Russian Security Council approved this plan. At that point, this council had, for only a few days, been headed by Putin.

However, in May 1999—after the dismissal of Prime Minister Primakov, who had been critical of an intervention in Chechnya—this moderate plan would be changed and another, more radical plan adopted. This was a plan to reconquer the *whole* Chechen republic and bring it back into the Russian Federation. It is unclear how far these changes were affected by developments on the ground in Chechnya. Radical Wahhabists within the Chechen government, led by Shamil Basayev, convened, in April 1999 in Grozny, a Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan to discuss the unification of the two republics into a caliphate. In May a group of about sixty radicals crossed the border into Dagestan and wounded eleven servicemen and two policemen before retreating. This led to the first attacks by the Russian air force against radical positions in Chechnya since the first Chechen War.^[7] However, it was clear that, in order to start an all-out war, a more serious *casus belli* had to be

found.

A REAL OR CONSTRUCTED *CASUS BELLI*? THE ALLEGED CHECHEN ATTACK ON DAGESTAN

This *casus belli* was a second and more important incursion of Chechen rebels into Dagestan. A Chechen attack on another Caucasian republic that was—unlike Chechnya itself—an undisputed part of the Russian Federation, could not be accepted, and clearly justified a counterattack. On August 8, 1999, an incursion took place involving about one thousand Chechen fighters, led by the jihadist rebel leader Shamil Basayev and his Saudi ally, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, leader of the foreign mujahideen in Chechnya. The Kremlin immediately declared Russia to be under attack by international terrorism. Yeltsin sacked Prime Minister Stepashin and, on August 9, appointed Putin as his successor. He indicated that he considered Putin a worthy successor to become the next Russian president. The Chechen attack

on Dagestan was presented by the Russian authorities as a complete surprise. But how spontaneous and “unexpected” was this Chechen attack? In early August 1999, just after the incursion took place, the investigative Russian weekly *Versiya* published a report alleging that, some time before the incursion into Dagestan,^[8] the head of Yeltsin’s presidential administration, Aleksandr Voloshin, had purportedly met in France with Shamil Basayev. The meeting allegedly took place in a villa on the Côte d’Azur, which belonged to a Saudi citizen, Adnan Khashoggi, a rich international arms dealer with a dubious reputation. The meeting was, allegedly, arranged by a middleman, Anton Surikov, a retired officer of the GRU (*Glavnoe Razvedivatelnoe Upravlenie*), the intelligence service of the Russian army. Surikov and Basayev would have known each other and would even have been on friendly terms since 1992, when they fought together on the side of

Abkhazia in the war against Georgia. In this period Shamil Basayev, his brother Shirvani Basayev, and their Chechen fighters worked closely together with the GRU. They were even trained by this organization. “There is little doubt,” wrote Martin Malek, “that Basayev worked together well with [the] Russian secret services in Abkhazia (where Basayev’s men are said to have played soccer with the heads of killed Georgians).”^[9]

The reason behind this secret meeting on the French Riviera would seem to have been that—however implausible this might seem at first sight—the Kremlin and Shamil Basayev shared parallel interests. Basayev was a Wahhabi jihadist who wanted to establish a Caucasian emirate in the North Caucasus. He was a fierce opponent of the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, a moderate Chechen nationalist, who considered Basayev’s expansionist jihadism a danger to Chechnya’s independence. A small war was in Basayev’s

interests, because it would destabilize Mashkadov and at the same time enhance Basayev's status inside Chechnya, opening up political prospects. The Kremlin equally urgently needed a small victorious war in its "Operation Successor." In the alleged meeting on the French Riviera the Russian side is thought to have promised that there would be no real resistance in Dagestan (as a matter of fact some weeks before the conflict the Russian border troops would be withdrawn from Dagestan's borders—to the great surprise of the local authorities). It would be a "Potemkin war," a quasi-war, a theatrical, hardly serious armed exchange, so that in the end both sides could claim victory.^[10] Are these allegations of a secret understanding between Basayev and the Kremlin true? We don't know, because until today definitive evidence is lacking. It is clear, however, that if Basayev had trusted a Russian promise that the conflict would remain restricted to a theatrical skirmish, he would

have fulfilled for the Kremlin the role of a “useful idiot.” After the Chechen incursion into Dagestan Putin immediately declared an all-out war as an answer to the Chechen provocation.

STORM IN MOSCOW

But would Basayev’s attack on Dagestan be enough to trigger a wave of public anger in Russia? For the average Russian citizen the events in Dagestan were far from home and certainly had nothing to do with daily life in a country that was just recovering from the deep financial crisis of 1998. It was clear that in order to succeed, “Operation Successor” had to be accompanied by more powerful measures. Then, suddenly, in the first weeks of September 1999, in the Russian Federation there began a series of terrorist attacks. On September 4, a massive bomb exploded at a military housing complex at Buikansk in Dagestan, killing eighty-three people. On September 8 and 13 there followed explosions in working-class apartment

buildings in south Moscow, leaving 228 people dead. On September 16 a truck exploded in the southern town of Volgodonsk. These explosions were real massacres. Hundreds of Russian citizens—men, women, children—were killed, dismembered, and maimed, when bombs, placed by unknown criminals in the basement of the apartment buildings, exploded. The explosions always took place early in the morning to kill a maximum of victims. In just a few weeks over three hundred people were killed and over one thousand wounded. The wave of terrorism led to widespread panic and fear in the population. And for everybody it was clear who was the culprit: it was the work of Chechen terrorists.

A STRANGE “EXERCISE” BY THE FSB

Then something strange happened. On the evening of September 22, 1999, a bus driver, returning home in Ryazan, a city about 130 miles southeast from Moscow, saw two

suspicious-looking men carrying big sacks into the basement of the apartment building where he lived. On the license plate of their car was pasted a piece of paper with the number 62, the region code of Ryazan. The man immediately called the police, and when the policemen arrived they discovered in the basement three 50 kg sacks of a white powder. The sacks were connected to a detonator, batteries, and a clock with the timer set for 5:30 next morning. Immediately thirty thousand residents in the neighborhood were evacuated. The sacks contained the highly explosive substance hexogen that had also been used in the previous bombings. The local police, analyzing mobile telephone calls that were made immediately after the event, arrested two men in connection with the terrorist attempt. To the great surprise of the policemen, the two suspects showed ID cards of the secret service FSB. It took the FSB some time to react. But on September 24 FSB chief Nikolay Patrushev

announced that it had only been an exercise to test the vigilance of the police and the population. The substance of the sacks, identified by experts as hexogen, was said to have been just ordinary sugar. This version, however, was contested by Yury Tkachenko, the explosives expert who had defused the bomb. In an interview in February 2000 with Pavel Voloshin, a journalist of the paper *Novaya Gazeta*, Tkachenko insisted that the vapors coming from the sacks had been analyzed by a sophisticated gas analyzer and that the device had clearly indicated the presence of hexogen. Also the detonator was a professional one, one that was used by the army.^[11] According to the paper *Kommersant* an explosion in the twelve-floor building in Ryazan would have killed about 240 people.^[12]

FORESIGHT OR LEAKED INFORMATION?

Other strange things happened in this period—

even before the wave of explosions started. There were, for instance, two Western journalists, who—quoting anonymous sources—announced the events two months *before* they actually took place. On June 6, 1999, Jan Blomgren, the Moscow correspondent for the Swedish paper *Svenska Dagbladet*, wrote that one option being considered by the Kremlin and its associates was “terror bombings in Moscow which could be blamed on the Chechens.”^[13] A similar statement was made by Giulio Chiesa, the Moscow correspondent for the Italian paper *La Stampa*, who wrote an article in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of June 16, 1999, with the title *Terroristy tozhe raznye* (There are also different kinds of terrorists), indicating that terrorist methods can be used, not only by rebel groups, but also by governments.^[14] In a second article, written after the explosions, Chiesa emphasized the plausibility of the latter option, pointing to the extreme professionalism of the terror attacks.

According to him, for the nine explosions that were planned the terrorists needed more than two tons of hexogen and “in Russia hexogen is produced only in a factory in Perm, in the Urals,” which would mean that “tons of explosives disappear from a top-secret factory and circulate throughout Russia.”^[15] Chiesa also stressed the fact that the explosives “were positioned in an extremely professional way, under the bearing structures of the buildings, in such a way as to make them collapse like a house of cards.”^[16]

Not only these two foreign correspondents, but also Russian journalists predicted with unmatched foresight the coming events, hinting at involvement of the highest political authorities. On July 22, 1999, Aleksandr Zhilin published an article in the *Moskovskaya Pravda* with the title *Burya v Moskve* (Storm in Moscow).^[17] In this article Zhilin wrote that “the city is awaiting great shocks. The

performance of loud terrorist acts (or attempts at terrorist acts) is being planned involving a number of government establishments: the buildings of the FSB, MVD [Ministry of the Interior], the Federation Council, the Moscow City Court, the Moscow Arbitration Court, and a number of editorial boards of anti-Luzhkov publications.”^[18] In a second article, published after the bombings, Zhilin wrote that he possessed a leaked document on which his first article was based. He said he had showed the document to the deputy premier of Moscow and to colleagues from the TV: “Everyone said that this could not be true,” he wrote. “Today I understand that those journalists who rejected even the theoretical possibility of the existence of a plan of destabilization in Moscow, one that included terrorist acts, were reasoning like normal, decent people. They could not understand in their minds how, for the sake of some political goals, someone could commit such barbaric acts.”^[19]

Another Russian journalist, Yelena Tregubova, who had close contacts with the Kremlin at the time, wrote that, as early as September 1998—this is *one year before* the apartment explosions took place—the head of the presidential administration, Valentin Yumashev, warned her “that we have received secret information from the special services that the country finds itself on the eve of mass rebellions, in essence on the verge of revolution.”^[20] Tregubova considered this an indication that a “Storm” scenario had already been envisaged. It is clear that the real truth could not emerge in this climate of rumors, predictions, alleged leaked documents, and so-called exercises in which FSB agents were caught while putting sacks of sugar in the basement of an apartment building. There was only an “official” truth, and this truth was that Chechen terrorists were responsible for these acts. Sophie Shihab, at that time the Moscow correspondent for the French paper *Le Monde*,

returned later to these dramatic and fateful weeks. She wrote about a young French businessman with close contacts with Berezovsky, who had called the bureau of *Le Monde* in Moscow in September 1999. "On the telephone," wrote Shihab, "he has lost his considerable self-assurance and renounces his friend: 'Boris is announcing more attacks. He has gone mad. It is finished, I'm having nothing more to do with him. He must think that by creating chaos he can put his strong man into power.'" [21] Strange? But there were other strange things that happened in this period, although it would take two and a half years before these emerged in the press.

One of these strange things was the fact that Gennady Seleznev, the speaker of the Duma, was informed of the explosion in Volgodonsk three days *before* the explosion actually took place. [22] It happened on September 13, 1999, during a session of the Duma and LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy told

how it happened: “Somebody from the secretariat brought a note. Clearly they had called to warn the speaker about such a turn of events. Seleznev read us the news on the explosion. Thereafter we waited for announcements about the event in Volgodonsk on the TV news. But when this only happened three days later, I was the only one who asked the speaker about it at the plenary session of September 17, 1999.”^[23] Seleznev did not answer: he simply turned Zhirinovsky’s microphone off. When, in October 1999—after the war had started—a Russian GRU officer, Aleksey Galtin, was captured by the Chechens, the man declared on a video, received by *The Independent*: “I know who is responsible for the bombings in Moscow (and Dagestan). It is the FSB, in cooperation with the GRU, that is responsible for the explosions in Volgodonsk and Moscow.”^[24] The Russian authorities immediately claimed that this confession had been made under torture and contained no

truth. But after his return to Russia, Galtin repeated his version of the facts in an interview with the opposition paper *Novaya Gazeta*, and this time he could not be accused of making his statement under pressure.

Another clue hinting at the involvement of the FSB was an open letter, published on March 14, 2005, in the *Novaya Gazeta*. The open letter was written by Achemez Gochiyaev, a native of Karachaevo-Cherkessia in the North Caucasus, who was sought by the police in connection with the apartment bombings.^[25] Gochiyaev told how, before the bombings, he had been contacted by a certain Ramazan Dyshekov, a former classmate, with a business proposal to sell mineral water. In order to stock the water, the other had told him, it was necessary to rent basements in apartment buildings in Moscow and Ryazan. After the second explosion in Moscow Gochiyaev sensed he had been trapped, suspecting that Dyshekov was an FSB agent. He called the police and gave the

addresses of other buildings where basements were rented. That is how other explosions in Moscow were able to be prevented. In his open letter Gochiyaev accused the FSB of having organized the Moscow bombings and Dyshekov of being an FSB agent. He asked for an independent, international investigation.

THE DUMA INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

In such a serious situation, in which there are allegations that a government has used state terror against its own citizens, one would expect a government to do anything to clear its name and remove any doubt. “The idea that the secret services might have had something to do with the apartment bombings evoked indignation in Putin,” the *Moscow Times* wrote. “To even speculate about this is immoral and in essence none other than an element of the information war against Russia,” he was quoted as saying.^[26] By qualifying investigation as

speculation and speculating as immoral, Putin obviously wanted to block any serious investigation into the facts. The problem, however, was that the facts that *had* emerged revealed so many unsolved problems and contradictions that they only strengthened the rumors of involvement of the government and the secret services. A government that has nothing to hide would be anxious that a thorough and impartial investigation would take place, in which the investigators would be given full, complete, and unrestricted access to all documents and to any further information that they deemed relevant. However, it was not the government, but the Duma that established an investigation commission in 2002. On July 25, 2002, the members of the Duma Commission organized a teleconference from Moscow with Alexander Litvinenko, Yury Felshtinsky, and Tatyana Morozova, who were in London. The first two were the authors of the book *FSB vzryvaet Rossiyu* (translated in English with the

title *Blowing Up Russia*), in which they accused the FSB of being behind the apartment bombings.^[27] The president of the Duma Commission, Sergey Kovalyov (the former president of Yeltsin's Presidential Human Rights Commission), complained that the government did not give the information requested and was hiding itself behind "state secrets."^[28]

Secrecy and lack of cooperation on the part of the authorities was not all. It soon became clear that it was extremely *dangerous* to air critical opinions on the events. One example was Duma member Sergey Yushenkov of the party *Liberalnaya Rossiya* (Liberal Russia). In March 2002, after the news emerged that Duma speaker Seleznev had been informed of the Volgodonsk explosion before it took place, Yushenkov declared "that the episode with the note seems still further proof of the involvement of the FSB in the explosions that took place in Moscow and Volgodonsk in the

autumn of 1999.”^[29] Yushenkov was gunned down and killed at the entrance of his Moscow apartment block on Thursday evening, April 17, 2003.^[30] A colleague of the victim, Liberal Russia member Yuly Rybakov, who would later investigate the bombings, speculated in the *Moscow Times* “that Yushenkov could have been killed for his attempts to show that the security services were guilty of a series of apartment block bombings in 1999.”^[31] A similar assessment was made by Arkadi Vaksberg, who himself was a member of the commission. “In fact,” wrote Vaksberg, “Yushenkov has clearly paid for his uncompromising position on the Chechen war, he knew without doubt the persons who were really responsible for the apartment explosions in Moscow.”^[32] A late and intriguing testimony on Yushenkov’s death was made in 2010 by Marina Salye, a member of the St. Petersburg Duma, who, in the early 1990s pushed for

Putin's resignation as the city's deputy mayor after implicating him in a multimillion-dollar kickback scheme. She said "that she decided she needed to lie low after receiving a fright while visiting a colleague, State Duma Deputy Sergei Yushenkov, with whom she was hoping to forge a political alliance in the early part of 2000. 'We were going to cooperate politically. I always had good relations with Sergei Nikolayevich. . . . When I came to his office, I saw a person there who I didn't want to see anytime, anyplace, under any circumstances. I'm not going to reveal his name. But I then understood it was time to go. And Sergei Nikolayevich was soon killed.'" [33]

The apartment of the journalist Yelena Tregubova was bombed on February 2, 2004, after the publication of her book *Tales of a Kremlin Digger*. She escaped a certain death only because, having already left her apartment, she returned for a few minutes. It was at that precise moment that the bomb

exploded outside her front door.^[34] The former KGB colonel, Alexander Litvinenko, who, together with Yuri Felshtinsky, wrote the critical book on the apartment bombings with the title *Blowing Up Russia*, was poisoned in London in November 2006 with the radioactive substance polonium 210, a substance which one must assume can only be procured from a government agency. Litvinenko's suspected murderer, Andrey Lugovoy, a former KGB bodyguard, fled to Russia. He was offered a seat in the Duma by Zhirinovskiy's Liberal-Democratic Party, thereby getting parliamentary immunity that prevented him from being extradited to Britain. The murder of Litvinenko prompted the journalist Yelena Tregubova to leave Russia and ask for political asylum in Britain. Another victim was probably Yury Shchekochikhin, a Duma deputy for the liberal Yabloko party, member of the anti-corruption commission of the Duma, and deputy editor-in-chief of the opposition paper *Novaya Gazeta*. It was

Shchekochikhin who initiated the 2002 Duma investigation into the apartment bombings. He died on July 3, 2003, after two weeks of agony. There were grave suspicions that he was poisoned, but this suspicion could not be verified because the results of his autopsy were classified a “medical secret.”^[35] Even his relatives never received an autopsy report and “when they tried to initiate criminal proceedings, their request was denied.”^[36]

YELTSIN ON THE APARTMENT BOMBINGS

In his memoirs Boris Yeltsin referred to the rumors that the secret services may have been involved in the apartment bombings.

In this continuing debate about Chechnya, I can accept any position and any arguments except outright lies. And today, unfortunately, both in our own country and in the world, there are people who

unfairly juggle the truth. They say that it's not the Chechen terrorists who are committing aggression against Russia, but the Russian army that is committing aggression against "free Chechnya." It's not terrorists who blew up the buildings in Moscow but the Russian security services, in order to justify their own aggression. . . . It is a professional and moral crime to spread such blasphemous theories about how the second Chechen war began, especially in view of material evidence collected in an investigation of the Moscow apartment-house explosions: Mechanical devices and explosives similar to those used in the Moscow bombings were found in rebel bases in Chechnya. The names of criminals, who went through training at terrorist bases in Chechnya, have been established; their immediate associates have been detained. I am convinced that this case will soon come to trial.

Nevertheless, the falsehoods continue. Some find it very profitable to maintain lies. [\[37\]](#)

Yeltsin wrote these words in 2000.

However, the investigations of the Duma Commission, established two years later, were prematurely halted because of lack of cooperation on the part of the government, and thirteen years later still no Chechen terrorist has been tried for the apartment bombings. The whole affair has been declared a state secret by the authorities, and the many—too many—strange events and unexplained circumstances that point to an alleged involvement of the secret services, far from having been investigated exhaustively, have been subject to a cover-up. According to a report by Amnesty International, “the responsibility for these attacks [in Moscow and Volgodonsk] should rather be sought on the part of the FSB. Until today the question of

Russian state terrorism remains still open. The Russian secret services, at that time, seem to have set in motion a sinister scenario of a power change in the Kremlin against the background of explosions.”^[38] Arriving at a similar conclusion, Arkadi Vaksberg, member of the Duma investigation commission, wrote: “Murders and attempted murders that, judging by the traces they left behind, had been ordered by the Kremlin and the Lubyanka [FSB], happened, one after the other, [they were] sometimes of a surprising scale and cruelty: I’m thinking especially of the apartment explosions at the eve of the election of our beloved president.”^[39] David Satter expressed himself even more clearly. He wrote: “Both the logic of the political situation and the weight of the evidence lead overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the Russian leadership itself was responsible for the bombings of the apartment buildings. This was an attack in which many of the victims were children whose bodies were

found in pieces, if at all. There can be little doubt that persons capable of such a crime, regardless of how they present themselves, would not give up power willingly but would react to a threat to their position by imposing dictatorial control.”^[40]

NOTES

1. Sergei Kovalev, “Putin’s War,” *New York Review of Books* (February 10, 2000). (Note that Kovalyov’s name can also be spelled Kovalev.)
2. Skuratov would soon be dismissed. On March 17, 1999, a video was broadcast on state television showing him naked on a bed with two prostitutes. This was a classic case of Russian *kompromat* (compromising information). During a press conference a few weeks later FSB director Putin and Interior Minister Stepashin confirmed that the man on the video was Skuratov and that the prostitutes had been paid for by individuals who were

being investigated for criminal offences.

3. John B. Dunlop, “‘Storm in Moscow’: A Plan of the Yeltsin ‘Family’ to Destabilize Russia,” *The Hoover Institution* (October 8, 2004), 20.

4. Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 284.

5. How serious the threat of a coup d'état was in May 1999 became clear from the publication in the *Novaya Gazeta* of July 5, 1999, of the leaked text of the draft presidential decree, in which emergency rule was to be instituted from May 13 “in connection with the aggravation of the political and criminal situation.” (Cf. Dunlop, “Storm in Moscow,” 23.)

6. It was Sergey Stepashin, critical of the war in Chechnya, who, in an article in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* of January 14, 2000, revealed that this meeting was held.

7. Cf. Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 30.

8. In a second article in *Versiya* in August 2000,

the exact date of this meeting was given: July 4, 1999. (Quoted in Dunlop, "Storm in Moscow," 40.)

9. Martin Malek, "Russia's Asymmetric Wars in Chechnya since 1994," *Connections* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 88.

10. This version of a simulated Chechen attack on Dagestan finds support in a report by Florian Hassel, the Moscow correspondent for the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, who, in October 1999, met five Dagestani policemen who had briefly fought Basayev's troops: "Basaev's [Basayev's] attack on Dagestan was apparently organized in Moscow," said one policeman, Elgar, who watched the Chechens retreat from the village of Botlikh on September 11. "Basaev and his people went back comfortably in broad daylight with about 100 cars and trucks and many on foot. They used the main road to Chechnya, and were not fired at by our combat helicopters. We received express orders not to attack." (Quoted in Dunlop, "Storm in Moscow,"

47.)

11. Cf. *Novaya Gazeta* (February 14–20, 2000) and David Satter, *Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 29–30.

12. Sergey Topol and Nadezhda Kurbacheva, “Terakt predotvratil voditel avtobusa” (Bus Driver Prevented Terrorist Act), *Kommersant* (September 24, 1999). In March 2000, the *Moscow Times* wrote about a paratrooper, Alexei P. “While guarding a storehouse last fall, Alexei and his friend discovered hexagen [i.e., hexogen], the explosive that the Ryazan authorities say was found in the apartment building. The hexagen was in large sacks marked ‘sugar,’ and the soldiers said they broke one open hoping to be able to sweeten their tea. When their tea tasted strange, they informed their supervisors, who had the white powder tested. In the end, FSB officials sent from Moscow scolded the soldiers for ‘exposing state secrets,’ and advised them to forget what they

had seen.” (Sarah Karush, “Hackers Attack Novaya Gazeta,” *Moscow Times* (March 16, 2000).)

13. Cf. Patrick Cockburn, “Russia ‘Planned Chechen War before Bombings,’” *The Independent* (January 29, 2000).

14. Giulietto Chiesa, “Terroristy tozhe raznye,” *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (June 16, 1999).

15. Giulietto Chiesa, “Cecenia, l’invenzione di una Guerra,” *La rivista del Manifesto* no. 6 (May 2000).

16. Chiesa, “Cecenia, l’invenzione di una Guerra.”

17. Aleksandr Zhilin, “Burya v Moskve,” *Moskovskaya Pravda* (July 22, 1999). (Quoted in Dunlop, “Storm in Moscow,” 11.)

18. Zhilin, “Burya v Moskve.”

19. Zhilin, Aleksandr, and Grigory Vanin. “Burya v Moskve: Sushchestvuet li sekretnyy plan destabilizatsii obstanovki v stolitse?” (Storm in Moscow: Does There Exist a Secret Plan to Destabilize the Situation in the Capital?),

- Novaya Gazeta* (November 18, 1999). (Quoted in Dunlop, "Storm in Moscow," 12.)
20. Yelena Tregubova, *Baiki kremlevskogo diggera* (Tales of a Kremlin Digger), (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2003), 98–99.
21. Sophie Shihab, "Qui a commis les attentats de 1999?" *Le Monde* (November 17, 2002).
22. "Gennady Seleznev predupredili o vzryve v Volgodonske za tri dnya do terakta" (Gennady Seleznev Was Warned about the Explosion in Volgodonsk Three Days before the Terrorist Act), *NEWSru.com* (March 21, 2002).
23. "Gennady Seleznev predupredili o vzryve v Volgodonske za tri dnya do terakta."
24. Helen Womack, "Russian Agents 'Blew up Moscow Flats,'" *The Independent* (January 6, 2000).
25. "Ya khochu rasskazat o vzryvakh zhilykh domov" (I Want to Talk about the Apartment Bombings), *Novaya Gazeta* (March 14, 2005).
26. Quoted in Sarah Karush, "Hackers Attack Novaya Gazeta," *The Moscow Times* (March 16,

2000).

27. Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinsky, *Blowing Up Russia: The Secret Plot to Bring Back KGB Terror* (London: Gibson Square, 2007). A transcript of the teleconference of July 25, 2002, is published in this book (254–284). The original Russian edition of the book was printed in Latvia and brought into Russia to be distributed by the Prima Information Agency of ex-dissident Alexander Podrabinek. On December 29, 2003, the 4,376 copies were confiscated by the Ministry of the Interior and the FSB. The copies were ultimately destroyed in 2009. The reason given for the confiscation was “dissemination of state secrets.”

28. Cf. “Svedeniya Litvinenko o vrzyvakh zhilykh domov v Moskve” (Testimony of Litvinenko on the explosions of apartment buildings in Moscow), interview with Sergey Kovalyov by Tatyana Pelipeiko, *Ekho Moskvy* (July 25, 2002).

29. “Gennady Seleznev predupredili o vrzyve v Volgodonske za tri dnya do terakta.”

30. "Russian MP's Death Sparks Storm," *BBC News* (April 18, 2003).
31. "Russian MP's Death Sparks Storm."
32. Arkadi Vaksberg, *Le laboratoire des poisons: De Lénine à Poutine* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 263.
33. Anastasia Kirilenko, "Putin's Old Nemesis Speaks Out After Decade of Silence," *RFE/RL* (March 5, 2010).
34. Cf. Grigory Pasko, "Russia's Disappearing Journalists," *Robert Amsterdam Perspectives on Global Politics and Business* (December 14, 2006). After the bomb explosion in the entrance of Tregubova's apartment, she was questioned at the Criminal Investigation Office. The officer, Vadim Romanov, "wondered whether Tregubova happened to be acquainted with former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko. She replied that she did not know him, and asked why this would be of interest to the investigator. 'Why wouldn't it be?' Romanov answered her. 'After all, in your book [*Tales of a*

Kremlin Digger], you write the same thing Litvinenko is saying—that Putin is involved in the bombings of the apartment buildings in Moscow.” Tregubova has described the events around the bomb attack in the first chapter, titled *Kak vzryvali menya* (How they blew me up) of her 2004 book *Proshchanie kremlevskogo diggera* (Farewell of a Kremlin Digger), (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2004), 10–65.

35. The *Novaya Gazeta* wrote: “Within two weeks he turned into a very old man, his skin came off and his inner organs stopped functioning one by one. Doctors in the special government hospital speculated that he had been poisoned. Forensic experts said the same in private conversations. However, everyone signed the official reports confirming his death was natural.” (“Shchekochikhin’s Case,” *Novaya Gazeta* (March 25, 2008).)

36. Yuri Felshtinsky and Vladimir Pribylovsky, *The Age of Assassins: The Rise and Rise of Vladimir Putin* (London: Gibson Square, 2008),

242.

37. Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 343.

38. Natalie Nougayrède, “La démocratie dévoyée,” in *Droits humains en Russie: Résister pour l'état de droit*, Amnesty International Report (Paris: Editions Autrement Frontières, 2010), 15.

39. Vaksberg, *Le laboratoire des poisons de Lénine à Poutine*, 351.

40. Satter, *Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State*, 252.

Chapter 12

The Second Chechen War

Putin's War

The Second Chechen War started on September 22, 1999. On this day Russia began an aerial campaign over Chechnya, which was followed by a ground invasion at the beginning of October. Almost ten years later, on April 16, 2009, the Russian government officially declared the war to be over and won—although there was still some fighting going on. The war took almost a decade, roughly the same time as the war in Afghanistan. The war in Chechnya, however, was not called a war, but a *kontrterroristskaya operatsiya*, an “anti-terrorist operation,” or KTO. This second war would be fought in an even more violent and ruthless way than the First Chechen War. On the Russian side there existed a clear urge to take revenge

and punish the Chechen people for the lost first war. It led to an all-out war with little or no respect for the rules of war or for human rights, least of all the right to life of the Chechen civilian population. The actions of the Russian army can be listed under six headings:

- Bombardments
- The use of contract soldiers (*kontraktniki*)
- The conduction of sweep operations (*zachistki*)
- The installation of so called filtration points
- Forced disappearances
- Chechenization

BOMBARDMENTS: THE MASSIVE SLAUGHTER

In the First Chechen War the Chechen capital Grozny was heavily bombed for months, which led to a death toll second only in recent European history to the death toll of Dresden

during World War II. In the first war also the Russian army suffered important losses. In the second war the Russian commanders had learned the lessons of the NATO actions in Kosovo some months before. Their new strategy was this: bomb until victory and conduct a war at distance without heavy casualties. The NATO war against Serbia, however, relied on a strategy of precision bombardments and the availability of smart weapons that minimized collateral damage and victims in the civilian population. Such a strategy, however, was lacking in the Second Chechen War. "Collateral damage in Chechnya was of little interest to the Russian public and to international audiences (aside from human rights organizations, which had little influence in Russia), and consequently Moscow did not take them into account."^[1] According to the Russian defense expert Pavel Felgenhauer,

The loss of life, mostly civilian, and the

damage to property was terrific In many instances Russian troops committed appalling war crimes, deliberately attacking the civilian population in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions. There is credible evidence of use of the so-called Heavy Flamethrowing System (TOS-1)—a fuel bomb land-based multiple launch delivery system, also known as “Buratino” among the Russian rank and file—against Chechen towns and villages during the winter campaign of 2000. The third protocol of the 1980 Geneva Convention strictly forbids the use of such “air-delivered incendiary weapons” in populated areas, even against military targets.^[2]

The effects of these fuel bombs are described as follows:

A typical bomb consists of a container of fuel and two separate explosive charges.

After the munition is dropped or fired the first explosive charge breaks open the container at a pre-determined height dispersing the fuel as a fine mist over a large area. This mixes with atmospheric oxygen and flows into and around structures. The second charge then detonates the cloud creating a massive blast wave. This pressure wave kills people even in cellars or bunkers. If people are not killed by the blast they are incinerated.^[3]

The Russian forces also used “Tochka” and “Tochka-U” ballistic missiles. These missiles have a radius of 120 km and on impact can cover up to 7 hectares with cluster shrapnel. According to Felgenhauer, “the use of such mass-destruction weapons as aerosol (fuel) munitions and ballistic missiles against civilian targets was undoubtedly authorized by Moscow and may implicate the President Putin personally, as well as his top military chiefs, in

war crimes.”^[4] According to Jacob Kipp, an expert on the Russian army at the University of Kansas, the Russian army has certain peculiarities that make it more prone to commit war crimes than Western armies. “The Russians have a tradition in which every war is a ‘total war.’ . . . When the decision has been taken to start a war, there is no feeling for the fact that there can be limits and should be limits how this war is conducted.”^[5] The Russians call this situation *bespredel*, which literally means “without limits.” It implies torture, cruelty, and gratuitous acts of violence which remain, as a rule, unpunished.

The civilian death toll in Grozny was not as massive as in the winter of 1994–1995. This was due to the fact that many inhabitants, remembering what happened in the first war, fled to the neighboring republics, especially to Ingushetia. During the bombing campaign 250,000 civilians, more than a quarter of the total Chechen population, crossed the border.

However, restricting the civilian death toll seemed not to be a top priority for the Russian government. Emma Gilligan has given an extremely precise and horrifying account of the failure of the Russian government to provide safe evacuation routes out of the war zone. “The failure to evacuate the capital,” she wrote, “became the most symbolic event. This was the decisive moment when the Russian government unashamedly revealed that it was prepared to subject the civilian population of Chechnya to a massive bombing campaign in order to take back the capital.”^[6] On December 6, 1999, the Russian armed forces dropped leaflets on the city, demanding that civilians still remaining in Grozny leave within five days or face destruction. At that moment fifteen to forty thousand civilians were still trapped in the city. “The crude logic was that fifteen to forty thousand civilians, if unable to move out of fear for their personal safety, or because of age, physical illness, or lack of financial means,

might well be sacrificed for the defeat of several thousand separatist fighters.”^[7] The imminent bombing campaign on the most vulnerable citizens led to an international outcry, which put enough pressure on the Russian authorities to open—although belatedly and reluctantly—two evacuation routes. “The failure to evacuate the civilian population,” wrote Gilligan, “constituted one of Russia’s deepest failures of principle and leadership, in both the first and the second wars in Chechnya. This failure . . . reaffirmed a growing consensus among many civilians that they were being targeted as part of a larger campaign of racial destruction.”^[8]

KONTRAKTNIKI: THE CRIMINAL VOLUNTEERS

The First Chechen War was fought with badly trained conscript soldiers with low morale, who, despite the superiority of their weapons, were often no match for the highly motivated Chechen fighters. For this reason the Russian

army introduced—alongside the conscript soldiers—a new kind of soldier, the contract soldier or *kontraktnik* (plural: *kontraktniki*). These *kontraktniki* had, as a rule, a contract for six months and were very well paid by Russian standards, receiving 800 rubles, or approximately \$25 per day.^[9] Most of them were demobilized soldiers from the former Soviet armed forces, who joined Private Security Companies (of which over twelve thousand were registered). The most well-known of these was the Moscow-based *Alpha* firm, founded by former KGB Spetsnaz (Special Forces) personnel, which is connected to the international *ArmorGroup* firm.^[10] What interests governments is the fact that

the companies, as opposed to the individuals that work for them, do not fall within many aspects of international law and would not, for instance, come within the Statute of the International Criminal

Court. . . . Governments may see in PMFs [private military forces] not only a means of saving money but a way to use a low-profile force to solve awkward, politically sensitive, or potentially embarrassing situations that develop on the fringes of policy. Since PMFs are willing to go where the government would prefer not to be seen, they offer a way to create conditions for “plausible deniability” and may be used to carry out operations that would be expected to meet with public or legal disapproval, or operations that sidestep legislatively imposed limits on military operations and force levels. . . .^[11] [This includes, however,] the risk that PMF employees can get away with murder, sex slavery, rape, human rights abuse, etc.^[12]

This risk became a fateful reality in the Second Chechen War. The introduction of *kontraktniki* had a deep impact on the character

of this war. Conscript soldiers were certainly no innocents or angelic young lads. They included the average number of sadists that can be found in the general population. But the great majority of them were normal guys, mostly from modest provincial homes, trying to uphold a minimum of decency amidst these events. The *kontraktniki* were of another kind. According to Pavel Felgenhauer, “many kontraktniki enlisted, but the process of screening volunteers for Chechnya was superficial and they were sent into combat without any further selection or training. Many of these volunteers have been drunks, bums and other fallouts of Russian society.”^[13] The contract soldiers were not given military uniforms. Soon they developed their own private dress codes: “the bandanas [pirate’s scarves], the fox tail hanging down the back of the neck, singlet tops, sunglasses, and tattoos—all of these were emblems of their status and self-aggrandizement.”^[14] Thomas de Waal, who actually met them at checkpoints in

Chechnya, described them as follows: “They were often ex-criminals with tattoos along their arms and bandannas [*sic*] on their heads, creatures more of gangland than a modern European army—and no friends to journalists.”^[15] The contract soldiers soon got the reputation of brutal killers, but also of thieves who openly carried out their robberies from people’s homes.^[16]

ZACHISTKI: THE PURGES

Together with the Special Forces (Spetsnaz) the *kontraktniki* would play a leading role in sweep operations by the Russian army in occupied territory, the so-called *zachistki*. These operations were sometimes conducted at night or early in the morning, sometimes also during the day. The army would encircle a village and hermetically seal it off from the outside world. Thereupon small groups of six to nine men enter the village and conduct street-by-street

searches of homes. There were no official witnesses, no search warrants, and the faces of the soldiers were, as a rule, covered by masks or blackened to avoid identification. For the same reason the registration plates of the military vehicles were covered. Hiding their identity was a priority for these troops to carry out the most hideous acts. The official reason for these sweep operations was to control the identity papers of the Chechen population and to identify members of “illegally armed formations.” But in practice these *zachistki* degenerated into summary executions, torture, arson, and looting. A notorious case was that of the village of Novye Aldy on February 5, 2000, when soldiers threw grenades into basements full of civilians and set houses alight with the inhabitants still inside.^[17] During the same operation fifty-six civilians were summarily executed. The word *zachistka* became one of the Russian catchwords in the winter of 1999–2000. In December 1999 the weekly *Moskovskie*

Novosti published a list with “words of the year.” The word *zachistka* was number one on the list.^[18]

Emma Gilligan has analyzed how the word *zachistka* made its way into the Russian media.

By late 1999, the use of *zachistka* in the press and everyday speech had reached an infectious and alarming level. From September 1999 to 2005, *zachistka* appeared 787 times in the headlines of Moscow’s central newspapers in relation to the second war in Chechnya. In the text of the papers, it appeared 10,730 times. From the verb *zachistit’*, *zachistka* was used in the literal sense to describe the cleaning of pipes, the sanding or smoothing out of metal, the cleaning of paint or corrosion from surfaces^[19] It was linked euphemistically to the idea of cleaning out *human beings*—in this case, suspected Chechen rebel fighters and their alleged

civilian supporters. No longer neutral or inoffensive, *zachistka* became congruent with the practice of gathering or sweeping, in the literal sense, Chechen men and women into fields, factories, or schools to be checked, detained, or executed, usually on the outskirts of a targeted village. In this respect, the idea of harvesting or cleansing the land is reminiscent of the metaphor adopted in Hitler's Germany—that of *völkische Flurbereinigung* (cleansing of the soil).^[20]

The resemblance to the Serb word *etnicko ciscenje* (ethnic cleansing), coined in the wars of the former Yugoslavia some years earlier, was, indeed, striking. Not only because of its etymological origin, but also because of its meaning. Another linguistic root of *zachistka* is the Russian word *chistka*, which means purge. Stalin's repression in the 1930s in which hundreds of thousands of party members,

intellectuals, and kulaks were liquidated was called *Velikaya Chistka* (Great Purge). The word *zachistka* therefore evokes a *double* association: on the one hand with the practices of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand with the purges of Russia's Stalinist past. We should, however, not forget that ethnic cleansing, especially of nonwhite Muslim peoples, has old historical roots in Russia. John Dunlop, for instance, reminds us that "in May 1856, Count Kiselev, minister of state domains, informed officials in the Crimea that Alexander [tsar Alexander II] was interested in 'cleansing' (Kiselev used the verb *oshishchat'*) Crimea of as many Tatars as possible."^[21] That the tsarist empire was interested in annexing foreign lands, but not in annexing foreign peoples, was expressed by the famous remark of a tsarist minister that "Russia needs Armenia, but she has no need of Armenians."^[22]

In 2005 the Russian human rights organization Memorial estimated the total

death toll of civilians due to the *zachistki* between two thousand and three thousand.^[23] But the *zachistki* were not only murderous events, they were equally *economic* events. They were well organized looting operations. Oleg Orlov, one of the leaders of Memorial, wrote that “these operations are usually accompanied by crimes against the local population. Robberies on a mass scale are the most common and basic form of war crime. This doesn’t just mean that the troops or police take people’s money. These are organised operations in which, quite openly, right in front of the local population, people’s property is loaded onto trucks or armoured personnel carriers. This is not just a matter of a few undisciplined soldiers and clearly sanctioned by the officers. For the military, it’s a business.”^[24] Corruption and looting were widely accepted and had become quasi-institutionalized practices for the rank and file, as well as for the officers, who had become “war entrepreneurs.”

For them the war had become a means of personal enrichment. This commercial aspect of the war in Chechnya has also been stressed by Herfried Münkler, who wrote that “the war in Chechnya is conducted by both sides in such a way that it is no longer clear where the dividing line is between acts of war and normal criminal violence.”^[25] This war criminality merges with a wider criminality, because “in the end the actors in these wars make many contacts with international organized crime to sell the booty, trade illegal goods, or to buy weapons and ammunition.”^[26] What is alarming in the Chechen case is that these criminal acts were not committed by irregular, disorganized fighters in a faraway and obscure failed state, but by the special troops and the regular army of a great European power, which is a member of the Council of Europe.^[27]

FILTRATION POINTS: HIDING TORTURE

Immediately linked with the *zachistki* was the installation of so-called filtration points (*filtratsionnyye punkty*). These were temporary detention points. They were installed as an answer to national and international protests against torture practices in the official detention center in Chernokozovo. In the decentralized and ad hoc organized filtration points these torture practices could continue, but were no longer hindered by critical witnesses. "Torture was a routine practice at the temporary filtration points," wrote Gilligan. "Unlike at Chernokozovo, torture was practiced in specially equipped wagons, in tents, or in fields. The torture wagons were the ultimate symbol of impunity—they were linked to neither a legal detention point nor possible witnesses. The most common forms of torture practiced included the following: electric shocks to the genitals, toes, and fingers with a field telephone . . . ; asphyxiation with plastic bags; cutting off ears; filling mouths with kerosene;

setting dogs on the legs of the detained; knife cuts; and carving crosses in the back of detainees.”^[28] In 2000 there were about thirty filtration points in operation where somewhere between ten and twenty thousand detainees were held.^[29]

FORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND BLOWING UP DEAD BODIES

Sweep operations by masked men, temporary filtration points set up for a few weeks, one week, or even a few days, in an empty factory hall, a school, a tent, or a bus, gave the torturers *carte blanche*, free from the risk of being disturbed by witnesses. The Russian Special Forces that were involved showed an extreme need for secrecy. There was, first, the need to hide one's own identity; second, to hide the identity of the army unit or government agency one belonged to; third, there was the need to hide the acts one was

committing; and, fourth, and last but not least, there was the need to hide the *results* of these acts. This brings us to another feature of this war that fully justifies the name it was given by Anna Politkovskaya: "A Dirty War."^[30] The sweep operations in the first year of the war led to mass executions of civilians. When, later, mass graves were discovered, it was possible to establish the identity of a number of the bodies. The dead body of an executed civilian, discovered in a mass grave, was the material proof of a war crime. Even if the perpetrators of the crime could not be identified (and the police and judicial instances were not very cooperative in identifying, finding, and prosecuting them), there always remained a certain risk of being identified later.

This led to a new practice. People started to disappear. They were taken away from their homes by armed, masked men in armored patrol vehicles, and their families were not informed where they were being held or what

had happened to them. By 2002 the disappearance rate was more than a hundred civilians per month.^[31] According to estimates by Amnesty International, published in 2010, between three thousand and five thousand people had disappeared since the beginning of the Second Chechen War. They added, however, that the actual number would be higher, due to the fact that, in the generalized climate of fear, not all cases had been reported to the police.^[32] Mass graves, when they are discovered, are embarrassing facts for the perpetrators. To conceal the killings of abducted people the perpetrators took care, therefore, to have the corpses disappear also. “Blowing people up, dead or alive . . . is the latest tactic introduced by the federal army into the conflict,” wrote the correspondent of *The Guardian* in October 2002. “It was utilised perhaps most effectively on 3 July [2002] in the village of Meskyer Yurt, where 21 men, women and children were bound together and blown

up, their remains thrown into a ditch. From the perspective of the perpetrators, this method of killing is highly practical, it prevents the number of bodies from being counted, or possibly from ever being found.”^[33]

In 2003 blowing up corpses had become a systematic practice. “[R]esidents and human rights campaigners say fragments of blown-up bodies are being found all over the war-ruined region. Rather than put a stop to human rights violations, the military appears to be doing its best to hide them, critics say. . . . Lawmaker and rights campaigner Sergei Kovalyov theorizes that the intent is to make it difficult for independent investigators to connect the corpses to the soldiers who allegedly arrested them.”^[34] Stalin has been credited with the phrase “no person, no problem” (*net cheloveka, net problemi*). Stalin liquidated his problems by liquidating the people. In Chechnya the Russian Special Forces cynically changed Stalin’s adage into “no corpse, no problem.” “The analogies to

Argentina's 'dirty war' were by no means unfounded," wrote Gilligan. "The tactics grew increasingly reminiscent of those of Jorge Videla's military government from 1976 to 1983."^[35] During Videla's dictatorship, between nine thousand and thirty thousand people disappeared. During *vuelos de la muerte* (death flights) many were pushed out of planes into the Atlantic Ocean and the Rio de la Plata. The same happened in Chechnya, but over land. One of the Russian soldiers interviewed by Maura Reynolds told her: "We also threw rebels out of helicopters. It was important to find the right height. We didn't want them to die immediately. We wanted them to suffer before dying."^[36]

According to Article 1 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted on December 20, 2006, by the General Assembly of the United Nations, "1. No one shall be

subjected to enforced disappearance. 2. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance.” Article 2 states that “for the purposes of this Convention, ‘enforced disappearance’ is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.” Article 5 states that “the widespread or systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity.”^[37] Equally, Article 7, Paragraph 1 (i) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines the enforced

disappearance of persons as a crime against humanity. The crimes committed in Chechnya, the site of such “widespread and systematic practice of enforced disappearance,” unambiguously fall under the definition of both the UN Convention and the Rome Statute that determine them to be crimes against humanity.

THE PROCESS OF CHECHENIZATION

In October 1999 (then) Prime Minister Putin promised that the war in Chechnya would be short and casualties would be low. It would be the Chechens themselves, he said, not the Russians who would be fighting the bandits and terrorists. Pavel Felgenhauer commented: “It actually seemed at times that Richard Nixon was back, talking of the ‘Vietnamization of the war.’”^[38] The Chechenization, announced by Putin, was, indeed, another difference with the First Chechen War. The second phase—in which local Chechen allies of the Russians would play

an increasing role—began on October 5, 2003, when Imam Akhmad Kadyrov (the father of the present leader Ramzan Kadyrov) was installed as president by the Russian government. It had a profound impact on the way the war was conducted. In all the villages Kadyrov's men had their local informers. The sweep operations could therefore become more focused. From now on *zachistki* became *adresnye zachistki*: targeting only selected addresses.

Consequently, the number of victims gradually decreased. The struggle of Chechens against Chechens, however, was not less violent, but it lacked the clear *racist* undertones that characterized the Russian offensive of the first two years.

Jonathan Littell, a French-American author and winner of the prestigious French literature prize *Prix Goncourt*, who worked in Chechnya for a humanitarian organization in the 1990s, revisited Chechnya in 2009. He was impressed by the totally rebuilt center of Grozny.

Already from the plane, I could get an idea of the scale of the reconstruction: all the apartment buildings along the avenue seemed to be new, the green roofs and the canary yellow façades In the centre, everything is brand new, absolutely everything: not only the beautiful 19th century buildings, completely restored, alongside the Prospekt, but also the sidewalks, the pavement, the green grass lawns with automatic sprinklers.”^[39]

Littell saw modern restaurants, a pharaonic new mosque, named after Akhmad Kadyrov, the president’s father, which is an exact copy of the famous blue mosque of Istanbul, and a reconstructed orthodox cathedral with glittering golden onion-shaped towers. The main boulevard, the Prospekt Pobedy (Victory Boulevard) had been rebaptized into Prospekt Putina (Putin Boulevard). “One could almost say, without

exaggeration, that Paris seems to keep more traces of the Second World War,” wrote Littell, “than Grozny of its two conflicts.”^[40]

Chechnya’s president, Ramzan Kadyrov, whose father Akhmad was killed in April 2004, is Putin’s special protégé. He reigns as a sultanist, oriental despot, and his feared militia, the *kadyrovtsy*, maintains a climate of terror.^[41]

The system holds only because of the “special relationship” between Kadyrov and Putin. Ramzan’s regime, however, shows the limits of Putin’s Chechenization. As more and more former separatist fighters side with Ramzan, “there is an aspect of Ramzan’s policy that is [for the Russian authorities] a subject of great concern: the massive cooptation of former independentist fighters.”^[42] Should Ramzan disappear, this feudal structure based upon the personal loyalty of the Chechen leader to Vladimir Putin, could break down and Moscow would be confronted with some twenty

thousand heavily armed Chechens. When, on April 16, 2009, Moscow decreed the official end of the *kontrterroristicheskaya operatsiya* (KTO) in Chechnya, it was a victory especially for Ramzan Kadyrov, who had acquired an almost complete autonomy by declarations of loyalty. According to the Russian political commentator Sergey Markedonov, “beginning in 2003, the Kadyrovs, first father and then son, in fact had succeeded in pushing out the federal presence from the republic. Slowly, step by step, but consistently.”^[43] And Charles King and Rajan Menon observed: “there are persistent worries in Moscow that he [Ramzan Kadyrov] has built his own state within a state—offering a model for how savvy Chechens, Circassians, and others might one day gain the kind of de facto autonomy, perhaps even independence, that previous generations failed to win.”^[44]

The “victory” proclaimed by the Russian government in the spring of 2009, after having formally ended the war, soon turned out to be

a pyrrhic victory. Not only because Moscow was gradually losing its grip on Kadyrov—a fact that Russian analysts also recognized^[45]—but because the conflict began to spill over into the neighboring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia, where a ruthless guerilla war was raging. “The [Chechen] conflict has splintered and metastasized,” wrote *Foreign Policy* four months after the official “end” of the war in Chechnya.^[46] Also Chechnya itself was far from being pacified. This became clear from a report by Thomas Hammarberg, the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe. Hammarberg wrote that in Chechnya in 2009 an increase in terrorist acts, murders, and abductions could be observed in comparison with 2008.^[47] The most famous case was the murder of Natalya Estemirova, representative of the human rights organization Memorial, who was kidnapped and murdered on July 15, 2009. Despite the harsh repression rebel forces

remained active. On August 29, 2010, a surprise attack took place on the house of Ramzan Kadyrov in his home village Tsentoroi, followed by a suicide attack on the Chechen Parliament on October 19. The first attack was called by a Russian commentator “out of the ordinary,” because “this latest attack strikes a blow at the very heart of the Caucasus vertical power structure.”^[48] And he added that “the attack on Tsentoroi has shown the vulnerability of the Kadyrov regime, which many consider the most successful in the North Caucasus.”^[49] Kadyrov’s vulnerability shows at the same time, behind the apparent strength of the Kremlin’s “power vertical,” the vulnerability of Putin’s regime. Interviewed on the situation in the Caucasus by the French paper *Le Monde* the well-known Russian analyst Lilia Shevtsova said that “everything in the region is getting out of control. We find there a non constitutional entity, Chechnya. Nobody talks about it, but it is a real humiliation for the federal authorities.

You have there a feudal and 'sultanist' regime, which means: clannish and authoritarian, that is supported by money from Moscow. . . . It produces resistance in the young generation against this regime and against the federal forces. The terrorist attacks take place almost on a daily basis.”^[50]

THE WAR IN CHECHNYA AND THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A final difference between the First and the Second Chechen War was that during the second war the Russian Federation was a fully fledged member of the Council of Europe, one of the most prestigious intergovernmental human rights organizations in the world. Russia had become a member on February 28, 1996, when the First Chechen War was beginning to unwind. One would have expected that the council would have condemned the war crimes committed in Chechnya, but, unfortunately, the

reaction of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe was rather muted. Apart from a temporary suspension of its voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly for some months in 2000, Moscow escaped any sanction.^[51] The European Court of Human Rights, however, was still able to play an important and useful role, because a rapidly growing number of cases of Russian—also Chechen—citizens was brought before the jurisdiction of the court. In the beginning of 2007, 19,300 allocated applications against the Russian Federation were pending, which represented 21.5 percent of all cases from all forty-seven member states. By the end of the same year the total number of cases against Russia was over 20,000 and represented 26 percent of the total. By the end of 2008 the total number of cases against Russia had grown further to 27,246, which was 28 percent of the total.^[52]

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg was, for Chechen citizens, a court of

last resort to correct the corrupt judiciary in Russia. The majority of the cases have been won by the plaintiffs. On January 26, 2006, Russia was for the first time condemned for a case of torture.^[53] The Russian authorities obediently paid the fines, but they refused to change the judicial system according to the obligations Russia had accepted when it became a member of the council. Because the European Court of Human Rights abstained from obliging the Russian government to open new judicial inquiries, punish the perpetrators, and present public excuses to the family, this has led to a cynical system—resembling the medieval salic law (*lex salica*)—in which, in the case of a condemnation a kind of “tax” is paid by the Russian state to the families of the victims who had been killed. As a rule, “the disappearance of a human being costs 35,000 euros.”^[54] Although for the plaintiffs these rulings are “better than nothing,” they do not really restore their violated sense of justice. As

concerns ordinary Russians, for them the Strasbourg rulings are only another proof of Europe's negative feelings towards Russia. "Europe," wrote the pro-Kremlin paper *Pravda*, "has always disliked Russia, but has never been straightforward about it. Just google: 'European court in Strasbourg Chechens' and you will see how many cases against Russia have been won. Many of those cases are based on doubtful facts."^[55] There is another side to the coin: the flood of complaints is totally disrupting the court in Strasbourg, which is drowning under the overload of cases. Attempts, however, to reform the court to make procedures more efficient were blocked by Russia. Its own solution to diminish the flow has been to exert a growing pressure on the lawyers of Russian and Chechen plaintiffs, who are harassed by the authorities to discourage citizens from seeking justice in Strasbourg.

A GENOCIDE?

The Second Chechen War was characterized by an endless series of crimes, many of which certainly deserve to be qualified as war crimes and crimes against humanity: from the indiscriminate bombardments of Grozny and the use of forbidden fuel and cluster bombs in the first months of the war, to the summary executions of civilians during the *zachistki*, the torture, the forced disappearances, the blowing up of bodies, the organized looting, and other acts of state terror. Another important question is whether the Russians committed *genocide*. There are no precise data available for the number of people killed, only estimates that vary according to the sources. Uwe Halbach wrote in February 2005—this is four years before the official end of the “counterterrorist operation”—that according to estimates, “between 10% and 20% of the population of Chechnya died in both wars, so after 1994. For the first war the numbers vary between 35,000 and more than 100,000 victims. . . . As concerns

the second war . . . , in the late summer of 2002 human rights organizations calculated the [number of] victims in the Chechen population at 80,000 dead.”^[56] Five years later Jonathan Littell gave for both wars a total number of two hundred thousand victims.^[57] According to another author, “figures range to 300,000 killed,” adding that this “is probably an exaggeration.”^[58] The last figure, apparently, does not take into account the refugees who fled the republic, whose numbers could reach one hundred thousand. It seems plausible, therefore, to estimate the total number of killed Chechens in the two conflicts between 150,000 and 200,000. These include men, women, and children, the great majority of them noncombatant citizens. Before the first war started the population of Chechnya was roughly one million. This means that possibly between *15 to 20 percent* of the Chechen population has been exterminated.^[59] To put

this number in a historical perspective: Daniel Goldhagen has estimated that “Pol Pot [killed] the highest percentage of the inhabitants of any country, more than 20 percent of the Cambodians, totaling 1.7 million.”^[60] Pol Pot was, indeed, a ruthless mass murderer. And the number of people killed by his regime is tenfold of the Chechens killed in Chechnya. But the *percentage* of the population killed in these two cases, by Pol Pot on the one hand, and by the masters of the Kremlin on the other, are quite comparable. The question of a genocide committed by Russia in Chechnya is therefore fully on the table.

Of course there is the famous question of *intent* that, according to international conventions, must be proven in order that an act can qualify as genocide. Did the Russian government *intentionally* kill such a great proportion of the Chechen population? This cannot be proven as long as there are no records (texts of the orders given by the

political leadership to the military commanders, minutes of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, etcetera) that provide undisputable proof. But is such a proof necessary? Daniel Goldhagen denies this requirement. According to him, “intent should not be a criterion for determining what instances qualify as genocide.” And he added: “If a large number of people, except through defensible military operations, are eliminated in any manner, why should this not be part of a study of genocide, which rightly becomes a study of mass murder, which rightly becomes a study of mass elimination?”^[61]

It is quite clear that in Chechnya such a large number of people could not have been eliminated “through defensible military operations.” If one estimates the total number of Chechen fighters in both wars at around fifteen thousand to twenty thousand, this means that for each killed Chechen fighter the Russians killed nine to ten Chechen civilians.

This indiscriminate mass killing of civilians cannot, under any circumstance, be qualified as collateral damage. The human rights activist Sergey Kovalyov wrote in February 2000, during the bombing campaign of Grozny:

The Russian army is quite prepared for genocide. This was demonstrated in the previous war; it was proven again recently by events in the village of Alkhan-Yurt, where professional soldiers shot around forty unarmed inhabitants—for no reason. It has already been confirmed by official announcements that vacuum bombs are being employed in Chechnya—terrible weapons that kill every living thing over a wide area, including people in shelters. What is new this time around is that Russian society as a whole is prepared to carry out genocide. Cruelty and violence are no longer rejected.^[62]

Goldhagen is quite clear on the Chechen case. "States and their leaders often give tacit support, remain silent, or make quiet pro forma objections when allies or other important countries commit mass murders or eliminations. Aside from a few tepid and oblique objections, this has characterized virtually every state's stance toward the Russians' mass murdering and vast destruction in Chechnya."^[63] The likelihood of members of the Russian government being pursued for war crimes and crimes against humanity is not great. The juridical instruments, however, are in place. On the table is an important verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Akhmadov and others v. Russia*. This concerns an attack on October 27, 2001, by Russian soldiers, firing from helicopters on people, harvesting in the fields near the village of Komsomolskoye. The court decided that the attack violated article 2 of the Convention (right to life). In the explication of the verdict the

court spoke of an “armed conflict” in Chechnya. This was the first time the court used the expression “armed conflict.” In all former verdicts the court had spoken about the “repression of an armed rebellion.” Amnesty International has stressed the importance of this verdict: “to agree that in Chechnya exists an armed conflict is of great importance for the international legal and penal qualification of human rights violations. The existence of an armed conflict is the necessary condition for the application of norms concerning war crimes that, let us remember, are imprescriptible.”^[64] Another hopeful initiative was the adoption of a resolution on April 2, 2003, by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) asking for the establishment of an international tribunal for crimes committed in Chechnya. Unfortunately, this initiative remained without follow-up.^[65]

It is disappointing that—apart from condemnations by the European Court of

Human Rights—the alleged war crimes committed by Russia in Chechnya have met with so little protest from the international community, especially from nearby Europe. This lack of interest can certainly be explained. Not only was the war considered an internal affair of the Russian Federation, but the West also believed (or wanted to believe) the Russian propaganda that the war in Chechnya was a part of “the global war on Islamist terrorism.” The West’s failure to react—and especially Europe’s failure to react in the framework of the Council of Europe—was a disgrace. The war crimes committed in Chechnya—repulsive and criminal as they were in themselves—were also a warning for the West about Russia’s eventual future behavior. Michael Ignatieff wrote: “Even when a state’s domestic behavior is not a clear and present danger to the international system, it is a reliable predictor that it is likely to be so in the future. Consider the example of Hitler’s regime, 1933–38, or Stalin’s in the same period.

In hindsight, there seems no doubt that Western governments' failure to sanction or even condemn their domestic policies encouraged both dictators to believe that their international adventures would go unpunished and unresisted."^[66]

NOTES

1. Martin Malek, "Russia's Asymmetric Wars in Chechnya since 1994," *Connections* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 85.
2. Pavel Felgenhauer, "The Russian Army in Chechnya," *Crimes of War Project* (April 18, 2003). <http://www.crimesofwar.org/chechnya-mag/chech-felgenhauer.html>.
3. Jonathan Marcus, "Russians Urged to Stop 'Vacuum' Bombings," *BBC News Online* (February 15, 2000).
4. Felgenhauer, "The Russian Army in Chechnya."
5. Quoted by Maura Reynolds, "Krieg ohne

Regeln: Russische Soldaten in Tschetschenien,” in *Der Krieg im Schatten: Russland und Tschetschenien*, ed. Florian Hassel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 135.

6. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 101.

7. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 101–102.

8. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 103.

9. Cf. Felgenhauer, “The Russian Army in Chechnya.”

10. Cf. Marina Caparini, “Private Military Companies,” in *Combating Terrorism and Its Implications for the Security Sector*, eds. Amb. Dr. Theodor H. Winkler, Anja H. Ebnöther, and Mats B. Hansson (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2005), 216.

11. Caparini, “Private Military Companies,” 209.

12. Caparini, “Private Military Companies,” 209.

13. Felgenhauer, “The Russian Army in Chechnya.”

14. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 71.

15. Thomas de Waal, “Introduction,” in Anna Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War* (London: The Harvill

Press, 2007), xxv–xxvi.

16. According to the Main Military Procurator, Sergey Fridinsky, “in 2006–2007, more than 5,000 recorded crimes were committed by contract personnel. In 2008, the number of recorded crimes committed by contract servicemen increased by 50.5 percent.” (Cf. Roger N. McDermott, *The Reform of Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges and Policy Implications* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2011), 82–83.) Note that these recorded crimes mainly took place outside Chechnya, in the Russian Federation proper. Most crimes in Chechnya were neither recorded, nor punished.

17. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 56.

18. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 53.

19. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 51.

20. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 51–52.

21. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*, 29. And these were not mere words. “Between 1856 and 1864,

approximately 600,000 Muslim peoples of the Caucasus quit that region for the Ottoman empire” (ibid.).

22. Quoted in Solovyov and Klepikova, *Inside the Kremlin*, 249.

23. Sergey Maksudov, “Naselenie Chechni: prava li perepis?” (The Population of Chechnya: Is the Census Right?), *Kavkaz-Forum* (September 8, 2005). <http://www.kavkaz-forum.ru/dossier/12963.html?print=on>.

The total number of victims of the *zachistki* for the period 1999–2009 will be higher. But from 2003 the number of victims gradually decreased, due to three facts. First, from 2003 fewer *kontraktniki* were engaged. Second, due to the collaboration of the Chechen mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, the Russians were better informed and replaced widespread and massive *zachistki* by *adresnye zachistki*, sweep operations that targeted only the homes of selected suspected individuals. And, third, there was the fact that at that time probably the

majority of Chechen fighters had already been killed. On January 20, 2003, the Russian press agency Interfax set the figure at more than fourteen thousand rebels killed. (Quoted in Uwe Halbach, "Gewalt in Tschetschenien: Ein gemiedenes Problem internationaler Politik," *SWP-Studie*, Berlin (February 2004).)

24. Alice Lagnado, "An Interview with Oleg Orlov," *Crimes of War Project* (April 18, 2003).

25. Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2002), 32.

26. Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*, 31–32.

27. That the special troops and *Spetsnaz* elite troops began to play a more important role from the end of 2000 becomes clear from the fact that Putin (by Presidential Decree No. 61—signed on January 22, 2001) put the FSB in charge of all anti-terrorist operations in Chechnya. All power structures operating in the North Caucasus, including the army, were to be subordinated to the new HQ. (Cf. Gordon Bennett, "Vladimir Putin & Russia's Special

- Services,” C108, *Conflict Studies Research Centre* (August 2002), 29.)
28. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 63.
 29. Malek, “Russia’s Asymmetric Wars in Chechnya since 1994,” 93.
 30. Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War*.
 31. Halbach, “Gewalt in Tschetschenien: Ein gemiedenes Problem internationaler Politik,” 15.
 32. *Droits humains en Russie: Résister pour l’état de droit*, Amnesty International Report, 103.
 33. Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich, “Torture and Rape Stalk the Streets of Chechnya,” *The Guardian* (October 27, 2002).
 34. Sarah Karush, “A Grim New Allegation in Chechnya: Russians Blowing up Bodies,” *Associated Press* (March 13, 2003). In April 2003 also Oleg Orlov of the Russian NGO Memorial confirmed that this had become routine practice: “Particularly over the past few months, security forces blow up the bodies in order that they cannot be identified.” (Cf. Lagnado, “An

Interview with Oleg Orlov.”) This practice had a striking resemblance with that of the Chekists just after the October Revolution. According to J. Michael Waller, “the early chekist killing method was designed so as not to create martyrs around whom opponents could rally. The doomed, naked prisoner would be brought to a normally drunken executioner armed with a tsarist-era Colt pistol. The Colt was favoured for its large caliber; when fired into the back of the head, the bullet would mutilate the face upon exiting the skull, making the body unrecognizable. This method saved the chekists the problem of dealing with relatives searching for bodies, and made recovery of a potential martyr impossible.” (Waller, *Secret Empire: The KGB in Russia Today*, 21–22).

35. Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 63.

36. Quoted by Maura Reynolds, “Krieg ohne Regeln: Russische Soldaten in Tschetschenien,” in *Der Krieg im Schatten: Russland und Tschetschenien*, ed. Florian Hassel, 128.

37. On January 1, 2014, the convention had ninety-three signatories and was ratified by forty-one countries. The convention came into force on December 23, 2010. The Russian Federation did not sign the convention.

38. Felgenhauer, "The Russian Army in Chechnya."

39. Jonathan Littell, *Tchéchénie: An III* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 38.

40. Littell, *Tchéchénie: An III*, 41–42.

41. Suspicions have been aired that Ramzan Kadyrov is behind a series of political murders inside and outside Chechnya, that is, the murder of *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anna Politkovskaya and of human rights activist Natalya Estemirova. Until recently there was no proof. This changed in 2009. A Chechen refugee in Austria, Umar Israilov, who started a procedure against Kadyrov for torture before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, was killed on the street on January 13, 2009, by a commando. One of the three

accused Chechens, Otto Kaltenbrunner, had “pictures on his cell phone that show him embracing Mr Kadyrov, one of the indications of their closeness.” One of the alleged murderers had called Shakya Turlaev, an adviser of Kadyrov, after the operation. According to the Austrian MP Peter Pilz, spokesman for the Greens on questions of security and defense, Kadyrov has formed in Austria “a shock troop of 30 to 50 men who are tasked to terrorize, kidnap or kill” Chechen exiles. In the EU are living about a hundred thousand refugees, of whom twenty-six thousand in Austria. Pilz said that the FSB agent Saïd Selim Peshkoev at the Russian embassy in Vienna, a former minister of the interior of Chechnya, had direct access to data on Chechen refugees collected by the BVT (Austrian intelligence service). A statement to this effect was signed by the former conservative Austrian minister of the interior, Ernst Strasser, who is now a member of the European Parliament and president of the

Austrian-Russian Friendship Association ORFG. (Cf. Joëlle Stolz, “Le procès des meurtriers d’un réfugié tchéchène dévoile le ‘système Kadyrov,’” *Le Monde* (November 17, 2010).)

42. Littell, *Tchéchénie: An III*, 64–65.

43. Quoted in Paul Goble, “Chechnya Far from Peaceful and Far Less under Russian Control,” *Moldova.org* (April 15, 2010).

44. Charles King and Rajan Menon, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia’s Invisible Civil War,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July/August 2010), 30.

45. Cf. Sergey Maksudov, Vyacheslav Igrunov, Aleksey Malashenko, and Nikolay Petrov, “Chechentsy i russkie: pobedy, porazheniya, poteri” (Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010). In this interview, in which the authors discuss their book of the same title, they say “that at this moment in this space [Chechnya] has formed a half-independent vassal government (*polunezavisimoe vassalnoe gosudarstvo*) that is not at all controlled from Moscow.”

46. Paul Quinn-Judge, "Russia's Brutal Guerilla War," *Foreign Policy* (August 31, 2009).
47. Piotr Smolar, "En Tchétchénie la violence augmente, selon un rapport," *Le Monde* (November 26, 2009).
48. Aleksey Malashenko, "Militant Attack on Tsentoroi Village," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Commentary (August 30, 2010).
49. Malashenko, "Militant Attack on Tsentoroi Village."
50. Piotr Smolar, "Le maire de Moscou, Iouri Loujkov, a été évincé car il n'appartenait pas au 'cercle du pouvoir,'" *Le Monde* (September 30, 2010).
51. Cf. Nougayrède, "La démocratie dévoilée," in *Droits humains en Russie: Résister pour l'état de droit*, 22–23.
52. Cf. Katlijn Malfliet and Stephan Parmentier, "Russia's Membership of the Council of Europe: Ten Years After," in *Russia and the Council of Europe: 10 Years After*, eds. Katlijn Malfliet and

Stephan Parmentier (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.

53. Cf. Nougayrède, *Droits humains en Russie: Résister pour l'état de droit*, 89.

54. Kirill Koroteev, "Les violations des droits humains en Tchétchénie devant la Cour Européenne des Droits de l'Homme," in Nougayrède, *Droits humains en Russie: Résister pour l'état de droit*, 120.

55. Andrey Bortsov and Vadim Trukhachev, "Poland Ascribes Non-existent Genocide of Chechens to Russia," *Pravda.ru* (September 28, 2010).

56. Hallbach, "Gewalt in Tschetschenien: ein gemiedenes Problem internationaler Politik," 18.

57. Littell, *Tchéchénie, An III*, 56.

58. Martin Malek, "Understanding Chechen Culture," in *Chechens in the European Union*, eds. Alexander Janda, Norbert Leitner, and Mathias Vogl (Vienna: Austrian Integration Fund: Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior,

2008), 32.

59. Russian sources give other figures for the civilian war dead. Sergey Maksudov, for instance, gives a total number of Chechens killed in *both* wars of twenty-eight thousand (!). He contrasts this number with twenty thousand Chechen Russophones (in the next sentence called “Russians”) killed by the Chechens (and not by the Russian bombardments). (Maksudov et al., “Chechentsy i russkie: pobedy, porazheniya, poteri.”) It is surprising to read these figures with no critical comment on the website of the Moscow Center of the prestigious Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

60. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Worse than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 36.

61. Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 29. A similar argument is made by Susan Neiman who, rightly, emphasized that not *intentions*, but the

results are decisive. “What counts,” she wrote, “is not what your road is paved with, but whether it leads to hell. Precisely the belief that evil actions require evil intentions allowed totalitarian regimes to convince people to override moral objections that might otherwise have functioned.” (Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 275.)

62. Kovalev, “Putin’s War.”

63. Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 250–251.

64. Koroteev, “Les violations des droits humains en Tchétchénie devant la Cour Européenne des Droits de l’Homme,” 119.

65. Cf. Miriam Kosmehl, “Tschetschenien und das internationale Recht,” in *Der Krieg im Schatten: Rußland und Tschetschenien*, ed. Florian Hassel, 121–122.

66. Michael Ignatieff, “Human Rights as Politics,” in *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann (Princeton NJ:

Princeton University Press, 2001), 41–42.

Chapter 13

The War with Georgia, Part I

A Premeditated Russian Aggression

After the War in Georgia, Vaclav Havel and other prominent personalities, wrote an op-ed in which they argued that “a great power always finds pretexts to invade a neighbor whose independence it does not accept. Let us remember: Hitler accused the Poles of being the first to have opened fire in 1939 and Stalin held the Finns responsible for the war he started against them in 1940. The fundamental question is to know which is the occupied country and which is the occupying country, who has invaded whom, rather than who has fired the first bullet.”^[1] We should keep these words in mind when analyzing the events which

took place in Georgia in August 2008.

A FIVE-DAY WAR?

The Russian version of the war in Georgia is as follows: on the night of August 7, 2008, Georgian troops entered the breakaway province of South Ossetia and launched a surprise attack on its capital, Tskhinvali. During the attack the Georgian troops killed two thousand civilians: a clear case of genocide. Many of the victims were Russian citizens. In addition, Russian peacekeepers, stationed in South Ossetia, were killed. To stop this genocide Russian troops started a "humanitarian intervention." They entered South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the other breakaway province, to drive the Georgian aggressors back. This version of the facts was not only broadcast nationwide by the Russian media and disseminated by Russian diplomats abroad, it was personally explained by Vladimir Putin to US President George W. Bush, who

were both attending the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing on August 8.

This official Russian narrative, however, was a prime example of active disinformation, a deception method of which the Russian secret service is the unrivaled champion. When the war began the Kremlin immediately launched cyber attacks against Georgia and effectively blocked the websites of the Georgian government and the Georgian media. In so doing it was able to impose its own version of the events from the very start of the conflict. It even managed, with considerable success, to influence Western public opinion. Most correspondents of Western media in Moscow accepted uncritically the Russian narrative “that the war started with a Georgian attack, which was followed by a Russian response.” The only criticism to be heard was concerning the “disproportionate” character of the Russian response, a euphemism for the massive attacks outside South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the

Georgian heartland and the destruction of the military and economic infrastructure of the country.^[2] The Russian disinformation campaign was very successful. It is telling that even Pavel Baev, an analyst who could never be accused of being naïve vis-à-vis the Putin regime, wrote on August 11—one day before the ceasefire: “[the Russian] surprise was so complete that Putin, according to those who saw him in Beijing, was pale with barely controlled rage, which he tried to convey to U.S. President George Bush and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.”^[3] For this interpretation of the facts Baev referred to a Russian source. A similar version of the facts could be found in a report by a European think tank, published some weeks after the war. In this report it was stated that “Moscow has *responded* to Saakashvili’s military attack on South Ossetia by escalating a conflict over a secessionist region into a full-scale inter-state

war with Georgia.”[4]

Does this interpretation of the Russian war against Georgia as a Russian response, provoked by a Georgian aggression that led to a genocide, stand up to the facts? No, it does not. This war, far from being—as most media at the time wanted to believe—a reckless act, initiated by an impulsive Georgian president, was a carefully planned operation. It had been prepared by the Russian leadership since 2000 through a process of gradual and purposive escalation. Step by step this process was implemented and brought to its final *dénouement* in August 2008. If we want to analyze this war and the factors that led to it we should, therefore, analyze its *complete* history and this history does not start on August 7, 2008, but in the year 2000. That we take this choice of start date is no coincidence, because it is the same year in which Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was elected president of the Russian Federation. From this point Russia's

Georgia policy changed radically, although not particularly in terms of its objectives. These remained generally the same as at the beginning of the 1990s. These objectives were to divide Georgia and undermine its viability as an independent and sovereign state. The active military support given by Russia to separatist movements during the civil wars in South Ossetia (1991–1992) and Abkhazia (1992–1993), as well as its support for the corrupt autocrat Aslan Abashidze in Adjara (Southwest Georgia) until his forced resignation in 2004, had no objective other than to weaken Georgia. Plans to incorporate Abkhazia into Russia already existed in the 1990s, as became clear from a remark made by Pavel Grachev, then Russian minister of defense, who told Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze: “We can’t leave Abkhazia, because then we’d lose the Black Sea.”^[5] Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote shortly after the civil wars: “In Georgia, military intervention gave Moscow the pretext for

political mediation. In the course of it Georgia learned . . . that Russia as an umpire is not very different from Russia as an empire.”^[6]

With the arrival of the new strongman in the Kremlin it was the strategy, not the objectives, that changed. This strategy was no longer based on ad hoc initiatives and on blocking solutions aimed at reintegrating the breakaway provinces into Georgia. From this point on there was a well-organized long-term planning. Every single step was deliberately calculated in advance, and a war with Georgia became an option. After the war with Chechnya, the war with Georgia became Putin’s *second* war of choice. Contrary to the official Kremlin version that insists on calling the war in Georgia a “Five-Day War,” *three* different phases in this conflict can be discerned:

- the period of a Russian-Georgian cold war (December 2000 to spring 2008)
- a period of a lukewarm war (spring

2008 until August 7, 2008)

- the hot war (August 7–August 12, 2008)

THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN COLD WAR: THE PASSPORT OFFENSIVE

The Russian-Georgian Cold War started in December 2000, when the Russian government imposed visa requirements for Georgians who worked in Russia—an unfriendly measure that was directed against the thousands of Georgian citizens who worked in Russia and sent remittances to their relatives at home. Georgia was the first and only CIS country for which visas were introduced. Moscow said the measure was necessary to prevent Chechen rebels from entering Chechnya via Georgian territory. This decision, taken in the first year of Putin's presidency was the first sign of a more aggressive stance toward Georgia. In 2002 this anti-Georgian policy entered a new phase when

the Russian authorities started distributing Russian passports on a wide scale to the inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.^[7] This “passport offensive” made it clear that Moscow’s intention was to “thaw” the frozen conflicts in Georgia and then resolve them in a way that suited Moscow’s interests. By creating a majority of “Russian citizens” in the two breakaway provinces Russia seemed to be preparing these provinces for some form of integration into Russia. Ronald Asmus wrote:

Russian passports were welcome as a way to travel although in reality few residents ever left the country except to visit Russia. For Moscow it created a fake diaspora and another lever of control. Having handed out thousands of passports to individuals living on what it still recognized as Georgian territory, Moscow would subsequently claim the right to defend its newly minted “citizens.”^[8] . . . [That]

doctrine was reminiscent of what Nazi Germany had done in the Sudetenland in the late 1930s, using the German diaspora to agitate in favor of unification with Germany and then justifying the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia with the need to protect ethnic Germans suffering persecution in Prague.^[9]

Some observers dubbed this policy “re-occupation through passportization.”^[10] The EU-sponsored “Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,” headed by the Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, was also very clear on the illegal nature of Russia’s passport policy, reporting that “the issuance of passports is an act based on governmental authority. To the Mission’s knowledge, the passports were in many cases distributed on the territory of the breakaway entities. To the extent that these acts have been performed in Georgia without Georgia’s

explicit consent, Russia has violated the principle of territorial sovereignty.^[11]

But it was not only *Russian* passports that were distributed. The *de facto* deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia, Maksim Gvindzhia, declared on September 6, 2006, that at that point roughly 80 percent of the population held a *dual* Abkhaz-Russian citizenship.^[12] This means that the Abkhaz government had already started to distribute its *own*—illegal—passports two years before its independence was recognized by Russia.^[13] Because holders of Abkhaz passports could obtain a dual Russian-Abkhaz citizenship (which gave Abkhaz citizens the right to receive Russian pensions and to travel to Russia without restrictions),^[14] it became clear that from 2006 Russia was conducting a *double track* strategy, leaving both options open: either the independence for Abkhazia, or its incorporation into the Russian Federation. The extent to

which these options even remained open after the August 2008 war, emerged from declarations by the presidents of the two breakaway provinces on September 11, 2008. According to the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, “South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity said his republic planned to merge with the neighboring Russian province of North Ossetia, and become part of Russia, a statement he later withdrew [apparently under pressure from the Kremlin, MHVH]. Meanwhile, Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh said Abkhazia would not pursue to obtain ‘associated territory’ status with Russia, but would seek to join the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russia-Belarus Union State.”^[15]

In December 2001 Eduard Kokoity replaced the more moderate South Ossetian independentist President Lyudvig Chibirov. Kokoity was Moscow’s man. A former

Komsomol apparatchik and ex-Soviet professional wrestler, Kokoity was accused of links with organized crime.^[16] As a member of Aleksandr Dugin's revisionist International Eurasianist Movement that propagated the reintegration of former parts of the Soviet Union into the Russian Federation,^[17] he was never interested in any negotiated compromise with Tbilisi. For Moscow, Kokoity was the right man in the right place to block, definitively, the eventual reintegration of South Ossetia into Georgia, opting for a solution that would make the secession of the region permanent.

It is important to note that this aggressive strategy by Russia toward Georgia started in the years 2000–2002. It was, therefore, neither a reaction to the Rose Revolution nor to Georgia's aspirations for NATO membership: during those years the Georgian president was Eduard Shevardnadze and not Mikheil Saakashvili, and the Rose Revolution had not yet taken place. Also a Georgian NATO

membership was not on the political agenda. After the Rose Revolution in 2003, however, the relationship rapidly deteriorated. When, on September 27, 2006, Georgia arrested four Russians diplomats suspected of espionage for the GRU, the Russian military secret service, and extradited them some days later, the Kremlin launched a full-scale economic and diplomatic war. It was a case of pure and deliberate overkill. Russia suspended all air, rail, and road traffic between Russia and Georgia, including the postal services. It stopped issuing visas to Georgians and imposed import bans on Georgian wine and mineral water. Putin declared "that Georgia's home and foreign politics was similar to that conducted by KGB during Stalin's times,"^[18] which is a surprising remark for a former KGB agent who has never hidden his deep personal pride in being a Chekist. The economic blockade was accompanied by a vehement anti-Georgian campaign within the Russian Federation,

targeting the approximately one million Georgians who lived and worked in the country. Georgian businesses in Moscow were raided; illegal immigrants were hunted and expelled. The Russian action clearly constituted a “racist campaign,” wrote Salomé Zourabichvili, who was Georgian foreign minister from 2004 to 2005. “[It was] apparently supported by the official authorities, [and took] the form of a “hunt for the Caucasian” in the streets of Russia’s main cities.”^[19] The Moscow police asked schools to provide lists of children with Georgian names in order to check out their parents. The government sponsored raids on Georgian migrant workers and market traders soon started to give off a whiff of ethnic cleansing, which led the independent radio station Ekho Moskvyy (Echo of Moscow) to start a campaign asking their listeners to wear a badge with the slogan *Ya Gruzin* (I am a Georgian).^[20]

THE LUKEWARM WAR: RUSSIAN PROVOCATIONS AND PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

The second phase, the “lukewarm war,” started soon afterward. In his famous Munich speech of February 10, 2007, Putin had already announced a harder stance toward the West. This was followed by Russia’s first direct military aggression against Georgia one month later, when Russian military helicopters shelled Georgian administration buildings in the Kodori Gorge, a mountainous part in Upper Abkhazia that was still under the control of the Georgian government. However, when shortly after this aggression Russia proposed the closure of its 62nd military base in Akhalkalaki, a small town in South Georgia near the frontier with Armenia, this raised hope in Georgia that the situation would improve. On June 27, 2007, ahead of schedule, the Russians finished the withdrawal of their troops. Andrey Illarionov, a

former Putin aide, later turned into a regime critic, said that this unexpected and seemingly cooperative attitude on Russia's part was, in fact, an integral part of the Russian war preparations. "While it may seem counter-intuitive," wrote Illarionov, "it became clear in hindsight that Moscow wanted to avoid a situation in which Georgia [in an eventual war] could take Russian bases hostage."^[21] The decree, signed by Putin on July 13, 2007, in which he announced the suspension of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) by December 12, 2007, should be viewed in the same light. When this treaty was signed, it was hailed as "the basis for overall European and North American security, and derivatively, world security, for many decades to come."^[22] Through the treaty the objective of "eliminating the capability of launching a surprise attack [was] completely realized."^[23] An example of an attack that was supposed to be excluded in

the future was the “combined-arms surprise attack in Europe like the Nazi blitzkrieg at the beginning of World War II.”^[24] Putin, however, unilaterally “suspended” this treaty, a step that was not foreseen in the treaty text.^[25]

Although the other signatories still continued to apply the CFE Treaty, Putin, in fact, had killed it. He killed it deliberately. Since Russia was no longer bound by the provisions of the Treaty, Putin could remove the limits on the deployment of Russian heavy military equipment in the North Caucasus, thereby giving Russia a free hand to start a war against Georgia.

On March 6, 2008, Russia took another unilateral step when it lifted the sanctions on Abkhazia that had been agreed by the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1996. It was Russia’s answer to the declaration of independence by Kosovo in February 2008, and it would be the opening shot in the war of nerves between Russia, with its South Ossetian

and Abkhazian proxies, and Georgia. It was, however, after the Bucharest NATO summit of April 2–4, 2008, that Russia's Cold War against Georgia really began to warm up. Without a doubt the refusal of France and Germany to grant Georgia (and Ukraine) a Membership Action Plan (MAP) during the summit was instrumental in Russia adopting a more aggressive stance toward its small neighbor, whose vulnerability had been suddenly exposed after being snubbed by these two leading EU countries.^[26]

In hindsight, it was after the Bucharest summit that the preparations for a military confrontation began in earnest. President Mikheil Saakashvili had already warned that this would happen. "If we don't get [the MAP]," he said, "that's exactly when they [the Russians] are going to start all kinds of troubles."^[27] He was proved to be right. The NATO summit affirmed that Georgia and Ukraine would, one day, "become members of NATO." "But because

the summit did not provide for a mechanism to achieve this purpose, explicitly rejecting the Membership Action Plans that would fulfill this function,” wrote David J. Smith, “Putin read NATO’s fudge for what it was. In other words, the West will continue its dalliance without seriousness of purpose.”^[28] “NATO’s failure to approve a Georgian MAP at the April 2008 summit,” wrote Vladimir Socor, “emboldened Russia to escalate military operations against Georgia.”^[29] The lifting of the sanctions against the breakaway regions was followed by a decree by President Putin in April 2008 instructing the Russian government to cooperate with the de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to recognize some documents issued by them.^[30] It was the first official step made by Russia to recognize the two breakaway entities. The new relationship, established by Russia with these provinces after April 2008, “was virtually

identical to that which existed between Moscow and the federal territories within Russian proper. Georgia noted that Putin's order amounted to Russia's full annexation of the two Georgian regions."^[31] An imminent annexation was also revealed by the presence of high-ranking Russian FSB officers in the South Ossetian "government."^[32]

The Russian political analyst Alexander Golts wrote: "Tbilisi had every reason to consider what had happened as a preparation for annexation."^[33] One of the consequences of the lifting of the sanctions was that it legalized the theft by Russians of Georgian property: "Russians have been investing, especially in real estate along the coast, though much of this property belonged, before the 1990s war, to Georgians who have not been able to return and for whom no compensation mechanism exists."^[34] Mart Laar, former prime minister of Estonia, wrote an alarming article in the

Financial Times. He spoke about “a creeping annexation” and warned: “This will incorporate the two territories into the Russian legal space.”^[35] He added: “Ignoring Moscow’s Soviet-style land-grab would intensify strife in the south Caucasus.” “In 1937,” Laar warned, “Hitler agitated for the rights of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia; in 1938, he annexed Sudetenland into the Reich, purging it of non-Germans. In Abkhazia, most Georgians, Armenians, Estonians, Greeks and Russians—perhaps 500,000 in all—are already gone.” He concluded: “Western political autism is irresponsible. The west must awake and unite, not to oppose Russia or support Georgia, but to stand up for its ideals.”

Nobody, however, listened. US President George W. Bush, in the last year of his presidency and extremely unpopular, was a lame duck, and the leading European states let economic interests prevail over uncomfortable principles. During the same period the Kremlin

strengthened the self-declared “governments” of the breakaway provinces by bringing in more of its own people. An important appointment was that of the Russian General Vasily Lunev, a former deputy commander-in-chief of the Siberian Military District. On March 1, 2008, he became minister of defense of South Ossetia, a region with only sixty thousand inhabitants. In normal conditions this would have been more than a degradation: rather an *exile*. In this case, however, in view of the coming war, it was an important promotion. And on August 9, 2008, General Vasily Lunev’s secret *real* function became clear, when he was appointed commander-in-chief of the 58th Army of the North Caucasian Military District, the army that led the invasion into Georgia.^[36]

A new step in the process of escalation was taken on April 20, 2008, when a Georgian Israeli-made Hermes-450 reconnaissance drone was shot down above Abkhazia. The Russian

government attributed this act to “Abkhaz militias.”^[37] This explanation was ridiculed by *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Yuliya Latynina, who wrote, “Apparently, in the near future small, but proud Abkhazia will have its own space armies.”^[38] The Georgian government was able to produce video evidence of the attack that was filmed by the unmanned drone seconds before it was shot down. It showed a Russian MiG-29 fighter attacking the drone with a missile and then flying back in the direction of Russia. Russia said the video was a fake, but a UN report, published one month later, concluded that the video evidence was authentic.^[39] In the same week in which the drone was shot down, Pavel Felgenhauer reported that “Sergei Shamba, the head of [the] Abkhazian foreign ministry, made a statement about the intention of capturing part of Georgian territory for making a certain ‘buffer zone.’ Apparently, it is planned to banish local

population from there.”^[40] These aggressive declarations hinting at further annexations of Georgian territory coupled with ethnic cleansing of the inhabitants were accompanied by accusations at the address of Georgia that Georgia prepared an attack. Georgia’s “aggressiveness” was also used as a pretext for transferring on April 29, 2008, an additional Russian military contingent of what were called *mirotvorcheskie sily* (peacekeepers) to Abkhazia. Felgenhauer commented: “People in the Staff of airborne troops stated that it’s not ‘additional peacemakers,’ but a battalion of 400 soldiers with regular ammunition, including heavy material, anti-aircraft means and artillery (which is not allowed for peacemakers) that was brought into Abkhazia without any prior arrangement with the Georgian side.”^[41] This move was a flagrant violation of the 1994 cease-fire agreement that had ended the war between Georgian and Abkhaz fighters.

On May 31, 2008, a further step on the

escalation ladder was taken when four hundred soldiers of Russia's railway forces illegally entered Abkhazia and started to repair the railway connection between Sukhumi, Abkhazia's capital, and Ochamchire in south Abkhazia, near the frontier with Georgia proper. The railway along the Abkhazian coast connects Abkhazia in the North with the Russian town of Sochi. It is the only railway connection linking Georgia with Russia. The official reason given for this troop activity was a ruling by the—newly elected—Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, “on rendering humanitarian aid to the republic.”^[42] NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer pronounced the deployment to be “clearly in contravention of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity,” and “an escalating action by Russia.”^[43] He said the troops should be withdrawn. The Georgian government indicated the real reason for the repairs: the preparation for a Russian attack on Georgia. “Nobody needs

to bring Railway Forces to the territory of another country, if a military intervention is not being prepared,” declared Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze.^[44] Due to the poor road system the Russian army, as a rule, transports its troops and tanks by rail. The troops finished their work at the end of July, only a few days before the war started.

In July Russia further increased the pressure. On July 3, 2008, an assassination attempt was made on Dmitry Sanakoev, head of the Tbilisi-backed interim administration of South Ossetia, which still controlled about one third of the territory, including some villages north of the separatist capital Tskhinvali. Throughout the month of July new incidents took place.

On July 9 Moscow demonstratively acknowledged that four Russian Air Force planes had flown a mission over South Ossetia. That action sought to deter

Georgia from flying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), thus blinding Tbilisi to Russian and proxy military movements in the area. A series of roadside bomb blasts targeted Georgian police patrols. During the second half of July and the first days of August, Russian-commanded Ossetian troops under the authority of (Russian-led) South Ossetian authorities fired repeatedly at Georgian-controlled villages, forcing Georgian police to fire back defensively.^[45]

For informed observers it was clear that the wheels of war were turning. On July 5, 2008, a publication in the Russian online paper Forum.msk.ru titled “Russia is on the verge of a great Caucasian war,”^[46] quoted Pavel Felgenhauer, who predicted the outbreak of a war with Georgia. “The most important fact is,” Felgenhauer said, “that around Putin’s circle the decision has already been taken to start a war with Georgia in August.” The chief editor of the

paper, Anatoly Baranov, just returning from the North Caucasus where he had spoken with Russian officers stationed in Rostov-on-Don, wrote: “The army wants to fight They see in the war the solution to internal political problems, the consolidation of the nation, a purge of the elites, in general everything that is positive.”^[47] On August 3, four days before the outbreak of the war, the Georgian internet portal *Gruziya Online* (Georgia Online), wrote that five battalions of the Russian 58th Army had passed through the Roki tunnel, a 6-kilometer tunnel that is the only direct road connection between Russia and South Ossetia.^[48] The same day the Russian deputy minister of defense, Nikolay Pankov, was in Tskhinvali and conducted secret talks with the separatist South Ossetian “President” Kokoity and other leaders of his government. An even more disquieting fact, reported by the Internet paper, was that the evacuation of women and children from Tskhinvali had begun. Four

thousand people were said to have been evacuated. When Kokoity was asked about it, he “declared that they had not evacuated the children, but sent them on holiday.”^[49] A few days later, on August 7, the master of this announced war, Vladimir Putin, was to board the plane in Moscow to attend, together with other world leaders, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing.

THE HOT WAR: AUGUST 7–12, 2008

On August 7, 2008, the day the war started, the situation was so tense that only a spark was needed to set Georgia afire. There have been discussions afterward over who actually fired the first shot. It was clearly in Russia’s interests that this first shot should be fired by Georgia so that the Russian aggression could be presented as a defense. In the EU-sponsored Tagliavini Report, published on September 30, 2009, the opening of the hostilities was attributed to

Georgia. “It is not contested,” wrote the authors of the report, “that the Georgian armed forces started an armed offensive in South Ossetia on the basis of President Saakashvili’s order given on 7 August 2008 at 23.35.”^[50] The report confirmed, however, that at the very moment the hostilities started, troops from the regular Russian army—troops that were *not* part of Russia’s peacekeeping forces—were already present in South Ossetia, that is, on Georgian soil. They were there illegally, without permission from the Georgian authorities. This fact came on top of prior violations of Georgian sovereignty, such as the passport offensive and the provocative flights of Russian fighter jets over the Georgian airspace. The incursion of Russian regular troops (and irregular troops in the form of Chechen and North Ossetian fighters coming from Russia) into South Ossetia, together with tanks and heavy weapons, was a violation of Georgian sovereignty of a totally new, and extremely menacing kind. In fact it

constituted as such a *casus belli*.

NOTES

1. Vaclav Havel, Valdas Adamkus, Mart Laar, Vytautas Landsbergis, Otto de Habsbourg, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Timothy Garton Ash, André Glucksmann, Mark Leonard, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Adam Michnik, and Josep Ramoneda, “Le test géorgien, un nouveau Munich?” *Le Monde* (September 23, 2009). The real question was, indeed, who *invaded* and not who fired the first bullet. As John Lukacs wrote, it is an old ruse used by politicians, “who wanted war (and attempted to tempt their opponents ‘to maneuver [them] into firing the first shot.’” (John Lukacs, *Democracy and Populism: Fear and Hatred* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 211.)
2. Hans Croijmans, the Moscow correspondent of the Dutch weekly *Elsevier*, for instance, four days after the ceasefire published an article titled “Reckless Violence.” The word “reckless”

referred not to the Russians, but to Saakashvili, who was believed to have started the war regardless of the consequences. “What incited the political leaders of Georgia to attack exactly on August 8, Tskinhvali, the capital of South Ossetia,” wrote Crooijmans, “we cannot be sure.” And he continued, “As could be expected the Russians came to the rescue of the South Ossetians.” (Hans Crooijmans, “Onbesuisd geweld,” *Elsevier* (August 16, 2008).)

3. Pavel K. Baev, “Russian “Tandemocracy” Stumbles into War,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5, no. 153 (August 11, 2008).

4. Nicu Popescu, Mark Leonard, and Andrew Wilson, “Can the EU Win the Peace in Georgia?” Policy Brief (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008), 3 (emphasis mine).

5. Cf. Thornike Gordadze, “Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 37. Shevardnadze reported

Grachev's assertion in an interview, published in the Russian magazine *Argumenty i Fakty* on July 2, 2005. In a report of the International Crisis Group even the separatist Abkhaz authorities expressed a certain distrust vis-à-vis Moscow's intentions. According to the report they believed that Moscow "is more interested in its territory than its people. The Abkhaz *de facto* leader, Bagapsh, said, 'Russia is interested in access to the sea, of which our territory offers 240 km.'" ("Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia," Europe Report No. 193, *International Crisis Group*, June 5, 2008, 3.)

6. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (March-April 1994), 73–74.

7. Cf. Andrey Illarionov, "Another Look at the August War," Center for Eurasian Policy, Hudson Institute, Washington (September 12, 2008), 7.

8. Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the*

West, 73. The Abkhaz and South Ossetian holders of Russian passports enjoyed complete Russian citizen rights. In December 2007 they voted in the Duma elections and in March 2008 in the presidential elections of the Russian Federation. (Cf. Marie Jégo, “‘L’indépendance’, et après?” *Le Monde* (August 28, 2008).)

9. Asmus, *A Little War*, 42.

10. Janusz Bugajski, “Russia’s Soft Power Wars,” *The Ukrainian Week* (February 8, 2013).

11. Cf. *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, Report, Volume II (September 2009), 182.

http://www.ceiig.ch/pdf/IIFFMCG_Volume_II.pdf

12. *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, 147. In October 2009 the Abkhaz Ministry of the Interior announced that between 2006 and 2009 141,245 of the 180,000–200,000 inhabitants of Abkhazia had received Abkhaz passports. On the basis of the data given in 2006 this would mean that almost all Abkhaz

passport holders also had a Russian passport. (Quoted in Sabine Fischer, "Abkhazia and the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict: Autumn 2009," ISS Analysis, EU Institute for Security Studies (December 2009), 3.)

13. The passports in Abkhazia were issued on the basis of the Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia of October 24, 2005. Article 6 of this Law stipulated "that a citizen of the Republic of Abkhazia is also entitled to obtain the citizenship of the Russian Federation." The South Ossetian *de facto* Constitution of April 8, 2001, stipulated "(1) The Republic of South Ossetia shall have its own citizenship. (2) Double-citizenship is admissible in the Republic of South Ossetia." (Cf. *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, 163.)

14. The Abkhaz minister of Economic Affairs, Christina Osgan, confirmed in June 2008 that there were fifty-one thousand pensioners in Abkhazia, thirty thousand of whom received a

pension from the Russian government. The average payment was 57 euro per month. (Cf. Gerald Hosp, "Leise Hoffnung an der Roten Riviera," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (June 14, 2008).) From 2003, paying pensions was one of the incentives Moscow used to distribute its passports in Abkhazia. Only holders of Russian passports could apply for a pension paid by Moscow.

15. "Putin Says Russia Has No Imperial Ambitions," *RIA Novosti*, September 11, 2008. Cf. also Hannah Strange, "South Ossetia Slapped Down over Russia Unity Claim," *Times Online* (September 11, 2008).

16. A former minister of the interior of his government, Alan Parastayev, accused Kokoity of terrorism and banditry. The terrorist acts were alleged to have been committed in South Ossetia and have been attributed subsequently to Georgia. Cf. "Byvshyy glava MVD Yuzhnoy Osetii obvinil Eduarda Kokoyti v terrorizme" (Former Head of the Ministry of the Interior of

South Ossetia Accused Eduard Kokoity of Terrorism), *Lenta.ru* (February 23, 2009).

17. Cf. Marlène Laruelle, “Neo-Eurasianist Alexander Dugin on the Russia-Georgia Conflict,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst* (September 3, 2008).

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4928/print>.

18. “Russia Launches Economic Blockade of Georgia, Puts Troops on High Alert,” *Pravda* (September 30, 2006).

19. Salomé Zourabichvili, *La tragédie géorgienne 2003–2008, De la révolution des Roses à la guerre* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2009), 305.

20. “Aktsiya Ya Gruzin,” Radio Ekho Moskvyy (October 6, 2006).

<http://www.echo.msk.ru/doc/281.html>.

21. Andrey Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, 65.

22. Thomas Graham Jr. and Damien J. LaVera,

“The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty,” in *Cornerstones of Security: Arms Control Treaties in the Nuclear Era*, eds. Thomas Graham Jr. and Damien J. LaVera (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 597.

23. Graham Jr. and LaVera, *Cornerstones of Security*, 593.

24. Graham Jr. and LaVera, *Cornerstones of Security*, 593.

25. There is no right “to suspend.” Article XIX of the CFE Treaty gives each State Party “the right to withdraw from this Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests.”

26. The snub was not lessened by the heads of state and government agreeing “that these countries will become members of NATO” (Bucharest Summit Declaration, April 3, 2008). Without a concrete time schedule this membership risked being postponed indefinitely. On Angela Merkel’s refusal to grant

Georgia a MAP, Illarionov wrote, not without irony: “[A]t the NATO Bucharest SummitA] on April 3–5 [in fact it was April 2–4], German Chancellor Angela Merkel noted that countries with unresolved territorial conflicts could not join NATO. On the basis of this principle, which would have applied equally to West Germany at the time of its NATO accession, the summit denied both Georgia and Ukraine a Membership Action Plan” (Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008,” 68).

27. Quoted in “Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia,” Europe Report No. 193, *International Crisis Group* (June 5, 2008), 14.

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europ>

28. David J. Smith, “The Saakashvili Administration’s Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Cornell and Starr, 126.

29. Vladimir Socor, “The Goals Behind Moscow’s

Proxy Offensive in South Ossetia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5, no. 152 (August 8, 2008).

30. Neil Buckley, “Russia Accused of Annexation Attempt,” *The Financial Times* (April 17, 2008).

31. Buckley, “Russia Accused of Annexation Attempt.”

32. Andrey Illarionov provided a small list of Russians in the government of South Ossetia. They included lieutenant-general Anatoly Barankevich, minister of defense from July 6, 2004, to December 10, 2006; Anatoly Yarovoy, FSB major-general, chairman of the KGB in South Ossetia from January 17, 2005, to March 2, 2006; Mikhail Mindzayev, FSB lieutenant-general, minister of the interior of South Ossetia from April 26, 2005, to August 18, 2008; Andrey Laptev, lieutenant-general, minister of defense of South Ossetia from December 11, 2006, to February 28, 2008; Aslanbek Bulatsev, FSB colonel, prime minister of South Ossetia since October 31, 2008 (Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008,”

81–82).

33. Alexander Golts, “Opyat Kavkazskaya Voyna,” *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal* (August 9, 2008).

34. Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation for War, 1999–2008,” 68.

35. Mart Laar, “Echoes of the 1930s in Russia’s Sweeping Annexation,” *Financial Times* (April 17, 2008).

36. “Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia,” 4.

37. Cf. “Kommentary Departamenta informatsii i pechaty MID Rossii v svyazi s voprosami SMI otnositelno intsidenta s gruzinskim bespilotnym samoletom 20 aprelya 2008 goda” (Comment of the Information and Press Department of the Foreign Ministry of Russia concerning questions from the media on the incident with the Georgian drone on April 20, 2008). Website of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

38. Yuliya Latynina, “200 km. tankov. O rossiysko: gruzinskoy voyne” (Two Hundred Kilometres of Tanks. On the Russian-Georgian

War), *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal* (November 19, 2008), 7.

39. Cf. Neil Buckley and Roman Olearchyk, “UN Says Moscow Shot Georgian Drone,” *The Financial Times* (May 27, 2008). The Russian attack also endangered the civil aviation. According to the UN investigators the interception “took place very close to, or even inside an international airway, at a time where civilian aircraft were flying.”

40. Pavel Felgenhauer, “Saakashvili Wants to Get to Moscow, While Russian Troops Are in Abkhazia Already,” *Novaya Gazeta* (May 20, 2008). These plans for an ethnically cleansed “buffer zone” had, at that time, certainly already been discussed with Shamba’s Kremlin bosses. The plans would be executed during the August war.

41. Felgenhauer, “Saakashvili Wants to Get to Moscow, While Russian Troops Are in Abkhazia Already.”

42. “NATO calls on Russia to withdraw railway

troops from Georgia,” *International Herald Tribune* (June 3, 2008).

43. “Saakashvili Calls Security Council to Decide on Abkhazia,” *Nevtegaz.ru Novosti* (June 3, 2008). The journalist of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* who visited Abkhazia in June 2008 repeated, uncritically, the vocabulary used by the Russian side to justify the entry of these troops, calling them “unarmed pioneers” (*unbewaffnete Pioniere*), comparing this Russian army battalion of engineers and technicians with a group of idealistic boy scouts. (Cf. Hosp, “Leise Hoffnung an der Roten Riviera.”)

44. “Tbilisi Condemns Russian ‘Railway Troops’ in Abkhazia,” *Civil Georgia* (May 31, 2008).

http://www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=18445.

45. Socor, “The Goals Behind Moscow’s Proxy Offensive in South Ossetia.”

46. “Rossiya stoit na grani bolshoy Kavkazkoy voyny,” *Forum.msk.ru* (July 5, 2008).

<http://forum-msk.org/print.html?id=496351>.

47. “Rossiya stoit na grani bolshoy Kavkazkoy

voyny.”

48. “58-ay armiya RF gotova voyti v Tskhinvali,” *Gruziya Online* (August 3,

2008).<http://www.apsny.ge/news/1217792861.p>

49. “58-ay armiya RF gotova voyti v Tskhinvali.”

50. *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, 238.

Chapter 14

The War with Georgia, Part II

Six Events Announcing the Kremlin's Preparation for War

Different authors have tried to reconstruct the chain of events leading to the outbreak of war. In this chain of events there are at least six events that should be considered. They are, separately, and taken together, a clear indication of Russia's preparations for war. These events are as follows:

1. A cyber war, launched by Russian servers before the outbreak of the hostilities, paralyzing Georgian government websites. This cyber war must have been prepared well in advance.

2. The huge Kavkaz-2008 military exercise conducted near the Georgian border just before the outbreak of the war.
3. The evacuation of the population of the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali before the war.
4. The surprising presence of a huge group of about fifty Russian journalists from the most important Russian press media and TV stations in Tskhinvali two days before the war began.
5. The active preparation for participation in the war by Cossack militias from Russia before the outbreak of war.
6. The incursion of regular Russian troops into South Ossetia before the outbreak of war.

According to Wesley K. Clark and Peter L. Levin, “Russia has already perpetrated denial-of-service attacks against entire countries, including Estonia, in the spring of 2007—an

attack that blocked the Web sites of several banks and the prime minister's Web site—and Georgia, during the war of August 2008. In fact, shortly before the violence erupted, Georgia's government claimed that a number of state computers had been commandeered by Russian hackers and that the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been forced to relocate its Web site to Blogger, a free service run by Google.”^[1] In the case of Georgia this would mean that the Russian cyber war already started *before* the hostilities began.

The Russian 58th Army is Russia's main military force in the North Caucasus. In the weeks before the invasion it conducted major exercises with the code name “Kavkaz-2008” (Caucasus 2008). These exercises took place in North Ossetia, just north of the Georgian border. It was a combined forces exercise in which the Russian air force and the Black Sea Fleet also took part. The official reason for the

exercise was to improve the army's preparedness to fight terrorism. However, "such a force was hardly of great utility in fighting terrorists in the mountains, but it was ideal for a conventional invasion of a neighbor. In fact, this exercise was a trial run for the invasion about to take place. . . . It was de facto a war game to invade Georgia."^[2] When, on August 2, the exercise officially ended, the troops did not return to their barracks, but remained deployed in the frontier region with Georgia. According to Andrey Illarionov, "the build-up culminated with the amassing of 80,000 regular troops and paramilitaries close to the Georgian border, at least 60,000 of which participated in the August war."^[3]

The evacuation of the population of Tskhinvali was already wholly completed *before* the outbreak of the hostilities. Up to four thousand South Ossetians had crossed the border to neighboring North Ossetia in the

Russian Federation. This exodus, meticulously prepared and organized by the authorities, was not a collective summer holiday, as President Kokoity wanted to make out. It was a *preventive measure* in a war of which the South Ossetian authorities—including the minister of defense, the Russian General Vasily Lunev (who would soon become the commander-in-chief of the attacking Russian 58th Army), already knew that it was going to take place.

Said-Husein Tsarnaev, a journalist with the press agencies RIA Novosti and Reuters, arrived in Tskhinvali on August 4. He was very surprised when he entered the lobby of his hotel in this small provincial town in an isolated and desolate region, far from Moscow, and found the lobby invaded by a crowd of Russian journalists. “We’ve arrived in Tskhinvali three days prior to the attack on the city . . .,” he wrote later, “we’ve got accommodation in the hotel ‘Alan.’ At once, I’ve noticed about fifty

journalists of leading TV channels and newspapers gathered in the hotel. I have experience with two Chechen campaigns and such a crowd of colleagues at the headquarters of peacekeeping forces I took as a disturbing signal.”^[4] It was, indeed, a disturbing signal. What were these journalists—many of whom were celebrated Russian star reporters—doing in Tskhinvali, an outpost in the Caucasus, in the first days of August 2008? Who brought them there? What for? And why had the Russian government closed Tskhinvali to non-Russian reporters (except two journalists from Ukraine)? Russian websites have since published lists of the journalists’ names.^[5] And, indeed, the *fine fleur* of the Russian media was present. The journalists represented almost every prominent paper, magazine, and news agency, including Izvestia, Novoe Vremya, Moskovskiy Komsomolets, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Regnum, ITAR-TASS, and RIA Novosti, not to forget the most important Russian television channels:

NTV, REN TV, TVTS, TV Channel “Rossiya,” TV Channel “Mir,” as well as the First and the Fifth TV Channel. Some of the journalists had already arrived on August 2, others on August 5 and 6. Why were they there, in Tskhinvali, a deserted ghost town left by its inhabitants for “holidays” in the Russian Federation? The journalists were obviously waiting for something to happen. They were waiting for what?

On August 6—two days before the start of the hostilities—the pro-Kremlin paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published an article with the title “Don Cossacks Prepare to Defend the People of South Ossetia against Georgian Aggression.”^[6] The Cossacks are fighters who historically played an important role in defending the frontiers of the Russian empire. After having been repressed by the communists, their hosts (locally organized groups) made a glorious comeback in the Russian Federation, and they have fought as

mercenaries in many conflicts in the post-Soviet states. In the article in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* the ataman (leader) of the Don Cossacks announced that Cossack fighters were preparing to go to South Ossetia. He said that “Cossacks from the whole of Southern Russia were united in their effort to help the unrecognized republic.”^[7] The question is why the Cossack militias were actively preparing to fight in South Ossetia on August 6, yet the war that broke out one day later was represented by the Kremlin as a complete surprise.

The sixth event, however, was the most significant. It was the entry of regular Russian troops into Georgia through the Roki tunnel. Russian troop movements must already have started on August 6, the day before the hostilities began. The Georgian government had intercepted cell-phone conversations between South Ossetian border guards saying that Russian border guards had taken over the

control of the Roki tunnel at the Georgian side and that a Russian military column had passed through at about four o'clock in the morning. How many troops had gone through was not clear. The name of a Russian colonel who was in charge was mentioned. He commanded a unit of the 58th Army that was not authorized to be in Georgia. The Georgian peacekeeping commander in South Ossetia, Brigadier General Mamuka Kurashvili, phoned the Russian supreme commander of the mixed (Russian-Georgian) peacekeeping forces, Major General Marat Kulakhmetov, asking for an explanation. Kulakhmetov promised to call back, but did not do so. Thereupon President Saakashvili sent an envoy, Temuri Yakobashvili, to Tskhinvali to talk to a Russian diplomat, Yury Popov. Popov, however, did not show up. The reason he later gave was that his car had a flat tire and he didn't have a spare one. The only Russian official Yakobashvili was able to meet in a deserted Tskhinvali was General Kulakhmetov.

The Russian general proposed that Georgia declare a unilateral ceasefire. During the conversation he told Yakobashvili that he was fed up with the Ossetian separatists, who, according to him, had become uncontrollable, apparently suggesting that the Russians would eventually take a neutral stance if Tbilisi were to attack the separatists.^[8]

A SLOW-MOTION ANNEXATION?

The Georgians did not fall in this trap. They followed Kulakhmetov's advice and declared a unilateral ceasefire on August 7 at 6:40 p.m. The only response was an intensified shelling from 8:30 p.m. of the Georgian villages north of Tskhinvali by South Ossetian militias.^[9] At 10:30 p.m. two Georgian peacekeepers were killed and six wounded. Saakashvili received new intelligence reports, transmitted by an American satellite, that a column of 150 Russian tanks had entered the Roki tunnel.^[10]

Saakashvili found himself confronted by a situation in which Russian troops and heavy equipment were being brought illegally into South Ossetia, gradually building up enough military potential for a direct attack on Georgia. Saakashvili's efforts to call President Medvedev had no success. On the evening of August 7 Saakashvili was facing a dilemma: allow Russia's military infiltration of Russia into South Ossetia to continue, and thereby permitting Russia to complete a huge military buildup, and enabling it to crush the Georgian army, or to act.

Ronald D. Asmus has described the extremely stressful and precarious situation in which the Georgian leadership found itself in the late hours of August 7, 2008. "They all believed Georgia was being invaded in a kind of slow-motion, incremental way."^[11] "Moscow," he wrote, "was trying to de facto annex these two disputed enclaves bit by bit in slow motion —testing to see if the West would protest and daring Tbilisi to try to stop them."^[12] It was

also clear that Moscow would have no difficulty in finding an adequate *casus belli* to invade the territory of Georgia proper in order to reach its ultimate goal: to topple Saakashvili and bring about a regime change in Tbilisi. Waiting for the Russian troops to choose the right moment for attack meant that Georgia would leave the initiative to the other side. Considering the great inequality in manpower and military equipment^[13] it would be an easy walkover for the Russians with disastrous consequences for Georgia. Confronted with the continuing incursion by Russian forces into South Ossetia and the intensified shelling of the Georgian villages north of Tskhinvali, at 11:30 p.m. Saakashvili ordered his troops to enter South Ossetia in order to occupy Tskhinvali and stop the advance of the Russian troops. “Did Saakashvili fall into a trap?” asked Svante Cornell and S. Frederick Starr.^[14] They concluded: “Maybe so, but . . . even if he had not, a pretext would have been found to

proceed with the campaign as it had been planned.”^[15] Indeed, Saakashvili’s decision to attack was a case of a desperate, last minute *forward defense*, the ultimate trump card Georgia had at its disposal to avoid of being overrun by its huge neighbor. By blocking or preventing a Russian assault, the Georgian leadership—fully aware of the fact that Georgia could never win the war—hoped to win *time*, thereby enabling the United States and the EU to intervene and find a diplomatic solution.

Some commentators have stressed the fact that the Georgians did not mention the presence of Russian troops in South Ossetia before August 8. This was the case, for instance, with Eric Fournier, the French ambassador in Tbilisi. However, Jonathan Littell brought more clarity in this case when he visited Georgia in October 2008.

Nobody has talked publicly about Russian tanks before 8 August. But, in private, it is

more complicated: whilst the Ambassador of France in Tbilisi categorically affirms: “The Georgians have never called their European allies to inform them: ‘The Russians are attacking us,’ Matthew Byrza, a high American diplomat in charge of the Georgian dossier since the start of the Bush administration, explains to me: That the Georgians were more open with us than with the Europeans is normal because of our privileged relationship. Eka Tkechelachvili, their Minister of Foreign Affairs, has called me at 11.30h [Tbilisi time] and said to me: ‘The Russians are entering into South Ossetia with tanks and more than 1,000 men, we have no choice, we are ending the ceasefire. . . .’ The Georgians were convinced that that really happened.”^[16]

It is self-evident that the ambassador of France, one of the leading countries that some

months earlier blocked Georgia's Membership Action Plan for NATO, was not the first one on the list to be called by Saakashvili on that fateful evening.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION: DID RUSSIAN TROOPS ENTER SOUTH OSSETIA BEFORE THE WAR?

The Kremlin has always denied that Russian troops entered South Ossetia before the war. However, despite these denials there are many indications to the contrary that cast doubt on the Kremlin's official version and vindicate the Georgian version. On August 7, for instance, one day before the war started, the Abkhaz separatist leader Sergey Bagapsh appeared on the Russian TV channel *Rossiya*, declaring: "I have spoken to the President of South Ossetia. It [the situation] has more or less stabilized now. A battalion from the North Caucasus District has entered the area."^[17] This

declaration, confirming the presence of Russian troops in South Ossetia before the war, was not the only one. On August 15, 2008, the regional Russian paper *Permskie Novosti* published an article with the title “Soldiers from Perm Were in the Epicentre of the War.” In this article is reproduced a telephone call by a soldier of the 58th Army, which had invaded Georgia. The soldier told his parents: “We have been there [in South Ossetia] since August 7. Yeah, our whole 58th Army.”^[18] In the article was also mentioned that on August 7 the mobile phones of the soldiers were “muted.”^[19] Another indication of the early entry of Russian troops into South Ossetia could be found in an article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* (The Red Star), the paper of the Russian army, published on September 11, 2008. In this article army Captain Denis Sidristiy, who received the Order for Courage for his personal heroism during the war, gave the following account of the events: “We were on exercise [Kavkaz-2008]. Relatively not far from

the capital of South Ossetia. . . . After the planned exercises we remained in the camp, but on August 7 came the order to go to Tskhinvali.”^[20] Sidristiy confirmed that he witnessed during the night of August 7 to 8 the shelling of Tskhinvali by the Georgian army, which would only have been possible after crossing the high Caucasus mountains and when he was already *inside* South Ossetia.

When the article was cited by other media,^[21] the interview disappeared suddenly from the website to reappear again with editorial changes that specified the times of the day. The order to march to South Ossetia came now “on 7 August in the night” and captain Sidristiy saw the shelling of Tskhinvali “on 8 August in the morning.”^[22] However, these sudden changes to the captain’s memory might have been too blatant: soon afterward the editor of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* decided to remove the article altogether.^[23]

NOTES

1. Wesley K. Clark and Peter L. Levin, "Securing the Information Highway: How to Enhance the United States' Electronic Defenses," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 6, (November/December 2009), 3.
2. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, 21.
3. Valentina Pop, "Saakashvili Saved Georgia from Coup, Former Putin Aide Says," interview with Andrey Illarionov, *EU Observer* (October 14, 2008).
4. Quoted in Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparations for War, 1999–2008," 83.
5. "Tskhinvalskiy Pul Spiskom," December 4, 2008. This list gives thirty-one names.
<http://davnym-davno.livejournal.com/6488.html>.
6. "Donskie kazaki gotovy vstat na zashchitu naroda Yuzhnoy Osetii ot gruzinskoy agressii," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 6, 2008.
<http://www.ng.ru/regions/2008-08->

[06/1_kazaki.html](#).

7. “Donskie kazaki gotovy vstat na zashchitu naroda Yuzhnoy Osetii ot gruzinskoy agressii.”

8. Cf. Marie Jégo, Alexandre Billette, Natalie Nougayrède, Sophie Shihab, and Piotr Smolar, “Autopsie d’un conflit,” *Le Monde* (August 31–September 1, 2008). In secret reports from the US embassy in Tbilisi sent to the state department and subsequently published by WikiLeaks, this version of the facts was confirmed: “Putin has said to him [Saakashvili] that he does not care about South Ossetia, as long as Georgia avoids a massacre and solves the problem quietly.” (“La Géorgie, grande perdante du rapprochement russo-américain,” *Le Monde* (December 3, 2010).) This trap is also intimated by Salomé Zourabishvili, a former Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has become a fierce critic of Saakashvili. According to her the Russians must have given an unofficial green light to Georgia to intervene in South Ossetia to fight the local militias, which

Moscow said it “could no longer control.” Zourabichvili even speaks of the possibility of a “tacit agreement.” (Zourabichvili, *La tragédie géorgienne 2003–2008: de la révolution des Roses à la guerre*, 317.) But even if such an improbable tacit agreement could have existed, the fact remains that at the very moment that Saakashvili ordered his attack he no longer had any illusions about the Russian response. We must also remember that this was not the first time the Kremlin had tried to disseminate active disinformation by suggesting that there was disagreement between themselves and the leadership of the self-proclaimed republics. Putin, for instance, when visiting Paris at the end of May 2008, said to his French interlocutors that he agreed with a Georgian peace plan that would grant Abkhazia great autonomy—a position contradicting Putin’s earlier positions. When the Abkhaz “President” Bagapsh visited Paris one month later, Bagapsh said: “Putin can agree with this plan, but we

don't and we never will do," suggesting a difference of opinion between a "cooperative" Russian government and the "radical" separatists. (Cf. Piotr Smolar, "L'Abkhazie rejette la responsabilité de la crise sur les autorités géorgiennes," *Le Monde* (June 22–23, 2008).)

9. This shelling of Georgian villages inside South Ossetia by South Ossetian militias had already started on August 2. According to Martin Malek, "On August 5 a tripartite monitoring group, which included Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers and representatives of Russian peacekeeping forces in the region, issued a report. This document, signed by the commander of the Russian 'peacekeepers' in the region, General Marat Kulakhmetov, stated that there was evidence of attacks against several ethnic Georgian villages. It also claimed that South Ossetian separatists were using heavy weapons against the Georgian villages, which was prohibited by a 1992

ceasefire agreement.” (Martin Malek, “Georgia & Russia: The ‘Unkown’ Prelude to the ‘Five Day War,’” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2009.) http://cria-online.org/7_10.html.)

10. Jégo et al., “Autopsie d’un conflit.”

11. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 31.

12. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 25.

13. Felgenhauer estimated the Georgian army to be seventeen-thousand-strong, supported by up to five thousand police officers (two thousand of Georgia’s elite 1st Infantry Brigade were deployed in Iraq. They were flown back but arrived after the war was over). The overall number of Russian troops that took part in the war in Georgia in August 2008 was approximately forty thousand. They were supported by ten thousand to fifteen thousand separatist militias. This makes the power ratio 2.5:1—illustrating the clear numerical

superiority of the Russian forces, even without including differences in equipment. (Cf. Pavel Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Cornell and Starr, 170–173.)

14. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, “Introduction,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia*, eds. Cornell and Starr, 9.

15. Cornell and Starr, “Introduction.”

16. Jonathan Littell, “Carnet de route,” *Le Monde* 2 (October 4, 2008), 18. This version of the facts was confirmed in a testimony before Congress, made by Dan Fried, at that time Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, who said the Georgians “believed at the time—that they thought the Russian forces were coming through the Roki tunnel (linking Russia with South Ossetia) and they were in imminent danger.” (Daniel Dombey, “Congress Attacks Stance on Georgia,”

Financial Times (September 11, 2008).)

17. Quoted by Malek, "Georgia & Russia: The 'Unkown' Prelude to the 'Five Day War.'"

18. Quoted in "Soldaty govoryat, chto pribyli v Yuzhnuyu Osetiyu eshche 7 Avgusta" (Soldiers Say That They Were Already on August 7 in South Ossetia), *Polit.ru*, (September 10, 2008).

<http://www.polit.ru/news/2008/09/10/seven/pr>

19. "Soldaty govoryat, chto pribyli v Yuzhnuyu Osetiyu eshche 7 Avgusta."

20. The article was quoted on the same day by the news agency *Newsru.com*. The agency concluded: "Thus the captain was on the Southern side of the Caucasus ridge, already on Georgian territory, and saw the shelling of Tskhinvali and the position of the peacekeepers during the night of August 8." ("SMI: Rossiyskie voyska voshli v Yuzhnuyu Osetiyu eshche do nachala boevykh deystviy," *NEWSru.com* (September 11, 2008).)

21. "S saita 'Krasnoy Zvezdy' udaleno intervyyu kapitana Sidristogo o vtorzhenii Rossiyskikh

voysk v Yu O do napadeniya Gruzii,”
NEWSru.com (September 15, 2008).

22. “S saita ‘Krasnoy Zvezdy’ udaleno intervyu kapitana Sidristogo o vtorzhenii Rossiyskikh voysk v Yu O do napadeniya Gruzii.”

23. The story of the changed and subsequently removed article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* raised doubts for even the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, which after the war published an article extremely critical of Saakashvili (he was called “the choleric ruler of Tbilisi”). “Did Moscow’s deployment start, after all, earlier than it was until now admitted?” asked the authors. (Ralf Beste, Uwe Klussmann, Cordula Meyer, Christian Neef, Matthias Schepp, Hans-Jürgen Schlamp, and Holger Stark, “Wettlauf zum Tunnel,” *Der Spiegel* no. 38 (September 15, 2008), 132.

<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-60135192.html>.)

Chapter 15

The War with Georgia, Part III

The Propaganda War

After the opening of the hostilities the Russian propaganda machine immediately swung fully into action, helped by the massive presence in Tskhinvali of the reporters and cameramen from the national TV channels and print media, who had arrived days before the events started. The Russian press agencies began publishing stories of the atrocities supposedly committed by the Georgians against the South Ossetian civil population. A prominent place in these stories was reserved for the accusation that Georgia had committed in South Ossetia a genocide.

RUSSIA ACCUSES GEORGIA OF GENOCIDE

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev himself took the lead, declaring on August 11: "The ferocity with which the actions of the Georgian side were carried out cannot be called anything else but genocide, because they acquired a mass character and were directed against individuals, the civilian population, peacekeepers who carried out their functions of maintaining peace."^[1] The Russian ambassador in Tskhinvali mentioned that "at least 2,000 people were killed in Tskhinvali."^[2] In a fact sheet by the news agency RIA Novosti, issued one month later, this number had shrunk to 1,500 civilians. It was announced that "Russian prosecutors, on orders from President Dmitry Medvedev, are currently gathering evidence to support allegations of genocide committed by Georgia against South Ossetians."^[3] By August 21, this commission had already made a first estimate of 133 civilians killed by the Georgian

forces.^[4] When, on December 23, 2008, the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation at last published the final results of its inquiry, instead of 2,000 victims in Tskhinvali alone, the Committee found a total of 162 civilian victims for the whole of South Ossetia.^[5] However, the false, Soviet-style accusations directed at the Georgian government were never officially revoked, and until today the accusations of genocide find a prominent place in official and unofficial Russian publications on the war with Georgia.

Apparently, these accusations were prepared in advance by the Russian leadership to construct a semblance of similarity between NATO's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo and Russia's intervention in Georgia.^[6] The accusations against Georgia were extremely cynical, taking into account the abuses committed by the Russian military in Chechnya,

where in two wars at least 10 percent of the population had been killed. Yekaterina Sokiryanskaya of the human rights group Memorial commented: "Talking about the right for independence, about genocide and the war crimes of Mr Saakashvili, Russia's leaders are perhaps forgetting about the tens of thousands of civilians who were killed by Russia's bombardment of Grozny and who were executed, cleansed, and tortured by the Russian military in Chechnya."^[7] The Kremlin's accusations were a clear case of what Robert Amsterdam in a striking comparison has called "the Doppelgänger Theory": "the Kremlin's habit of charging their critics with the very activities in which they themselves engage."^[8] It was, by the way, not the first time Georgia was accused of genocide. Already in 1993 Vladimir Zhirinovskiy wrote: "Today Georgia is killing Abkhazians, Ossetians, and Europe keeps silent. . . . There are not many Abkhazians, but they are a people, they want to live on their land

and in freedom. But they [the Georgians] are taking this right away. This is a genocide, this is racism and it is happening today. Who is going to stop this?”^[9] Especially the accusation of “racism” was particularly unexpected, coming from a politician, who, in the same book, only some pages earlier, compared immigrants from the South with *tarakany*—cockroaches.

The Kremlin has made a habit of accusing others of crimes of which it has been accused of itself. Yekaterina Sokiryanskaya mentioned already the massive, indiscriminate bombardments of Grozny in the winter of 1999–2000 with thousands of victims amongst the civil population of Chechnya. These bombardments and other atrocities committed in Chechnya made another prominent Russian human rights activist, Sergey Kovalyov, write: “What is new this time around is that Russian society as a whole is prepared to carry out genocide. Cruelty and violence are no longer rejected.”^[10]

ETHNIC CLEANSING AND CLUSTER BOMBS

The cynical accusations of genocide, made by the Kremlin, were followed by accusations by Georgia that it was Russia that had practiced ethnic cleansing. The dirty work in this case was mostly done by the South Ossetian militias that had followed the advancing Russian army in armored patrol vehicles with covered licence plates. "Refugees from Karaleki and nearby [Georgian] villages," wrote Luke Harding of *The Guardian*, "gave the same account: South Ossetian militias that had swept in on August 12, killing, burning, stealing and kidnapping. . . . South Ossetian militias, facilitated by the Russian army, are carrying out the worst ethnic cleansing since the war in former Yugoslavia. Despite the random nature of these attacks, the overall aim is clear: to create a mono-ethnic greater South Ossetia in which Georgians no longer exist."^[11] South Ossetians did not attempt to deny that their aim was ethnic

cleansing, they even proclaimed it openly. “We did carry out cleaning operations, yes,” admitted Captain Elrus, the militia leader, when asked by Luke Harding. And why shouldn’t he? Had not South Ossetian president, Eduard Kokoity, in an interview in the Russian paper *Kommersant*, proudly declared: “We have flattened practically everything there [in the Georgian villages].”^[12] In a note of the Georgian government one could read that “deliberate attempts by the Russian government to exaggerate the number of people killed in the conflict also provoked revenge attacks on Georgian villagers.”^[13] The Russian lies concerning a genocide committed by Georgians had the perverse effect of inciting South Ossetian militias to kill, rape, and loot Georgian citizens with even more fervor.

Human Rights Watch accused Russia of having used cluster bombs against civil targets.^[14] Cluster munitions contain dozens

and sometimes hundreds of smaller submunitions, or “bomblets.” They cause unacceptable suffering because they are spread over a broad area and kill civilians indiscriminately during strikes. Because many bomblets fail to explode, these become landmines that kill and maim people months and even years later. In May 2008, 107 nations agreed to a total ban on cluster munitions. Russia and Georgia were not among the signatories. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, on August 12, 2008, Russian aircraft dropped RBK-250 cluster bombs on the Georgian town of Ruisi, which killed three and wounded five civilians. The same day the Russian army also bombed the market in the center of the town of Gori with cluster bombs. The bombs were launched with an Iskander missile. Eight civilians were killed, and dozens were wounded. Among the dead was Stan Storimans, a Dutch TV cameraman.^[15] *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Yuliya Latynina wrote: “The

most precise weapon of Russia, ORTK 'Iskander,' already first developed in the 1980s, though only a few examples are today in the possession of the army, struck Georgia twice: on the oil pipeline Baku-Supsa and on the market of Gori on which humanitarian goods were being distributed—the Dutch TV operator Stan Storimans was killed by it. . . . 'Iskander' is a high precision weapon, meaning that either it proved not so precise when it fell on the market, or that the market was targeted, and in that case it was the first time in history that a high precision weapon has been used against the civil population.”^[16]

The Dutch government sent a fact-finding commission to Georgia to establish the facts. In its report^[17] one could read that the bombardment took place after military and police units of Georgia had already left the town. The bomb clearly targeted the civilian population. At 10:45 a.m. there were twenty explosions in the air, as well as on the ground.

Each explosion spread a huge number of small 5mm metal balls. One of these hit and killed Storimans. He was killed by submunitions of a cluster bomb launched with a Russian Iskander SS-26 missile. In a letter to the Dutch Parliament, the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, Maxime Verhagen, wrote that although the use of cluster bombs was not yet forbidden, “parties in a situation of an armed conflict should always make a sharp distinction between military and civilian targets,” and, “taking into account that on August 12 the Georgian military and police had left Gori, the Russian forces should have abstained from using [these weapons]. In light of this I find the conclusion of the investigatory committee very serious and I have explained this to the Russian authorities.”^[18] Three days after the attack on Gori, Colonel-General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy chief of Russia’s general staff, categorically denied that such weapons had ever been used in Georgia. “We never use

cluster bombs,” he said. “There is no need to do so.”^[19] Moreover, the unequivocal findings of the fact-finding commission of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not change the Kremlin’s version of the facts. Commenting on the death of Storimans the spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry not only denied the use of cluster bombs, but he went even further and “asserted that there was not enough evidence to conclude that Storimans had been killed as a result of the use of [any] weapons by the Russian side.”^[20] In November 2008, some weeks after the publication of the Dutch report, Human Rights Watch wrote: “Russia has continued to deny using cluster munitions in Georgia, but Human Rights Watch finds the evidence to be overwhelming. Human Rights Watch believes that Russia’s use of cluster munitions in populated areas was indiscriminate, and therefore in violation of international humanitarian law.”^[21]

DOES A LIE TOLD OFTEN ENOUGH BECOME A TRUTH?

THE VICTIM AS AGGRESSOR

There are two opposing conceptions concerning lies. The first is attributed to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who is reputed to have said, “A lie told often enough becomes the truth.” There is another one, attributed to US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who said: “Repetition does not transform a lie into a truth.” It is clear that the Russian leadership has a preference for Lenin’s approach. Even faced with unequivocal evidence it continues to deny the facts. Apart from unfounded accusations against Georgia of genocide and the denial of its own use of cluster bombs, the war in Georgia was preceded and accompanied by open lies, misinformation (for instance, about “uncontrollable” South Ossetian militias), and active disinformation,^[22] all reminiscent of the old Soviet style. In this way Russia almost

succeeded in hiding the most important fact: that this was not a “Russian-Georgian war,” but a Russian war against Georgia *in Georgia*. There was not a single Georgian soldier that crossed the Russian frontier at any point. The Georgian troops that went into South Ossetia did not cross international frontiers, but intervened in their own country, no different from Russian troops intervening in Chechnya. It was Russian and not Georgian troops that crossed the border of another, sovereign country, in breach of the principles of international law.

The Kremlin’s passport offensive, practiced since 2002, by which Russia “created” its own citizens in a neighboring country, was not only an aggressive and clearly hostile act, it was already in itself a violation of international law and a preparation for the armed attack that would follow some years later. On August 8, 2008, President Medvedev said: “I must protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are.”^[23] And RIA Novosti wrote that

“Russia had repeatedly warned Georgia that it would resort to force to protect its citizens, which most South Ossetian residents are.”^[24]

Several authors have made comparisons with 1938. In 1994 Zbigniew Brzezinski had already written: “The outspoken president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, went as far as to state publicly . . . that “any talk about the protection of Russians living in Kazakhstan reminds one of the times of Hitler, who also started off with the question of protecting Sudeten Germans.”^[25] Comparisons with the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, might, on first sight, seem exaggerated. Unfortunately, they are not. There are so many similarities that the Czechoslovak case could almost have functioned as a blueprint for the events in Georgia. Germany also started by considering a group of inhabitants of a neighboring country as its own citizens. It financed the political party of the Sudeten Germans, the Sudeten German Party (SdP) led

by Konrad Henlein, and supported local militias that committed terrorist acts. "The Sudeten Germans kept 40,000 men, in the shape of free corps, on a war footing."^[26] The Abkhazian army, led by Russian officers, included up to ten thousand soldiers. Additionally there were Abkhazian and South Ossetian private militias of ten thousand to fifteen thousand men. This brought the armed militias inside Georgia to a total of up to twenty-five thousand men.^[27] In Czechoslovakia the militias caused trouble and made mischief and asked to be incorporated into the Reich. In the end Germany annexed the Sudetenland. This annexation was only the first step in the further dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. In Georgia a similar scenario took place. Russia trained and armed the militias, let them provoke and attack Georgia, and when there came a Georgian response, Russia came to the rescue of "its own citizens." Andrey Illarionov, a former Putin aide, called the Russian war against Georgia "one of the

most serious international crises for at least the last 30 years.” According to him,

This crisis has brought:

1. The first massive use of the military forces by Russia or the former Soviet Union outside its borders since the Soviet Union’s intervention against Afghanistan . . . ;
2. The first intervention against an independent country in Europe since the Soviet Union’s intervention against Czechoslovakia in 1968;
3. The first intervention against an independent country in Europe that led to unilateral changes in internationally recognized borders in Europe since the late 1930s and early 1940s. Particular similarities of these events and the roles being played this year by some international players

with the events and roles played by some international players in 1938 are especially troubling.”^[28]

The role of the players in 1938 is well-known. One of the leading *dramatis personae* in this period was Neville Chamberlain. “On 27 September 1938 he openly confessed to his horror at the idea of going to war ‘because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.’”^[29] Europeans had to pay a heavy toll for their disregard of the interests of a new, small, and faraway country. At that time they did not realize that not only the interests of this small country were at stake, but also the foundations of the existing international order of their time. For many Europeans the war in 2008 in Georgia was equally “a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing.” After the war Russia was only symbolically sanctioned. Even the most obvious measures

were not taken. “But why has Russia not been suspended from the Council of Europe, an organisation based on respect for human rights?” asked the *Financial Times*.^[30] Indeed, why not? As in 1938, Europeans could—later—regret their lukewarm response.^[31]

As could be expected, after the war Russia got the support of Kremlin-friendly Western experts. One of them was Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, *doyenne* of the French Kremlin watchers (although more a specialist on tsarist history than on modern Russian politics). Over the years Carrère d’Encausse has developed a warm personal relationship with the Russian leadership. As a regular participant in the seminars of the Valdai Club—sometimes referred to as Putin’s fan club—she received on November 4, 2009, from the hands of President Medvedev the Russian Order of Honor. She was also a prominent guest at the State Dinner, organized on March 2, 2010, on the occasion of

Medvedev's official visit to France. In her book *La Russie entre deux mondes* (Russia between Two Worlds), she wrote that the rebellion of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, when it started, certainly was "illegitimate and should have been ended." However, she continued, "the military defeat calls this pretention into question and modifies slightly the geography of the lost territories, still reducing that [part] which is controlled by Tbilisi."^[32] Why the military defeat of Georgia against an aggressor would call into question Georgia's right to have its national integrity restored is not indicated. Further in the text she refers to "the two separatist States." The word "States" is written with a capital S in the text.^[33] According to their status in international law the correct title would have been: the two separatist "entities" or "provinces." Apparently the author had no principal objections to the "independence" of the two provinces, but, on the contrary, fully

condoned the Russian land grab.^[34]

THE REAL REASONS FOR MOSCOW'S LAND GRAB

On November 21, 2011, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited the headquarters of the 58th Army in Vladikavkaz. This was the army that led the invasion of Georgia in August 2008. He gave a speech in which the official Kremlin version of the war—that it was “a humanitarian intervention to prevent genocide in South Ossetia”—was put into a broader context. While emphasizing that the intervention was a necessary “peace-enforcement operation,” he mentioned a second and quite different objective: “to curb the threat which was coming at the time from the territory of Georgia.” “If we had faltered in 2008,” Medvedev said, “[the] geopolitical arrangement would be different now and a number of countries in respect of which attempts were made to artificially drag

them into the North Atlantic Alliance, would have probably been there [in NATO] now.”^[35] It took the Kremlin three years to unveil the *real* reason for its intervention: to stop Georgia’s eventual NATO membership. Stopping NATO membership necessitated, however, for the Kremlin a second objective: a regime change in Tbilisi. In her memoirs the former US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, revealed how the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, called her in August 2008 and shamelessly proposed a regime change in Tbilisi as a condition for a Russian troop withdrawal. “The other demand,” said Lavrov to Rice, “is just between us. Misha Saakashvili has to go.”^[36] “I couldn’t believe my ears,” wrote Rice, “and I reacted out of instinct, not analysis.”^[37] Condoleezza Rice refused to negotiate the removal of a democratically elected president. When Lavrov repeated that it was “just between us” and asked her not to talk to others about his demand, this was similarly

rejected by her. It was clear that the objective of regime change was not something that just popped up during the negotiations. It had been prepared months, and probably years, before. It was, apparently, apart from the dismemberment of Georgia, the *real* reason for the Russian invasion.

In his memoirs Tony Blair wrote about a visit to Russia at the end of April 2003. “Vladimir Putin launched into a vitriolic attack at the press conference,” wrote Blair, “really using the British as surrogates for the U.S., and then afterwards at dinner we had a tense, and at times heated, discussion [on the Iraq war]. He was convinced the U.S. was set on a unilateralist course, not for a good practical purpose but as a matter of principle. Time and again, he would say, ‘Suppose we act against Georgia, which is a base for terrorism against Russia—what would you say if we took Georgia out?’”^[38] It is telling that Putin at that time gave exactly *this* example. The project was,

apparently, already in 2003 on the mind of the Kremlin's master. There are other facts that support this interpretation. On August 7, 2013, on the evening of the fifth anniversary of the war, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, in a prerecorded interview on Georgia's Rustavi-2 TV, told that he had met Putin in Moscow in February 2008 at an informal summit of the CIS. During the summit he told Putin that he was ready to say no to NATO in exchange for Russian help with the reintegration of the two breakaway territories. Saakashvili claimed "that 'Putin did not even think for a minute" about his proposal. "[Putin] smiled and said, 'We do not exchange your territories for your geopolitical orientation And it meant 'we will chop off your territories anyway.'" [39]

Saakashvili asked him to talk about the growing tensions along the borders with South Ossetia, saying, "It could not be worse than now."

"That's when he [Putin] looked at me and said: 'And here you are very wrong. You will see that

very soon it will be much, much, much worse.’”^[40]

This information came in the summer of 2012, a year after, quite unexpectedly, we were allowed already a glimpse inside the Kremlin’s kitchen. On August 5, 2012, a few days before the fourth anniversary of the war, a forty-seven-minute Russian documentary film “*8 Avgusta 2008. Poteryanny den*” (8 August 2008. The Lost Day) was posted on YouTube.^[41] In the film retired and active service generals accused former President Medvedev of indecisiveness and even cowardice during the conflict. They praised Putin, on the other hand, for his bold and vigorous action. According to one of Medvedev’s critics, retired Army General Yury Baluevsky, a former First Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the General Staff, “a decision to invade Georgia was made by Putin before Medvedev was inaugurated President and Commander-in-Chief in May 2008. A detailed plan of military action was arranged

and unit commanders were given specific orders in advance.”^[42] It is clear that these new facts support the interpretation, defended in this book, that, far from being a spontaneous Russian reaction to rescue its peacekeepers and “prevent a genocide,” the Russian invasion of August 2008 was a carefully planned operation. After the release of the documentary film Putin confirmed that the Army General Staff had, indeed, prepared a plan of military action against Georgia. It was prepared “at the end of 2006, and I authorized it in 2007,” he said.^[43] Interestingly, Putin also said “that the decision to ‘use the armed forces’ had been considered for three days—from around 5 August,”^[44] which clearly contradicts the official Russian version that the Russian army only *reacted* to a Georgian attack that started on August 7. According to this plan not only heavy weaponry and troops were prepared for the invasion, but also South Ossetian paramilitary units were

trained to support the Russian invading troops. Pavel Felgenhauer commented:

The “Lost Day” film and the comments by Putin and Medvedev have revealed a great deal: that the invasion of Georgia in August 2008 was indeed a preplanned aggression and that so-called “Russian peacekeepers” in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were in fact the vanguard of the invading forces that were in blatant violation of Russia’s international obligations and were training and arming the separatist forces. The admission by Putin that Ossetian separatist militias acted as an integral part of the Russian military plan transfers legal responsibility for acts of ethnic cleansing of Georgian civilians and mass marauding inside and outside of South Ossetia to the Russian military and political leadership. Putin’s admission of the prewar integration of the

Ossetian separatist militias into the Russian General Staff war plans puts into question the integrity of the independent European Union war report, written by Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini that accused the Georgians of starting the war and attacking Russian “peacekeepers,” which, according to Tagliavini, warranted a Russian military response.^[45]

NOTES

1. “Georgia Conflict: Key Statements,” *BBC News* (August 19, 2008).
2. “The Georgian War: Minute by Minute, August 9,” *Russia Today* (August 9, 2008).
<http://rt.com/news/the-georgian-war-minute-by-minute-august-9/>.
3. “South Ossetia Conflict FAQs,” *RIA Novosti* (September 17, 2008).
<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20080917/>.
4. Charles Clover, “Civilian Deaths Put at 133,”

Financial Times (August 21, 2008).

5. "Ustanovlenyy lichenosti 162 pogibshikh zhiteley Yuzhnoy Osetii: SKP RF," *RIA Novosti* (December 23, 2008).

<http://www.rian.ru/society/20081223/15789585/>

6. Another example of such a prepared attack was the accusation made immediately after the fighting that Georgia had destroyed protected historical buildings in Tskhinvali. "For Russia's part, which until now showed little interest in South Ossetia's cultural heritage, acts of destruction are [used] particularly as an argument to denounce Georgia as a war criminal," wrote the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. (Holm, Kerstin. "Brüder als Barbaren: Russland empört sich über die Zerstörung von Kulturdenkmälern in Südossetien," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 16, 2008).)

7. Quoted in "Put Out Even More Flags," *The Economist* (August 30, 2008).

8. Robert Amsterdam, "Andrei Piontkovsky and the Doppelgänger Theory" (September 26,

2007). <http://www.robertamsterdam.com>.

9. Zhirinovskiy, *Poslednyy brodok na yug*, 132.

10. Kovalev, "Putin's War."

11. Luke Harding, "Russia's Cruel Intention," *The Guardian* (September 1, 2008).

12. "Eduard Kokoity: My tam prakticheski vyrovnyali vse," *Kommersant* (August 15, 2008).

13. "Russian Invasion of Georgia: The Facts on Ethnic Cleansing of Georgians during the Russian Invasion and Occupation," *Georgia Update* website (October 8, 2008).

<http://georgiaupdate.gov.ge/>.

14. "Georgia: Russian Cluster Bombs Kill Civilians," *Human Rights Watch* (August 15, 2008).

15. The Russian Ministry of Defense denied in a news release on August 16, 2008, that it had used the Iskander missile in South Ossetia. Because the missile landed in Gori, which is situated *outside* South Ossetia, the Iskander missile may well have been used there. (Cf. "Up In Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and

Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia,” *Human Rights Watch*, New York (January 2009) 113).

16. Latynina, “200 km. tankov. O rossiysko-gruzinskoy voyne. Chast 2.”

17. “Verslag onderzoeksmissie Storimans,” *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, The Hague (October 20, 2008).

18. “Kamerbrief inzake het verslag van de onderzoekscommissie Storimans,” *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, The Hague (October 20, 2008).

19. “Up In Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia,” 113.

20. Quoted in Nico Hines, “Russia Accused of Dropping Cluster Bombs on Georgian Civilians,” *The Times* (August 15, 2008).

21. “Georgia: More Cluster Bomb Damage Than Reported,” *Human Rights Watch*, (November 4, 2008). Georgia also used cluster bombs in the conflict, but, unlike Russia, it did not deny this.

In the same report *Human Rights Watch* wrote that in the case of Georgia there was probably no intent to hit the civilian population.

Georgian Israeli-made M85 cluster bombs did not land in villages as a result of an intentional strike, but probably due to a failure of the (equally Israeli-supplied) Mk-4 rockets that fell down before reaching their goal.

22. Paul A. Goble makes a useful difference between *misinformation* and *disinformation*. “Misinformation,” he wrote, “the spread of complete false reports is the less serious threat. Typically, reportage that is completely false is not only easily identified but quickly challenged. But disinformation is another matter. . . disinformation almost always involves the careful mixing of obvious truths with falsehoods in a way that many will either find plausible or, at the very least, impossible to check.” (Paul A. Goble, “Defining Victory and Defeat: The Information War Between Russia and Georgia,” in *The Guns of August 2008*:

Russia's War in Georgia, eds. Cornell and Starr, 189–90.)

23. “Georgia Conflict: Key Statements.”

24. “South Ossetia conflict FAQs,” *RIA Novosti* (September 17, 2008).

25. Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” 79.

26. François Paulhac, *Les accords de Munich et les origines de la guerre de 1939* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), 139.

27. Pavel Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia: Georgia War,” in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Cornell and Starr, 172–173.

28. Illarionov, “Another Look at the August War,” 1.

29. Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy 1865–1980* (London: Fontana Press, 1989), 294.

30. “EU Must be United and Firm on Russia,” *Financial Times* (September 1, 2008).

31. On this lukewarm response, see Marcel H.

Van Herpen, "Russia, Georgia, and the European Union: The Creeping Finlandization of Europe," *The Cicero Foundation* (September 2008).

<http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marc>

32. H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, *La Russie entre deux mondes* (Paris: Librairie Arth eme Fayard, 2010), 291.

33. Carr ere d'Encausse, *La Russie entre deux mondes*, 293.

34. On September 11, 2008, during a meeting of the Valdai Club with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Carr ere d'Encausse asked Putin if he would respond positively to Kokoity's demand for integration of South Ossetia into the Russian Federation. She wrote: "Vladimir Putin answered with the greatest firmness that such a hypothesis was excluded. He explained that if Russia in this specific case was unable to ignore the will of the Ossetian people to be independent, it was firm regarding the principles of respecting the inviolability of

existing frontiers. This principle, according to him, applied without exception to the Russian Federation which could not, therefore, welcome into its midst a nation or territory that so desired.” Putin’s double-talk (he is speaking about the “inviolability of existing frontiers” just after having *changed* the frontiers of Georgia by brutal force) brings her to the—naive—conclusion that “the blunt refusal that was opposed to the Ossetian demand for integration into Russia makes the Russian position clear: the August intervention in Georgia . . . could lead to a settlement of a conflict between Georgia and its separatist minorities, [but] in no case to a dossier that was of interest to Russia.” (Carrère d’Encausse, *La Russie entre deux mondes*, 298–299.)

35. Cf. “Medvedev: August War Stopped Georgia’s NATO Membership,” *Civil Georgia* (November 21, 2011). Cf. also Brian Whitmore, “Medvedev Gets Caught Telling The Truth,” *RFE/RL* (November 23, 2011).

36. Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: My Years in Washington* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 688.
37. Rice, *No Higher Honor: My Years in Washington*, 688.
38. Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 447.
39. "Saakashvili: Georgia Was Ready to Trade NATO for Breakaway Regions," *RFE/RL* (August 8, 2013).
40. "Saakashvili: Georgia Was Ready to Trade NATO for Breakaway Regions."
41. "8 Avgusta 2008 goda. Poteryanny den." <http://rutube.ru/video/eddef3b31e4bdff29de4d>
42. Cf. Pavel Felgenhauer, "Putin Confirms the Invasion of Georgia Was Preplanned," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 152 (August 9, 2012).
43. Felgenhauer, "Putin Confirms the Invasion of Georgia Was Preplanned."
44. Quoted in Stephen Ennis, "Russian Film on Georgia War Fuels Talk of Kremlin Rift," *BBC* (August 10, 2012).

45. Felgenhauer, "Putin Confirms the Invasion of Georgia Was Preplanned."

Chapter 16

Conclusion

After World War II the American diplomat and Russia expert George Kennan wrote: “It would be useful to the Western world to realize that despite all the vicissitudes by which Russia has been afflicted since August 1939, the men in the Kremlin have never abandoned their faith in that program of territorial and political expansion which had once commended itself so strongly to Tsarist diplomatists.”^[1] These words were true after World War II, but are they still true today? Could one say, paraphrasing Kennan’s dictum, “that despite all the vicissitudes by which Russia has been afflicted since August 1991—the KGB inspired coup and the subsequent demise of the Soviet Union—the men in the Kremlin have never abandoned their faith in that program of territorial and political expansion which had once commended itself so strongly to Soviet diplomatists”? This

was the central question of this book. Could a great power for which a quasi-permanent, continued, and centuries-long territorial and political expansion has been the natural way of life, suddenly become a “normal,” post-imperial state? If one listens to some analysts, post-Soviet Russia simply had no choice but to adapt to its status of post-imperial country. Alexander Motyl, for instance, wrote:

Despite empire's long and venerable track record . . . , there are strong reasons to think that empire building is no longer a viable political project. Imperial states have acquired territory in three ways: by marriage, by purchase, and by conquest. Marriage no longer works, as no contemporary ruler (not even a dictator) claims to own the territory he rules. Purchase is a dead end, as all the world's land is divided among jealous states and oftentimes empowered populations.

Conquest is still possible in principle, and the twentieth century is full of instances in which it was attempted in practice. But the limits of conquest are clear, in the aftermath of Iraq if not before.

International and most national norms, for example, now hold that the conquest of foreign nations and states almost certainly involves violations of human rights and the principles of self-determination and cultural autonomy, and is therefore illegitimate. Moreover, nation-states are unusually effective vehicles of mass mobilization and resistance, making sustained conquest harder now than in the past In sum, while history suggests that being or having an empire is a guarantee of longevity, it also shows that acquiring an empire is probably no longer possible.^[2]

Motyl wrote these words in 2006, two

years before the Russian invasion of Georgia and the dismemberment of this small neighboring country. Another author, who explicitly considered the demise of the Russian empire as definitive, was Manuel Castells. According to Castells,

[T]here will be no reconstruction of the Soviet Union, regardless of who is in power in Russia I propose, as the most likely, and indeed promising future, the notion of the Commonwealth of Inseparable States (*Sojuz Nerazdelimyykh Gosudarstv*); that is, of a web of institutions flexible and dynamic enough to articulate the autonomy of national identity and the sharing of political instrumentality in the context of the global economy. Otherwise, the affirmation of sheer state power over a fragmented map of historical identities will be a caricature of nineteenth century European nationalism: it will lead in fact to

a Commonwealth of Impossible States
(*Sojuz Nevozmozhnykh Gosudarstv*).^[3]

Castells wrote these words in 1997, a year in which Russia seemed to have accepted definitively the loss of empire. Moreover, Castells was certainly right that there would be no reconstruction of the Soviet Union, which had disappeared, forever, with its ideological glue: communism. But empires do not need to be communist, as history teaches us. And empires need not be built only in a nineteenth-century way: relying almost exclusively on military power. They can also be built—or rebuilt—in a postmodern way, making use of a smart mix, which not only includes blackmail, pressure, and naked military power, but also financial instruments, economic leverage, and soft power.

We already cited in the introduction Dmitry Trenin, who, in the same vein as the two aforementioned authors, wrote: “The Russian

empire is over, never to return. The enterprise that had lasted for hundreds of years simply lost the drive. The élan has gone.”^[4] Unlike the other authors, who gave their optimistic assessments *before* the Russian invasion of Georgia, Trenin’s book was published *after* the invasion of Georgia and after the gas wars with Ukraine in 2006 and 2009. Trenin, who gave his book the title *Post-Imperium*, added the subtitle *A Eurasian Story*. He probably did so without any prior knowledge of Putin’s latest geopolitical project: his book was published before Putin wrote his famous *Izvestia* article in which he announced the formation of a Eurasian Union^[5] and also before the summit on December 19, 2011, during which the presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, officially launched the project of the Eurasian Union. Paradoxically—and ironically—Trenin added Putin’s latest, and most important imperial project as a subtitle to a book in which he argued that Russia had definitively lost its

imperial drive.

THE CRUCIAL YEAR 1997

Looking back however, it was not the year 2011—the year in which Putin launched his project of the Eurasian Union—which was crucial to Russia's new course, nor was it the year 1999, when Putin became acting president. In retrospect, the crucial year was 1997. In this year Russia stood at a crossroads. On May 27, 1997, after long hesitation, President Yeltsin signed the “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation.” In this act the Russian Federation committed itself to a set of common principles. Among these principles was featured the “respect for sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all states and their inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security.”^[6] The Kremlin's recognition of the inherent right of all states “to choose the

means to ensure their own security” was a major step forward on the road to a post-imperial state. It was the recognition of the sovereign right of both the post-Soviet states and the former Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe to choose their own alliances, including the right to become a member of NATO. In the same year—in July 1997—at the Madrid NATO summit, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were invited to join the Alliance.

Reactions in the West were more than positive. In an article with the title “From Empire to Nation State,” Chrystia Freeland wrote in the *Financial Times*: “After devoting five centuries to imperial expansion, Russia seems abruptly to have reconciled itself to a diminished global role.”^[7] She quoted Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the Moscow-based Center for Strategic Studies, who said: “This spring was a turning point in Russia’s choice between being an imperial power and a nation state. It marked a strong decision to reject

empire.”^[8] And he added: “The really surprising thing is that the negative reaction to the loss has not been stronger.”^[9] However, the Russian advance toward a democratic, post-imperial state during Boris Yeltsin’s second presidential term was not as straightforward as these enthusiastic comments seemed to suggest. Russia’s progress resembled rather the dancing procession of Echternach, in which three steps forward are preceded and followed by two steps backward. This is because, in the same year—on April 2, 1997—Yeltsin signed with the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko a Union Treaty leading to a Union State of Russia and Belarus. The signing of the treaty, wrote the *Financial Times*, “drew rare praise for Mr. Yeltsin from his Communist and nationalist opponents.”^[10] This praise was no surprise, because the initiative put Russia on a quite different track: that of a neoimperial state. The French paper *Le Monde* referred to a debate in

the Russian government between “occidentalists,” wanting to join the European democratic mainstream, and “Slavophiles,” wanting to build a Slavic Union under the aegis of Russia. The first group included two deputy prime ministers: Boris Nemtsov and Anatoly Chubais, and the leader of the liberal Yabloko fraction, Grigory Yavlinsky.^[11] The second group included not only ultranationalists, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the communist Gennady Zyuganov, but also Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.^[12] Primakov, who would shortly afterward become prime minister, was the former head of the SVR, the external intelligence service, a follow-up organization to the First Chief Directorate of the KGB. Primakov was described by Ronald Asmus as someone, who “had made his career by standing up to the West—‘the man who could say *Nyet*.’”^[13] He “saw his job as masking Russian weakness while

rebuilding Moscow's strength. By his desk, he kept a small bust of Prince Alexandr Gorchakov, a 19th-century Russian Foreign Minister under Czar Alexander II who had presided over Russia's recovery from its total defeat in the Crimean war. Partnership with the U.S. was not part of his lexicon.”^[14]

In an editorial *Le Monde* wrote at that time that the treaty on the Union State between Yeltsin and Lukashenko “emphasizes in the first place the permanent desire of the Kremlin to gather around it the former Soviet republics, at least the Slavic ones. Everything suggests that Ukraine will be next to bear the brunt of the Russian pressure: already dependent of her ‘big brother’ for her energy, she finds herself surrounded on three sides by Russian garrisons.”^[15] This commentary was, indeed, farsighted. The objective to bring Ukraine back in its orbit would become the overriding motive behind the Kremlin's policies in the next

decade. The choice facing Russia in 1997 was the choice between becoming a “normal,” democratic nation state, living in peace with its neighbors, or becoming—again—an empire. In the crucial year, 1997, the Founding Act with NATO pointed in the direction of the former, the Union Treaty with Belarus toward the latter. It was as though both initiatives mimicked the Russian coat of arms: the double-headed eagle whose heads face in two opposite directions. It was clear from the beginning that these two strategies could not be reconciled. As soon as 1994 Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote: “In not being an empire, Russia stands a chance of becoming, like France or Britain or earlier post-Ottoman Turkey, a normal state.”^[16] He added the warning: “If not openly imperial, the current objectives of Russian policy are at the very least proto-imperial. That policy may not yet be aiming explicitly at a formal imperial restoration, but it does little to restrain the strong imperial impulse that continues to

motivate large segments of the state bureaucracy, especially the military, as well as the public.”^[17] Brzezinski’s caution was certainly justified. It was shared by the Russian liberal politician Yegor Gaidar, who was Yeltsin’s prime minister from June 15, 1992, to December 14, 1992. Referring to the years 1918–1922—when the Red Army, in only four years, reconquered most of the lost tsarist territories—he wrote: “Russia is unique in restoring a failed empire.”^[18]

Putin’s project for a Eurasian Union is the Kremlin’s latest attempt to reintegrate the post-Soviet space. According to Jeremy Smith, a professor of Russian history at the University of Eastern Finland, “It is less clear what economic advantages Russia gains from the Union, given that so much of its trade is orientated to Europe, China, and elsewhere.”^[19] According to Smith, “this has fuelled the suspicion that the whole project is a way of enhancing Russian

regional hegemony and, in the most alarmist interpretations, moving toward the recreation of some form of the USSR. . . . Critics of the project maintain that, like the European Union, pressures for political integration will follow close upon the heels of economic integration, with the major difference that there will be a clear hegemonic power, Russia, dominating the Union.”^[20] One must add here one important reservation: the project of the Eurasian Union was not launched to recreate the Soviet Union, and the objective is not to reintegrate the Central Asian states into Russia proper. Its real and overriding objective is preventing Ukraine from establishing closer relations with the European Union and NATO, bringing this country definitively and irreversibly back into the orbit of its Slavic “brother country” Russia. This objective is openly admitted. Fyodor Lukyanov, for instance, a prominent Russian political scientist, wrote in a comment on Putin’s Eurasia article: “The paradox of the

Eurasian Union is that its primary goal is not Eurasia. Its most desired object is Ukraine.”^[21] Lukyanov considered membership of Ukraine—a country of 45 million—an economic necessity to make the Eurasian Union work. He also mentioned that “the growth of xenophobia [in Russia] . . . means that building an integrationist unification with the Central Asian countries will be accompanied by increased tensions. Ukraine is, in this sense, the ideal partner, together with Belarus, in as much as it immediately brings a sense of ‘Slavicness’ to the created structure.”^[22] Lukyanov spoke further, tellingly, of an “attempt to bring together what is profitable [the Slavic countries] and dissociate oneself from ‘ballast’ [i.e., the Central Asian countries].”^[23]

THE KREMLIN’S OBSESSION WITH UKRAINE

During the Russia-NATO Council session in Bucharest in April 2008, Putin called Ukraine “a

complex state formation. If the NATO issue is added there,” he said, “along with other problems, this may bring Ukraine to the verge of existence as a sovereign state.”^[24] Later during the same summit, in a discussion with U.S. President George Bush, Putin said that Ukraine was “not a real country.” This is clearly light-years away from the “common principles” laid down in the Founding Act, signed by Russia and the members of NATO in 1997, in which Russia had recognized the inherent right of all countries “to choose the means to ensure their own security.” Putin’s declaration was a scarcely veiled threat that Russia would intervene if Ukraine decided to join NATO. Doubts on Ukraine’s viability as a sovereign state were expressed on many occasions by leading Russians. On March 16, 2009, the Kremlin ideologue Gleb Pavlovsky wrote in the *Russkiy Zhurnal*, a Russian online magazine of which he is the owner, an article titled: “Will Ukraine Lose Its Sovereignty?”^[25] This article was

followed four days later by an interview with Sergey Karaganov, the *éminence grise* of the Russian foreign policy community and head of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy. This article had the title: “No One Needs Monsters. Desovereignization of Ukraine.”^[26] Karaganov depicted Ukraine as a failed state that was in a process of “passive desovereignization.” The process was, however, not only “passive.” Karaganov warned that “Russia will not want to see absolutely ungovernable territories close by.”^[27] Yuriy Shcherbak, former Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, wrote in response: “In military language it is called the ideological-propagandistic support of the future operation on capturing the territory of a sovereign state.”^[28] In fact, Russian politicians continued to denounce Ukraine as an “artificial” country that had no right to exist. At the height of the financial crisis Valery Fadeyev, editor of the

political journal *Ekspert*, wrote: “Ukraine is cheap, we can buy it.”^[29] It sounded less aggressive, almost as a joke, but it expressed the same contempt for Russia’s neighbor and its status as an independent, sovereign state.

In the Russian war of nerves with Ukraine Kirill, the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, also played an important role. From July 27 to August 5, 2009, Kirill visited Ukraine. His tour brought him not only to the pro-Russian eastern part, but equally to the western part of the country. One of his objectives was to suppress the pro-independence mood of the local church.^[30] Kirill talked a lot about the “common heritage” and the “common destination” of Ukraine and Russia. However, his intervention went further than simply delivering a spiritual message. According to Pavel Korduban, “One of his [Kirill’s] chief ideologists, Andrey Kuraev, was more outspoken, threatening Ukraine with a

civil war should a single church fully independent from Moscow ever be established.”^[31] Olexandr Paliy, a historian at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, commented: “We’ve seen more of a Russian state official than a religious figure. . . . The Church is being used as an instrument in the Kremlin’s game.”^[32] Oleh Medvedev, adviser of Yulia Tymoshenko, then Ukrainian prime minister, was more outspoken. He described Kirill’s tour “as a visit of an imperialist who preached the neo-imperialist Russian World doctrine.”^[33] When the archives of the KGB were opened after the demise of the Soviet Union, also a file on Kirill was found, indicating that he had worked for the KGB under the code name “Mikhailov.”^[34] It is, therefore, no surprise that the patriarch is working hand in hand with the Kremlin. Under Putin the Russian Orthodox Church has acquired the status of a semiofficial state

church and the relations between the hierarchy and the political leadership have become even closer than in tsarist times. How close the relationship between the Moscow patriarchate and the Kremlin has become was particularly evident when, immediately after his visit to Ukraine, Kirill went to the Kremlin to report to President Medvedev.

Kirill's visit in the summer of 2009 was clearly part of a broader psychological and political offensive. Some weeks after Kirill's visit President Medvedev published a video blog and an open letter to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko on the Russian presidential website. On this video Medvedev was overlooking the Black Sea where one could see two frigates menacingly on the horizon. Medvedev was dressed in black. *The Economist* even spoke of an "ominous black."^[35] Being dressed intimidatingly in threatening black had become a part of the symbolism used by the Kremlin when it addressed—directly or

indirectly—the Ukrainian leadership, as if to emphasize that between the two countries normal, civilized, diplomatic relations no longer existed. Some observers, such as Brzezinski, made comparisons with the black clothing of Mussolini.^[36] Others made comparisons with the *oprichniki*, the secret police of Ivan the Terrible, who were also dressed in black. Medvedev's open letter was a reaction to the expulsion by Ukraine of two Russian diplomats, accused of undermining activities. "We are more than just neighbors," wrote Medvedev in his open letter, "our ties are those of brothers."^[37] He went on, citing Gogol, that "there are no bonds more sacred than the bonds of brotherhood." After this declaration of brotherly love there followed a list of complaints concerning Ukraine's support for Georgian President Saakashvili and the "overt distortion of complex and difficult episodes in our common history, the tragic events of the great famine in the Soviet Union, and an

interpretation of the Great Patriotic War as some kind of confrontation between two totalitarian systems.”^[38] Medvedev’s letter explicitly referred to Patriarch Kirill’s visit to Ukraine, which was considered “an event of great significance.” “I had a meeting with the Patriarch following the visit,” wrote Medvedev, “and he shared my impressions and said many cordial words. We both are of the same opinion that the two fraternal peoples may not be separated as they share [a] common historical and spiritual heritage.” Such a message from the Kremlin master that the two “fraternal peoples” *may not be separated* was not reassuring for worried Ukrainians, who shortly before had read articles in the Russian media, announcing Ukraine’s imminent “desovereignization.” Special attention should also be paid here to the *language* of Medvedev’s message. The use of fraternal and paternal metaphors has a long tradition in Russia. “We have a good idea of what Stalin has

in mind,” wrote Richard Sennett, “when he declares ‘I am your father.’ He is going to force other people to do his bidding; he asserts his right to do so because he is the collective father. After a while people will habitually obey; the habit of obedience is discipline.”^[39] Using the “brother” metaphor Medvedev spoke as the older brother to the smaller, younger brother, implicitly claiming authority over the other. As Sennett rightly observed: “Metaphors are put to oppressive uses.”^[40]

Medvedev concluded his open letter with the words that “there can be no doubt that the multifaceted ties between Russia and Ukraine will resume on a fundamentally different level—that of strategic partnership—and this moment will not be long in coming.”^[41] These words could be perceived by the Ukrainians as an unveiled threat, because the “strategic partnership” the Kremlin wanted to establish with Ukraine would certainly include a

restriction of Ukraine's freedom of choice over its security arrangements, a freedom that nevertheless figured prominently in the Founding Act of 1997. Since the election of the more Russia-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich in 2010 the Russian pressure on Ukraine has not subsided. On the contrary: Russian pressure on Ukraine to join the Customs Union and Eurasian Union has only increased. The Kremlin uses both carrot and stick. The carrot is represented by a Russian offer to sell its gas to Ukraine for \$160 per cubic meter instead of \$425—a discount of more than 62 percent!^[42] The stick consists of a potential restriction of the number of Ukrainian migrant workers in Russia, estimated at between two and three million per year.^[43] The Russian authorities have already announced that from January 2015 citizens from the CIS countries need foreign passports to travel to Russia.^[44] The Russian pressure, however, also takes the

form of outright blackmail. An example of the latter is the so called “Yamal-Europe Two” project—a proposal, made on April 3, 2013, by Putin and Gazprom’s CEO Aleksey Miller to Poland, to build a new gas pipeline over Polish territory to Slovakia. This project, aimed “to demonstrate that Moscow can shift gas export volumes into new bypass pipelines, away from Ukraine’s gas transit system to Europe, eventually nullifying the system’s value.”^[45] This proposal was experienced by the Ukrainians as a direct attack. Some weeks later, on April 25, 2013, Putin, in a televised phone-in session in Moscow, went so far as to issue a warning that if Ukraine did not join the Eurasian Union it faced the potential “de-industrialisation” of multiple sectors within its economy.”^[46]

In the meantime negotiations between Ukraine and the European Union on an Association Agreement have reached a decisive phase. On March 30, 2012—after five years of

intensive negotiations—the chief negotiators of the EU and Ukraine initialed the text of the Association Agreement, which included setting up a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The text was hailed by some as “the most extensive international legal document in the entire history of Ukraine and the most extensive international agreement with a third country ever concluded by the European Union.”^[47] Unfortunately, however, due to election fraud and selective justice (the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko), the EU decided to delay the signing of the agreement. Although association with the EU would be in the long-term interest of Ukraine, eventually raising the prospect of EU membership, it is not certain that the Ukrainian government would make the necessary efforts to take up this opportunity. Russia, which does not formulate conditions of democratic governance or human rights, makes things much easier for Yanukovich. Moreover,

the benefits (lower energy prices) are immediate. It is still an open question whether Ukraine will be able to resist the Russian pressure. On May 22, 2013, the Ukrainian government signed a memorandum applying for observer status in the Russia-dominated Customs Union.^[48] Ukraine considers association with the EU compatible with a similar relationship with the Customs Union/Eurasian Union. However, this is not the case for Moscow. The Kremlin put enormous pressure on Viktor Yanukovich to shelve an Association Agreement with the EU, which the Ukrainian president planned to sign in Vilnius on November 28, 2013. The Kremlin's blackmail was successful. Yanukovich refused to sign the agreement—the result of six years of hard, protracted negotiations—in exchange for the Kremlin's offer of a \$15 billion loan and a discount in the price of Russian gas. Yanukovich met with mass protests at home. The protesters were not reassured by his statement that a

Ukrainian membership of the Eurasian Union was not (yet) on the agenda. It is clear, however, that most European governments, treating the relationship with Ukraine as a technocratic problem, have massively underestimated the important geopolitical implications of Ukraine's choice. However, it is not sure that this is also the case for Moscow. If Ukraine were to opt for deeper integration into the European Union, a Georgian scenario could not be excluded, in which the Kremlin could provoke riots in Eastern Ukraine or the Crimea, where many Russian passport holders live. This would offer Russia a pretext for intervening in Ukraine in order "to protect its nationals" and dismember the country. Unfortunately, such a scenario cannot be excluded. It is a corollary of the five principles of Russian foreign policy, formulated by President Medvedev on August 31, 2008. The fourth principle he mentioned was "protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, *wherever they may be.*"^[49] It leaves the

door open for military adventures throughout Russia's "neighborhood."

In 1992 Brzezinski warned: "The crucial issue here . . . is the future stability and independence of Ukraine."^[50] In 2012—twenty years later—in his book *Strategic Vision*, Brzezinski repeated this warning, writing: "It cannot be stressed enough that without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire."^[51] Brzezinski's warning is, more than ever, still relevant today. It is not without reason that Polish analysts especially, or analysts of Polish origin, warn about the dangers of Russia's new imperialism.^[52] Their country was, in the twentieth century (and in the centuries before), the main victim in Europe of the aggression from the imperialist powers, which dismembered and occupied the country. When

the Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski was asked: “Can you imagine any kind of renewed geopolitical conflict to your west in your lifetime?” he answered “I have a vivid imagination, but no, I cannot imagine an armed conflict between us and Germany.”^[53] When asked: “Does your imagination extend to the possibility of a future conflict to the east?” he answered: “Our relations with Russia, like yours [U.S.A.], are pragmatic but brittle. And unfortunately, after the war between Russia and Georgia, I’m afraid conflict in Europe is imaginable.”^[54] Another East European politician, Czech President Vaclav Havel, expressed the same concern sixteen years earlier: “I have said it so often: if the West does not stabilize the East, the East will destabilize the West.”^[55] This is a warning that should be taken seriously.

NOTES

1. Kennan, "Russia: Seven Years Later," in *Memoirs 1925–1950*, 519.
2. Alexander J. Motyl, "Empire Falls," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July-August 2006).
3. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: Volume II: The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 42.
4. Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, 233.
5. Putin, "Novyy integratsionnyy proekt dlya Evrazii: budushchee kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya."
6. "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation."
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_te
7. Chrystia Freeland, "From Empire to Nation State," *Financial Times* (July 10, 1997).
8. Freeland, "From Empire to Nation State."
9. Freeland, "From Empire to Nation State."
10. John Thornhill, "Russia Signs Union Treaty with Belarus," *Financial Times* (April 4, 1997).
11. Grigory Yavlinsky criticized the Union Treaty

with the following words: “You cannot talk about negotiating integration with a state where there is political repression and the conditions for the normal existence of the opposition are ruled out and the work of the media is restricted.” (Quoted in John Thornhill, “Belarus Link Alarms Russian Liberals,” *Financial Times* (April 2, 1997).)

12. Sophie Shihab, “M. Eltsine cherche à minimiser les conséquences de l’ “union” entre la Russie et la Biélorussie,” *Le Monde* (April 8, 1997).

13. Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Doors: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 141.

14. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Doors*, 141.

15. “L’avertissement biélorusse,” *Le Monde* (April 3, 1997).

16. Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” 79.

17. Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” 76.

18. Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for*

Modern Russia, 17.

19. Nargis Kassenova, Alexander Libman, and Jeremy Smith, "Discussing the Eurasian Customs Union and Its Impact on Central Asia," *Central Asia Policy Forum* 4 (February 2013), 6.

<http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Poli>

20. Kassenova et al., "Discussing the Eurasian Customs Union and Its Impact on Central Asia."

21. Fyodor Lukyanov, "Imperiya Naoborot," *Gazeta.ru* (November 17, 2011).

22. Lukyanov, "Imperiya Naoborot."

23. Lukyanov, "Imperiya Naoborot."

24. "What Precisely Vladimir Putin Said at Bucharest," *Zerkalo Nedeli* (April 25, 2008).

<http://www.mw.ua/1000:1600/62750/>.

25. Gleb Pavlovsky, "Will Ukraine Lose Its Sovereignty?" *Russkiy Zhurnal* (March 16, 2009).

<http://www.russ.ru>.

26. "No One Needs Monsters: Desovereignization of Ukraine," Interview with Sergey Karaganov, *Russkiy Zhurnal* (March 20, 2009). <http://www.russ.ru>.

27. “No One Needs Monsters: Desovereignization of Ukraine.”
28. Yuriy Shcherbak, “Ukraine as a Failed State: Myths and Reality,” *The Weekly Digest* 15, Kyiv (May 26, 2009).
29. Quoted in Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson, “The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood,” Policy paper (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2009), 29.
30. Since 1992 there has existed in Ukraine, alongside the official Orthodox Church that recognizes the Patriarch of Moscow, a rival independent Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UPTs-KP), led by Patriarch Filaret.
31. Pavel Korduban, “Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill Visits Ukraine,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no.155 (August 12, 2009), 5.
32. James Marson, “Faith or Politics? The Russian Patriarch Ends Ukraine Visit,” *Time* (August 4, 2009).

33. Korduban, “Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill Visits Ukraine.”
34. Cf. H el ene Blanc and Renata Lesnik, *Les pr edateurs du Kremlin [1917 –2009]* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 263.
35. “Dear Viktor, You’re Dead, Love Dmitry,” *The Economist* (August 22, 2009).
36. Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote: “Dressed all in black, including a black turtleneck sweater—a color scheme once favored by Benito Mussolini—the former KGB lieutenant colonel and now president, Vladimir Putin, addressed thousands of enthusiastic young supporters filling a Moscow sport stadium on November 21, 2007.” (Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Putin’s Choice,” *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 95.)
37. Dmitry Medvedev, “Relations between Russia and Ukraine: A New Era Must Begin,” President of Russia Official Web Portal, August 11, 2009. Available at <http://eng.kremlin.ru/text/speeches/2009/08/11>

38. Medvedev, "Relations between Russia and Ukraine: A New Era Must Begin."
39. Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 89.
40. Sennett, *Authority*, 79.
41. Medvedev, "Relations between Russia and Ukraine: A New Era Must Begin."
42. "Ukraina ne stanet nablyudatelem pri TS do 2015 g.," *kapital.kz* (May 20, 2013).
43. Cf. Oleg Varfolomeyev, "Ukraine Seeks Both Association Deal with EU and Observer Status in Customs Union," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 101 (May 29, 2013).
44. Cf. Fyodor Lukyanov, "Imperiya sdala passport," *Rossiya v Globalnoy Politike* (December 13, 2012).
45. Vladimir Socor, "Will Poland Consider a Gas Deal with Russia at Ukraine's Expense?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 67 (April 10, 2013).
46. Cf. Devin Ackles and Luke Rodeheffer, "Eurasian Paper Tigers," *New Eastern Europe* (June 24, 2013).

47. Oleksandr Sushko, et al., “EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Guideline for Reforms,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, KAS Policy Paper, no. 20 (Kyiv, 2012), 6.

48. Margarita Lyutova, “Ukraina stanet nablyudatelem v Evraziyskom Soyuze ne ranee 2015 goda,” *Vedomosti* (May 20, 2013).

49. “Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Rossia, NTV,” Sochi (August 31, 2008). President of Russia Official Web Portal.

<http://www.kremlin.ru/text/speeches/2008/08/3>
(emphasis mine).

50. Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” 80.

51. Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, 95.

52. Another analyst of Polish origin, Janusz Bugajski, also warned that “Russia under Putin has evolved into an imperial project The Russian regime defines its national interests at the expense of its neighbors, whose statehood

is considered secondary or subsidiary and whose borders may not be permanent.” Cf. Janusz Bugajski, “Russia’s Pragmatic Reimperialization,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4, no.1, (Winter 2010). http://www.cria-online.org/10_2.html.

53. “The Polish Model: A Conversation With Radek Sikorski,” *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 3 (May/June 2013), 5–6.

54. “The Polish Model: A Conversation With Radek Sikorski,” 6.

55. Vaclav Havel, “L’alliance euro-américaine doit s’approfondir en s’élargissant,” *Le Monde* (May 21, 1997).

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About the Author

Marcel H. Van Herpen is director of the Cicero Foundation, a pro-EU and pro-Atlantic think tank, based in Maastricht (The Netherlands) and Paris (France). He specializes in defense and security developments in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union. His last book publication is *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia* (2013).