

H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-18

Timothy Snyder. *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America.* London: Vintage, 2018. ISBN: 9780525574460 (hardcover, \$27.00); 9780525574477 (paperback, \$18.00).

21 December 2020 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT22-18>

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

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INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS MADDUX, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE,
EMERITUS

Timothy Snyder has written a number of award-winning books, many of which address issues of violence, challenges to freedom, and the threat of tyranny in twentieth- and twenty-first century Europe with a significant focus on the Soviet Union-Russia, Germany, and Eastern Europe. Perhaps his most influential work is *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, which explored the lands between Germany and the Soviet Union on which millions of civilians were killed by Adolf Hitler's Germany and Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union.¹ In 2017 Snyder's focus shifted to the increasing threats to liberty in Europe and the U.S., a subject he explored in *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the 20th Century*.² Snyder remains focused on this theme in *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, in which he applies a central paradigm to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 but broadens the thesis to include an assessment of Ukraine, the European Union, and the United States.³

Snyder's central thesis is that two world views have shaped the post-1991 period, and the perspectives of Russia under President Vladimir Putin, the countries in the European Union, and the United States under President Donald Trump. The first is the 'politics of inevitability,' which is most prevalent in the United States and assumes that American exceptionalism will continue, that the capitalist marketplace will triumph through globalization, and that democracy will be the most popular political system around the globe. The enthusiasm over the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union contributed to the illusion that the 'end of history' had arrived with democracy and capitalism supreme. Snyder's second world view is the 'politics of eternity,' with Russian leader Vladimir Putin as the most important advocate of this orientation. This perspective emphasizes victimhood, threats from outside, and leaders who "belittle and undo the achievements of countries that might seem like models to their own citizens. Using technology to transmit political fiction, both at home and abroad, eternity politicians deny truth and seek to reduce life to spectacle and feeling" (8). Snyder argues that Trump is in the eternity camp, and, in his response to the reviews in this forum, offers an update on Trump's orientation through the election of 2020.

The reviewers disagree on the strengths of Snyder's analysis in a vote of two in favor and one against. Aaron Belkin praises Snyder's study as a "must-read gem" that "underscores the inter-connectiveness of democratic deterioration in the West and authoritarian consolidation in Vladimir Putin's Russia." Belkin endorses Snyder's central paradigm of the politics of inevitability and eternity, especially the author's analysis of "why Putin pursues relative power by fomenting divisiveness, polarization, and fragmentation in the U.S. and Europe." Furthermore, according to Belkin, Snyder captures "Putin's bizarre and odious domestic behavior, including dangerous rhetoric about the threat that western decadence poses to Russian innocence." As a Ukrainian specialist, Yaroslav Hrytsak focuses his review on Ukraine and concludes that given the "available information and his analytical skills, Snyder uses both to the utmost, and the result is ... both brilliant and disturbing." Hrytsak concludes that Snyder's book possesses "substantial analytical worth" and urges the West to respond to Putin with a new political metaphysics. Joseph Kellner agrees with very little of Snyder's thesis, his assessment of Soviet policy under Joseph Stalin and his successors, as well as Putin's policy objectives and his responses to the U.S. and the Western powers. "Snyder is not a historian of Russia, but he employs Russian history to combat Russia's (allegedly) fascist

¹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). For an H-Diplo Roundtable on *Bloodlands*, see <https://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIII-2.pdf>, 8 September 2011 and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015) at <http://www.tiny.cc/Roundtable-xviii-1>, 6 September 2016.

² Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017).

³ Snyder's latest book is *Our Malady: Lessons in Liberty from a Hospital Diary* (New York: Crown, 2020) in which a personal health crisis before the Covid-19 virus prompted him to reflect on current threats to liberty and healthcare.

mythologies,” Kellner writes. He notes that he “found Snyder’s history deeply unfamiliar.” One exception pertains to Snyder’s evaluation of Putin and the Ukraine. Kellner writes that “Snyder is on firmer ground when seeking glimpses of the Russian state in investigative reporting, which in Ukraine specifically has shed needed light on the undeclared invasion.”

All of the reviewers have disagreements with *The Road to Unfreedom*, ranging from minor corrections to more substantial reservations on Snyder’s thesis and use of the term “fascist” with respect to Soviet policy and interpretations on Putin’s motivations. Hrytsak, for example, suggests that Snyder mistakenly describes Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev as having revived a cult of Stalin, arguing instead that Putin revived the cult. He also proposes that Snyder has exaggerated some of the influence of Russian role models on Putin, and raises the of the reliability of Putin’s public statements, focusing in particular on the Soviet leader’s remarks suggesting that the U.S. and the European Union were not threats to Russia in expanding EU membership to Eastern European states in 2004 and making a proposal to the Ukraine in 2011. During the Ukraine crisis in December 2014, Hrytsak notes that “Putin stated that the issue of European integration must be resolved by the Ukrainians alone, and Russia had nothing to do with it. He also said that he would tolerate [Ukrainian] Euromaidan-like mass protests in Moscow if they were kept within the bounds of law.” Hrytsak concludes that Putin always wanted “to keep Ukraine within the Russian sphere of influence. Concrete actions would be determined by the specifics of the situation” and “once Ukraine decided to leave Russia’s orbit, the Kremlin interfered to destroy its territorial integrity and to reduce it to a status of a political non-entity.”

Although very impressed with almost every aspect of Snyder’s thesis, his account of Putin’s behavior toward the West as well as domestic policies, his scholarship and writing style, his “masterful integration of agency and structure,” Belkin is “not quite fully persuaded” and questions whether the U.S. fits Snyder’s thesis. Instead of a move in the U.S. from a politics of inevitability to a politics of eternity with Trump’s arrival in the White House, Belkin believes that both have existed in the U.S. since 1900. The “two variants of willful ignorance have existed side-by-side throughout modern American history,” according to Belkin, who concludes that “capitalists have fabricated and amplified the central narratives at the heart of both approaches to sustain a complicated strategy of divide-and-conquer that is designed to prevent white workers from voting in terms of their class interests.”

Kellner has many concerns with Snyder’s book ranging from sources, the focus on the importance of Russian émigré thinker Ivan Ilyin on Putin, the failure to define terms such as “totalitarianism” and “fascism,” and, perhaps most serious, the need to consider geopolitical factors that influenced the deteriorating relationship between the U.S. and Russia after 1991. He wonders how much of Putin’s behavior has resulted from his experience with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Western and U.S. response to the struggles of President Boris Yeltsin and the U.S. policy of advocating moving the NATO alliance and the EU into the Russian sphere and toward the Russian border with the Ukraine as the final crisis.⁴

Kellner challenges Snyder’s linkage of Trump to Putin’s efforts to weaken the U.S. and its relations with its Western allies. In an effort to show how the Russians moved to influence Trump before 2016 and then assisted his campaign in the many ways demonstrated by the U.S. intelligence committees’ investigations and prosecutions of members of Trump campaign and advisers, in Chapter VI “Quality or Oligarchy (2016),” Snyder applies his thesis on Putin’s efforts to weaken the West and the politics of eternity to the United States. As Snyder describes the process of Russian support for Trump, “Trump’s advance to the Oval Office had three stages, each of which depended upon American vulnerability and required American cooperation. First, Russians had to transform a failed real estate developer into a recipient of their capital. Second, this failed real estate developer had to portray, on American television, a successful businessman. Finally, Russia intervened with purpose and success to support the fictional character ‘Donald Trump, successful businessman’ in the 2016 presidential election” (219). Kellner criticizes Snyder for relying on a “fringe theory that Soviets and Russians have been grooming Trump since the 1980s, making no distinction between state and private actors (4-5)”. Kellner agrees that Russia “did

⁴ For examples of assessments that emphasize considering geopolitical factors and the interaction of states as well traditional influences from the past, see Ronald Grigor Suny’s review of Angela Stent’s *Putin’s World: Russia against the West and with the Rest* (New York: Twelve Books, 2019) at <https://hdiplo.org/to/E43>. Suny points to the persistent Russian view of the “West as hostile and anxious to divide and weaken their country”

meddle in the 2016 election, and that it is in fact possessed of a technically sophisticated propaganda apparatus” but concludes that Snyder relies far too much on unreliable sources for too many issues in his study.

An area of potential consensus among the reviewers and Snyder as advanced by the author in his response is the necessity of relying upon history and not the politics of inevitability or eternity in order to affirm and maintain democracy. Snyder writes, “History demands and reinforces a similar tripartite view of time: we seek the structures of the past, we accept (and constantly discuss the shape and significance of) human agency, and we generally agree that the future is hard to predict.”

Participants:

Timothy Snyder is the Richard C. Levin Professor of History at Yale University. He is the author of a number of studies of European history, such as *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015). His most recent book is *Our Malady: Lessons in Liberty from a Hospital Diary* (New York: Crown Books, 2020). He is at work on a brief philosophical analysis of freedom, a family history of national movements, and a synthetic history of Europe.

Aaron Belkin is Professor of Political Science at San Francisco State University, Director of Take Back the Court, and Director of the Palm Center. His most recent book is *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of U.S. Empire, 1898-2001* (Columbia University Press, 2012), and he received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley in 1998. Since 1999, Belkin has served as founding director of the Palm Center, which the *Advocate* named as one of the most effective LGBTQ rights organizations in the nation. He designed and implemented much of the public education campaign that eroded popular support for military anti-gay and anti-transgender discrimination, and Harvard Law Professor Janet Halley said of Belkin that, “Probably no single person deserves more credit for the repeal of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’” During a November 2016 White House ceremony, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Anthony Kurta credited the Palm Center as one of the organizations most responsible for helping the military lift its ban on transgender personnel. His latest project, Take Back the Court, urges Congress to expand the size of federal courts.

Yaroslav Hrytsak is professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv, Ukraine). He is the author of numerous publications on modern history of Eastern Europe, including the books: *Ivan Franko and His Community* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2018); *Narysy modernoi istorii Ukrainy* [Essays in Modern Ukrainian History], 3rd ed. (Kyiv: Yakaboo, 2019).

Joseph Kellner received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 2018 and is now assistant professor of history at the University of Georgia. His book manuscript, a cultural history of the late Soviet period through the post-Soviet transition, is tentatively titled *The Spirit of Socialism: Culture and Belief at the Soviet Collapse*.

REVIEW BY AARON BELKIN, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Timothy Snyder's must-read gem underscores the inter-connectedness of democratic deterioration in the West and authoritarian consolidation in Vladimir Putin's Russia. Snyder explains how and why authoritarian tendencies have emerged—and in some cases prevailed—in recent years. He anticipates that western democracies that have not yet collapsed may be on the precipice of catastrophe. And he encourages readers to imagine alternative political possibilities. I love this masterpiece and would even go so far as to say that it is one of the best and most compelling books that I have ever read, though I do not quite agree with its central claim.

Snyder outlines a gorgeous vision of what politics can be. For Snyder, a politically healthy society commits to collective problem-solving by grappling honestly with history, and by recognizing limits of structures, spaces of indeterminacy, and possibilities for freedom (112). He argues that in order to avoid the temptations and shortcuts that authoritarians offer to their followers, societies must see themselves as they are rather than through exceptionalist prisms (275). And, they must commit to collective public policy (278). These are the *politics of responsibility*, perhaps the best exit from the road to unfreedom.

If American and European politics in this moment cannot be characterized in such terms, then how might they be described and understood? Snyder argues that for much of the postwar era, western politics have been structured by a form of forgetting that he calls the *politics of inevitability*, the capitalist version of which presumes that markets are inevitably superior, so superior that blind adherence to market logic often substitutes for policy. According to Snyder, Americans and Europeans have come to believe that aside from market logic, ideas do not matter, and that the course of events—permanent Western superiority—can be known in advance and taken for granted. Westerners' beliefs about their own competence, intelligence, and invulnerability are a smugness that he refers to as the *fable of the wise nation*. It is a pervasive affliction in the West.

Broadly speaking, Snyder understands the emergence of authoritarian politics in western democracies as a transition from one form of forgetting—the politics of inevitability—to another, the *politics of eternity*. Eternity politicians, according to Snyder, legitimate their rule not by policy accomplishments or the promise of a better future, but by nostalgia (110). They construct a fantasy of an eternally innocent nation under constant threat from outside forces. As they fabricate myths of national innocence, eternity politicians destroy history and fact, substituting in their place repeated and imagined cycles of crisis, threat and defense. Snyder observes that eternity politicians require and produce problems that are insoluble because they are fictional (51). This is what connects President Donald Trump's promise to 'make America great again' with his hyperbole about undocumented immigrants 'pouring across the border.'

Russian President Vladimir Putin is an eternity politician. When Putin destroyed Russian democracy by subverting the 2012 elections, he shattered Russia's mechanism of succession. For Snyder, the absence of a succession principle has profound temporal implications, because citizens rely it to sustain the hope that they can help shape a better future at the ballot box. He explains that when elections are fair, democracy produces a sense of time, an expectation of the future that can calm the present, and that mistakes can be corrected: "Democracy transforms human fallibility into political predictability, and helps us experience time as movement forward into a future over which we have some influence" (249). Once he undermined Russia's succession mechanism, however, Putin could only offer citizens a perpetual defense of national innocence—the politics of eternity—in lieu of the prospect of a better future. (48, 273).

Given Russia's kleptocracy and dependence on commodity exports, Snyder observes, Putin cannot increase Russian state power or close the gap with Europe or the U.S. So, foreign policy—exporting Russian chaos while underscoring Russian innocence—must take the place of domestic policy. If Russia cannot become stronger, Putin believes, others must become weaker. And the simplest way to make them weaker is to make them more like Russia. Rather than addressing its problems, Snyder says, Russia exports them (249). Hence, if neighbors can be pressured into abandoning alliances, if flaws of American

democracy can be exploited to elect a Russian puppet, and if the European Union (EU) can be wedged apart, then Putin can prove to domestic and foreign audiences that the rest of the world is no better than Russia.

Snyder's brilliant theory of strategic relativism underscores how and why Putin pursues relative power by fomenting divisiveness, polarization, and fragmentation in the U.S. and Europe. His sweeping analysis accounts for a vast range of ostensibly unconnected phenomena including why Putin bombed Syria (to create waves of immigrants who would destabilize western democracies), invaded Ukraine (to keep it away from Europe), financed Brexit (to foment divisiveness within the EU), provided financial and political support to extremist right-wing parties throughout Europe (same reason for financing Brexit), and meddled in the U.S. election in 2016.

As well, Snyder's theory accounts for Putin's bizarre and odious domestic behavior, including dangerous rhetoric about the threat that western decadence poses to Russian innocence. Snyder argues that the potential of facts to shatter myths of national innocence jeopardizes the politics of eternity, so factuality must be destroyed. To take one example of Snyder's specification of this phenomenon: Because Russia is innocent, no Russian could ever be a fascist, so Russian state television refers to opponents as fascists and blames the Holocaust on Jews. Snyder says that in the politics of eternity, the past provides a trove of symbols of innocence exploited by rulers to illustrate the harmony of the homeland and the discord of the rest of the world: "Time becomes a mystical loop, vacant of factuality" (57; 64).

Having distinguished between the politics of inevitability and eternity and explained Putin's motive for sowing discord, Snyder accounts for the decline of western democracy in terms of vulnerability and exploitation (77). Why does fragmentation appear to be pulling western democracies apart? Snyder argues that Russia's politics of eternity targeted the blindness at the center of European and American politics of inevitability (109). The capitalist version of the politics of inevitability, the notion that the market can replace collective solutions to national problems, has generated inequality that undermines belief in progress. Social mobility has halted, and the politics of inevitability have given way to the politics of eternity. New oligarchs spin tales of innocent pasts and, with the help of fascist ideas, leverage fake protection and spectacle to distract people with real pain. Western democracies may find themselves at different stages of the journey: Hungarian and Polish democracies have collapsed. America under Trump is *en route*. France and Germany are at an earlier stage. While the timing may not be not synchronous, the arcs and trajectories echo one another.

Snyder's scholarship impresses on so many levels. He is an amazing narrator, and his stories—including his riveting account of democratic resistance on Kyiv's Maidan square—are gripping. He is attuned and compassionate to his subjects. He conducts original research in multiple languages. His explanations account for a wide range of apparently unrelated outcomes. While *Road to Unfreedom* is a terrifying read, it is a joy to immerse oneself in such sophisticated yet accessible scholarship.

I am particularly impressed with Snyder's masterful integration of agency and structure and the deftness with which he balances generalized and particular explanations. My disciplinary peers in political science often place a premium on the identification of patterned outcomes and the explanation of those outcomes in terms of structural factors. We sometimes criticize historians for attributing causal importance to idiosyncratic nuances of a particular case while overlooking how the case might be understood as an instance of a pattern of outcomes that share similar causes. Among the strengths of this approach—at its best—is the possibility of explaining a large number of important outcomes in terms of a small number of causal factors, or parsimony. Among its weaknesses is the likelihood of overlooking what is interesting and important when particularity, uniqueness, and agency get stripped away.

Remarkably, Snyder is able to map the causal significance of broad factors while leaving plenty of room for nuance and agency, and his explanations of general patterns and specifics sustain rather than detract from one other. Snyder specifies two categories of willful ignorance, the politics of inevitability and eternity, and uses those categories as lenses for making sense of history. His development of the concepts of eternity and inevitability include dozens of generalizations: for example, authoritarianism arrives because people lose their ability to distinguish between fact and desire (249); only collective public policy can create citizens with the confidence of individuals (278); totalitarianism effaces the boundary

between private and public (232). In the hands of a less skillful scholar, such sweeping claims might diminish the narrative. In *Road to Unfreedom*, by contrast, the generalizations are gifts that reflect the specifics of each particular story while sustaining understanding of other outcomes in the text and beyond.

While deeply impressed by Snyder's magnificent work, I'm not quite fully persuaded, and I'll explain why in the context of the case I know best, the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Snyder is rightly concerned about the transition from the politics of inevitability to the politics of eternity, but these two variants of willful ignorance have existed side-by-side throughout modern American history. Capitalists have fabricated and amplified the central narratives at the heart of both approaches to sustain a complicated strategy of divide-and-conquer that is designed to prevent white workers from voting in terms of their class interests.

The short version of the story goes something like this: American capitalists have long striven to prevent workers from voting as one bloc. Throughout modern American history, they have fabricated and incited multiple forms of paranoia—fear without basis—about domestic threats (people of color, immigrants, Muslims, women, and LGBT people) and foreign threats (the Soviets, terrorists, immigrants) to persuade white voters to send capitalists to Washington to de-regulate the economy and reduce the tax burden on the richest Americans. Central to this project is the portrayal of the U.S. as benign, innocent, white, male, straight, and cisgender, a nation that is threatened by malicious and abject outsiders and insiders. The incitement of paranoia is highly elastic, as capitalists re-calibrate which scapegoats to target from one election cycle to the next. But the maneuver is always the same. Among the many forms of paranoia that capitalists have fabricated and incited is a racialized version of anti-statism, the notion that the federal government is ineffective, corrupt, and inefficient, and that to the extent that the state provides help to anyone, its beneficiaries are always undeserving black and brown people.

Notice that while the account offered above does not use Snyder's terminology of inevitability and eternity, the main story-lines of both models are myths that capitalists fabricate and amplify to prevent white, black, and brown workers from voting together as one block. Anti-statism *is* the politics of inevitability, the notion that the market knows best. The politics of paranoia *is* the politics of eternity, the notion that the U.S. is innocent, that it is threatened by menacing insiders and outsiders, and that making scapegoats suffer is more important than collective public policy. The politics of paranoia, just like eternity and inevitability politics, destroy history and factuality. Consider, for example, the durable willful ignorance about white supremacy and American power's basis in crimes against humanity at home (slavery and the Native American genocide) and abroad (drone killings of civilians; torture during wars in the Middle East, Vietnam and the Philippines; bombings of Korean, German, and Cambodian civilians; systemic rape, massacre and pillage in Vietnam.)

Snyder's argument about the transition from the politics of inevitability to the politics of eternity may overlook that both variants of willful ignorance are part and parcel of the same thing, capitalists' pursuit of divide-and-conquer policies. In the American case, the integration of these two variations are apparent in President Richard Nixon's southern strategy, Ronald Reagan's invocation of a welfare queen driving a Cadillac on the south side of Chicago, George H. W. Bush's Willie Horton ad, George W. Bush's anti-gay-marriage initiative, and Trump's wall. Snyder's accurate observation that eternity politicians offer fake protection and spectacle to distract people with real pain overlooks the reality that the politics of paranoia work well with audiences that are not suffering. Whites who flocked to the Republican Party in response to Nixon's southern strategy were doing fairly well economically. In 2016, almost every group of white voters, including educated and wealthy whites, supported Trump.

At least in the American case, I would argue that the problem is not quite that the U.S. is transitioning from inevitability politics to eternity politics. To be sure, Putin has catalyzed the decline of American democracy, as Snyder shows. But the bigger problem is that the alliance between capital and paranoia has become too strong for progressives to contest. Even though Democrats may prevail at the ballot box from time to time, Republicans have effectively leveraged nuances of America's counter-majoritarian institutions to rule as a minority. When Republicans win elections, they cut taxes. When Democrats win, Republicans use Senate obstructionism to prevent the passage of laws, and judicial review to curtail the few laws that do get enacted. Over time, Republicans have won gradually and Democrats have lost gradually as taxes on the rich have declined precipitously over the past half century while inequality exploded in tandem. Trump is the effect of these

dynamics, not the cause, and the approximately 40 percent of Americans who continue to support him will be available for future authoritarians to rally long after Trump leaves the stage.

While I do not quite disagree with Snyder's analysis, I might emphasize slightly different angles. So, I'll end where I started: Snyder's must-read gem is one of the best and most compelling books that I have read. His scholarship is a gift, and I'm so glad that I read this book.

REVIEW BY YAROSLAV HRYTSAK, UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Historical writing is among those areas of human activity where, unlike athletics or mathematics, age can be advantageous: the older the historians, the better they can be, and good historians tend to live long lives. An additional factor is at work for historians of recent events: they have to live long to discover the veracity of their interpretations. Timothy Snyder is a middle-aged historian; by this token he has good chances, if and when the Vladimir Putin regime in Russia falls apart, to see what was in the mind of its architect, and how Russian interference affected recent political changes in the U.S. and the European Union. So far, in his newest book, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* he has had to rely on the available information and his analytical skills. Snyder uses both to the utmost, and the result is, to quote Yuval Noah Harari, both “brilliant and disturbing.”

Snyder claims that Putin’s geopolitical doctrine could be better understood if one turns to Russian conservative philosophers, Ivan Ilyin above all. They saw the ‘decadent’ West as an existential threat, and believed that only ‘innocent’ Russia could save the world from this danger. There is another book published on the same subject, *Dans la tête de Vladimir Poutine* by French philosopher Michel Elchaninoff, which reaches a similar conclusion: this ‘hybrid’ of Putin and Russian conservative thought portends a very disturbing future.¹

I am a Ukrainian historian, and this review is informed by my knowledge of modern Ukrainian history. Such a perspective makes sense, since recent Russian political manoeuvres in Ukraine go a long way towards elucidating Putin’s doctrine.

I start with corrections. Snyder postulates that it was Max Stierlitz—a fictional Soviet counterintelligence agent dramatized in a famous Soviet television series—who served as a source of inspiration for young Putin (44). This does not seem entirely plausible. The series was broadcast in 1973, when Putin was 21 years old, his mind was already set on a career as a KGB officer. He made this decision at the age of 16, and his teenage inspiration came from another Soviet movie, *Dead season* (1968). The movie was based on the life story of Conon Molody, another Soviet plant, this time in British high society during the Cold War. In a conversation with Donatis Bonionis—the Lithuanian actor who played the main character—Putin has admitted the importance of this movie in his choice of career.²

Snyder introduces the Stierlitz story to show a link between Ivan Ilyin and Vladimir Putin. Stierlitz was played by Soviet actor Viacheslav Tikhonov, who later went on to act in two movies by Nikita Mikhalkov—and it was apparently Mikhalkov who introduced Putin to Ilyin’s works. This link may not be necessary: Tikhonov’s roles in Mikhalkov’s movies present far from a heroic image. The irony is that Tikhonov was the first choice to play *Dead Season*’s protagonist, but then was replaced by Bonionis, who bore a greater physical resemblance to Conon Molody. In any case, the significance of Stierlitz and Tikhonov as role models for Putin seems to be exaggerated.

These minor details are important to the extent that they reveal the ideological context in the Soviet Union in the first decade of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev’s rule. Under Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet ideological apparatus made no special efforts to create a positive image of a KGB agent. Brezhnev and his men, however, did, and their efforts—judging by the popularity of Soviet spy movies—were rather successful.

¹ Michel Elchaninoff, *Dans la tête de Vladimir Poutine* (Paris: Éditions Solin/Actes Sud, 2015). I have not read the book; I rely on an interview by its author—see: Efim Shuman, “Frantsuskii filosof: Chto tvoritsia v golove u Vladimira Putina,” *Deutsche Welle*, 14 June 2016, <https://p.dw.com/p/1J3uZ>.

² Donatas Banionis, “Iz memuarov,” *Druzhba Narodov* 12 (2005), <https://magazines.gorky.media/druzhba/2005/12/iz-memuarov.html>.

There was, however, a line that Soviet ideology under Brezhnev never crossed: contrary to what Snyder writes, it never revived a cult of Stalin (40, 157). This was the one tenet from the Khrushchev era that remained unchanged. What the Soviet apparatus under Brezhnev did do was introduce the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which had been absent during the rule of both Joseph Stalin and Khrushchev. This myth went together with rather feeble attempts to portray Brezhnev as one of the architects of victory over the Nazis. In other words, they promoted a cult of Brezhnev, not of Stalin. Under Brezhnev, Stalin was ideologically not kosher.

In his reliance on Russian conservative thought, Putin outdid Brezhnev: he did revive the cult of Stalin. The same holds true for Soviet policy towards Ukraine. Snyder writes that “[t]hough Soviet policy had been lethal to Ukrainians, Soviet leaders never denied that Ukraine was a nation” (120). By contrast, and following Ilyin’s “organic model” of Russian statehood, Putin sees Ukraine as an inseparable member of the virginal Russian body (112). This is basically true. Nevertheless, some caveats are in order. Soviet leaders never denied the existence of Ukraine as an *entity*, but they never defined it as a *nation*. In the first place, the concept of ‘nation’ was rather alien to the Soviet vocabulary. There were ethnic groups, peoples, nationalities, national politics, but rarely nations. The concept of ‘nation’ was considered a Western (bourgeois) borrowing that did not fit Soviet reality. Such a practice, ironically, echoed Ilyin’s claim that “[t]he ‘nationality question’ in Russia was ...an invention of enemies, a conceptual import from the West that had no applicability to Russia” (61). Following in Ilyin’s footsteps, Putin, too, says that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people” (i.e. not nation, 113). Second, there was another reason why Soviet leaders could not consider Soviet Ukraine as a nation in principle. Such a perception would have elevated it to the status of neighboring Communist Poland or Hungary. Ukrainians were treated as an ethnic group that was bound to dissolve and assimilate within the Soviet *people* (never the Soviet nation!). After the death of Stalin, Ukrainians were promoted to the status of junior partner (‘younger brother’) in running the Soviet Union. They could enjoy brilliant careers in the Soviet apparatus as *ethnic* Ukrainians, but they were repressed the moment any of them revealed the least aspiration to treat Ukraine as a *nation*: this automatically turned them into Ukrainian nationalists.

Snyder points out that Putin did not present the European Union (EU) enlargement of 2004 as a threat (79). On the contrary, he spoke favorably that year of future EU membership for Ukraine, and until 2011 the basic line of Russian foreign policy was that the European Union and the United States were not threats. The problem with his statements is whether they can be taken at face value. Thus, on 13 December 2014, in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, Putin stated that the issue of European integration must be resolved by Ukrainians and by Ukrainians alone, and Russia had nothing to do with it. He also said that he would tolerate Euromaidan-like mass protests in Moscow if they were kept within the bounds of the law.³

Some analysts believe that it was the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine that Putin took as the West’s direct interference in the Kremlin’s geopolitical interests. He took all the necessary measures to annihilate any possibility of mass protests in Russia.⁴ But probably even the Ukrainian Maidan was not the starting point here. A few months before, in September 2004,

³ “Putin: Kto-nibud chital teksts soglashenia of assotsiatsii Ukrainy s ES?” YouTube video, 7:44, posted 19 December 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8gR0dLAcWQ>.

⁴ See the confessions made by Russian political analysts Gleb Pavlovski and Sergei Markov: “Putin byl gotov ostanovit ‘oranzhevuyu revoliutsiyu’ siloy”, BBC Russkaya Sluzhba, 12 January 2012, https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2012/01/120126_putin_russia_west_part_two. During the Orange Revolution 2004, they worked in Ukraine for Putin and stated that the events in Ukraine made the Kremlin to revise its politics. In words of Pavlovski, after the Orange Revolution, Putin had an impression, that “somewhere nearby these [Orange] people, these regiments gather and very soon they will take to the streets.” A decision was made “to bring quickly into the politically space young unemployed people who were loyal to Putin.” This was the way how movement “Nashi” (Ours) was created.

following a terrorist act in Beslan, Putin stated that Russians were “dealing with the direct intervention of international terror against Russia” and that Russia “proved to be unprotected from both *the West* and the East” (emphasis added).⁵

If Putin changed his plans only after 2011, why then did he orchestrate a major cyberattack against Estonia in April 2007—which Snyder characterizes as “the first salvo in a Russian cyberwar against Europe and the United States”—and the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 (80)? According to Aleksandr Litvinenko and Vladimir Gorbulin, two leading Ukrainian experts in international security, the chronology of Russia’s transformation under Putin looks thus: the restoration of the old Soviet anthem (2000), the proclamation of a new imperial course (based on the model of energy-based superpower, 2003), quasi-isolationism and spy hysteria (2005-2007), controlled confrontation with the U.S. (Putin’s Munich speech in 2007), proclamation of the post-Soviet region as a zone of privileged interests of the Russian Federation (2008), and the effective rehabilitation of Stalin (2007-2009). When it comes to Ukraine, plans for its possible invasion were presumably conceived right after the Georgian-Russian war of 2008. Almost twenty years of experience of relations with independent Ukraine persuaded the Kremlin that its indirect control through local pro-Russian elites was inefficient. The Kremlin was aware that the historical ‘window of opportunity’ regarding Ukraine would close within the next several Ukrainian election cycles, when a new generation of Ukrainian elites would come to power. If they proved to be more resilient to Russian influences, military invasion should follow. As a result of this invasion, Ukraine would be divided into three entities: the Russian-speaking industrial East and South of Ukraine, which would be integrated into the Russian Federation, the largely agricultural Central Ukraine, which would be converted into a kind of a puppet state, and Western Ukraine, as the main anti-Russian agitator, which could go wherever it pleased.⁶

These aforementioned plans leaked to the press in 2009. At the time they looked so improbable that most analysts refused to believe them. Still, already in January of 2014, they were taken very seriously by leaders of the Euromaidan. The latter were aware that a Russian invasion was a matter of weeks.⁷ In this sense, contrary to what Snyder writes, Kyiv was not caught entirely by surprise when on February 24, 2014, Russian special forces moved into Ukraine (139).

George Orwell once wrote that with time it would turn out that Stalin’s foreign policy, which was claimed to be extremely intelligent, was in fact primitive opportunism.⁸ Historical studies partly confirm his words: Stalin saw clearly the strategic aim of his foreign policy, but there were no detailed plans, no general strategy. Decisions were made *ad hoc*, according to the demands of the situation. Each next step was determined by the weakness of the opponent. If he faced serious resistance, he looked for other ways and mechanisms.⁹ By the same token, the two aforementioned Ukrainian experts assumed that, with a high degree of probability, Putin did not have any precise, clearly formulated program of actions towards Ukraine. He saw clearly his strategical aim: to keep Ukraine within Russia’s sphere of influence. Concrete actions would be determined by the

⁵ Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina, 4 sentiabria 2004 goda, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22589>.

⁶ Aleksandr Litvinenko and Vladimir Gorbulin, “Bolshoi sosed opredelilsia. Chto Ukraine delat dalshe?” *Zerkalo nedeli*, 18 September 2009, http://gazeta.zn.ua/politics/bolshoy_sosed_opredelilsya_cho_ukraine_delat_dalshe.html.

⁷ I am stating this from my own personal experience. At that time I was working as an expert in one of the Euromaidan think tanks, and I was asked to reveal these plans publicly, on camera.

⁸ George Orwell, “Looking back on the Spanish War,” *The Orwell Foundation*, <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/looking-back-on-the-spanish-war/>.

⁹ E.Iu. Zubkova. *Pribaltika i Kreml. 1940-1953* (Moskva: Rossiyskaia politichiskaia entsiklopedia ROSSPEN, 2008).

specifics of the situation, and above all by the reaction of Ukrainians. Once Ukraine decided to leave Russia's orbit, the Kremlin interfered to destroy its territorial integrity and to reduce it to a status of a political non-entity.¹⁰

So far, Putin's policy towards Ukraine has proved to be his biggest miscalculation and his gravest defeat. He counted on the Russian-speaking South and East of the country splitting away during the Ukrainian crisis in the spring of 2014. The reasoning was simple: if the population of those regions constituted one people with the Russians, then as soon as Russian troops entered Crimea, the local population would rise against Kyiv, and form a separate 'Novorossiyan' republic. This republic was supposed to comprise the industrial heart of Ukraine, the city of Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) and the entire Black Sea coast; this latter part would connect Russia to Crimea and Transnistria, another puppet separatist state. Needless to say, this failed to materialize. The South and East not only refused to accept this plan, but chose to resist the separatists, with the resistance spearheaded by industrial Dnipro and coastal Mariupol. The trumpeted 'Russian Spring' in Ukraine dragged on until the summer, seeped into the fall, and completely ran out of steam by December 2014. Donbas, only in part, became the only separatist region.

The war in the Donbas is in its fifth year, and has resulted in 13,000 victims and 1.5 million refugees. However, this war has not stemmed Ukraine's drift towards Europe. A new political elite has grown up in Ukraine, literally sweeping the old elites out of power in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019. Despite the fact that a significant part of them, along with the new President, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, are Russian-speakers who hail from Ukraine's East and South, they continue to lay a course for European integration. After the Euromaidan and the Russian aggression, Putin, who, prior to the protests, enjoyed one of the highest levels of popularity among foreign leaders in Ukraine, has become the most disliked figure, while Stalin was and remains the main historical villain. Unlike Russia, where Stalin is seen by many as the father of Russia's geopolitical greatness and the architect of victory over Nazi Germany, in Ukraine he is remembered in the context of the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933, and anti-Ukrainian repression.¹¹

In short, Putin has lost Ukraine. It is manifest that Ukraine's future remains uncertain. But one thing is clear: Ukrainians no longer see themselves as part of the 'Russian world,' which, per Russian propaganda, carries morally superior 'traditional' values, unlike the 'decadent' West. The case of Ukraine shows that all 'virtual' talk of traditional values dissolves in the face of a real clash of forces—and in this *real* standoff, Russia cannot win.

Values are only worth their salt when they are more than declarations, when they truly motivate people to show heroism and sacrifice. The participants of the Euromaidan protests themselves called it a revolution of values. The values that the protestors saw as European, won over the declarative values of the 'Russian world.' The question Ukrainians put to themselves during and after the Maidan protests: are the Europeans and their leaders prepared to defend the values they consider their own? In his book, Snyder seems inclined to answer in the negative. Both the EU and the U.S. are unable to effectively resist the virtual war Russia is waging against them. This is evidenced by Brexit and Donald Trump's 2016 victory in the U.S. Presidential election, which seems to have been less likely without Russian interference.

If Snyder limited himself to these conclusions, his book would already possess substantial analytical worth. However, he goes beyond them, operating with other, more complex categories. Above all, he looks at how the perception of history and time has changed, and how this change affects political decision making. This part of the book reads as an attempt to rise to the challenge formulated by Adam Michnik in a conversation with Václav Havel in 2003—that our civilization needs a political

¹⁰ Litvinenko and Gorbunin, "Bolshoi sosed opredelilsia."

¹¹ For relevant statistics, see: Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Ukraine in 2013-2014: A New Political Geography," in Ulrich Schmid and Oksana Myshlovska, eds., *Regionalism without Regions: Reconceptualizing Ukraine's Heterogeneity* (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2019): 367-392.

metaphysics.¹² If the West is unable to respond, Putin will remain the only serious player in the field of political metaphysics—unlikely to win, but able to do serious harm.

¹² *An Uncanny Era: Conversations between Václav Havel and Adam Michnik*, Transl. Elzbieta Matynia. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 129.

REVIEW BY JOSEPH KELLNER, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Timothy Snyder's bestselling political pamphlet *On Tyranny*¹ cemented his place as a public commentator in the United States, and as a leading interpreter of our uneasy times in American print and visual media. *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* elaborates substantially on the previous work, and locates the origins of today's global rightwing reaction in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The author identifies contemporary Russian ideology as a virulent "politics of eternity" (8): the construction, through selective historical memory and propaganda, of a virginal body politic put upon by a timeless foreign enemy. This ahistorical worldview enables dictators and demagogues, aided by self-affirming news-as-entertainment, to deny their citizens the possibility of meaningful reform. "Eternity politics," in Russia as in the West, emerged as a reaction to a "politics of inevitability" (7), by which Snyder means the complacent neoliberal consensus, and elite indifference to the inequality it has produced. Finally, the book proposes a means to interrupt this sequence and reclaim the future. That means is "historical thinking," which is often presented in the shorthand of "facts" and "truth," and understood as the recovery of factuality against propaganda and politicized narrative. The book thus presents itself as a diagnosis and, by way of Snyder's own analysis, part of the cure for our political malady.

The author locates the germ of that malady in the thought of Ivan Ilyin, a White Russian emigré thinker who has seen some rehabilitation in the Putin era. By Snyder's reckoning, Ilyin invented a distinctly Russian fascism in the early twentieth century, which combined Bolshevik ruthlessness with the Russia-centric messianism of Orthodox and monarchist elements among the Whites. Putin and his inner circle have adopted and single-mindedly enacted Ilyin's vision for a post-Soviet fascist Russia, which has inspired Russia's "hybrid war" on Ukraine following the Maidan Revolution, a cyberwar against the European Union, and finally, triumphantly, the installation of Donald Trump to the American presidency. "Eternity politicians" like Trump and his ilk are unwittingly playing out Ilyin's script to their increasingly captive audiences. Their antagonists are democracy, the rule of law, and our sense of a shared reality. The final act is the destruction of Europe and the United States, and a descent into tyranny last seen in the European 1930s.

Snyder says that inevitability and eternity "turn facts into narratives" (8), and he presents this "history of the present" as a counterweight. His argument is built on journalism, online content, and academic historiography, with each chapter shifting between events of the last decade, interpretations of Ilyin's ideology, and forays into the Eastern European and Russian past.

Snyder is not a historian of Russia, but he employs Russian history to combat Russia's (allegedly) fascist mythologies. I found Snyder's history deeply unfamiliar. His thesis, though, is familiar — it is the binding of contemporary Russia to the darkest horrors of the twentieth century, Soviet and Nazi alike. Snyder's historical narrative is as follows: Putin and his ideological cohort were shaped by their education under Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev, whose regime represented a revival of Stalinism, which in its first iteration revealed a fundamental affinity with Nazism by way of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

The notion of a "Nazi-Soviet alliance," as used by Snyder, appears rarely in Russian and Soviet historiography, and indeed Snyder uses it without citations except, once, to his own book (see for example 3, 39, 70, 156). The term's absence in the literature is not out of hidden sympathy for Stalinism, but rather because the phenomenon itself may or may not have existed. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a cynical non-aggression treaty rather than a formal alliance, and entailed some material aid but no intermingling. Moreover, the pact had no ideological basis, and was signed by both sides in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion—it was to delay rather than forestall war between them. Finally, the pact followed multiple attempts by the Soviets to ally with Western powers, which those powers rebuffed. No expert disputes the criminality and

¹ Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017).

mass violence perpetrated by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in accordance with the Pact's secret protocols, but it only "began" the larger war (3) in the most limited sense - the war was a foregone conclusion by that time, and its instigator was Nazi Germany. Everything above represents the consensus among academic historians, which is heavily obscured in Snyder's rendition.²

The same can be said for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the substance of the war itself. Snyder largely skips from 1941 to 1945, where what matters (and this is reasonable) is the official memory of the war. He depicts a postwar shift from utopian-socialist ideology, which saw fascism as the last gasp of capitalism, to a Russian nationalism in which "fascist" became shorthand for "outsider to Russia." Snyder frames this as a shift to an "eternal" Western enemy (145-146). Here again, Snyder writes without citations.

And here again, his history bears little resemblance to the historiography. Socialist ideology was muted from the war's outset, and although "Soviet" and "Russian" were at times conflated during wartime and thereafter, the relation of fascism to capitalism was never discarded. More importantly, "fascist" emerged as the default term for the exact opposite reason than Snyder implies—it was to avoid framing the war as one against Germans, a need made permanent by the centrally important (if repressive) relationship of the USSR to East Germany. That is to say, "fascist" was used so as not to implicate ethnically-defined foreigners or Westerners in Nazi aggression. Snyder goes on to argue that in Russian usage today, the term "fascist" means "anti-Russian" (146), though his evidence rests on a small coterie of Russian ultranationalists who use it this way. They allegedly came to this view through their education in the 1970s under Brezhnev, whom Snyder depicts as Stalin's "most important successor," who placed the "cult of Stalin" at the regime's ideological center and constructed a "politics of bottomless fear" that lives on in today's Russian leadership (40). This categorization is alien to the historiography; Brezhnev was a visionless mediocrity.

In its presentation of Russian history for a non-expert audience, this book exhibits a near-total disregard for the work of historians of Russia. Consider the impression this might leave on a reader unfamiliar with the topic:

The book says quite little about the Russian 1990s, which I believe to be the essential reference point for understanding Putinism. The reader does learn that President Boris Yeltsin assaulted the legitimate parliament in 1993 and stole the election of 1996, but I personally would add that he did so with the full-throated support of the infinitely more powerful U.S. government, and that that support became firmly identified to the average Russian with the decade's grinding poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, world-topping suicide and murder rates, the degeneration of Russian culture, and a loss of dignity on the international stage. Snyder does show Yeltsin's subservience to the oligarchs as they pillaged the country, and attributes the problems of the decade both to "Russian choices" (34) and inequalitarian capitalism in a general sense. This is fair enough. We arrange different facts into different narratives, derived from different politics.

But consider the deeper past. In fusing Stalin to his "most important successor" in Brezhnev, the book completely erases Nikita Khrushchev, who is unquestionably more important. Snyder says only that Khrushchev came to power, and then left

² I am unaware of any contemporary historians of Russia who adopt the "red-brown" or "totalitarian" view that the Soviets and Nazis had any basis for or interest in a lasting alliance. A few prominent works do argue that the USSR was fundamentally aggressive and expansionist in orientation, for instance A.M. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), R.C. Raack, *Stalin's Drive to the West, 1938-1945: The Origins of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), and Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990). None of these are substantially based on Soviet sources, none is commonly taught, and Suvorov's is widely derided among experts. For an authoritative rebuttal to this thesis based in Soviet sources see Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). A similar debate over Soviet intentions extends backward into the period of "collective security," with the two sides represented in Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) and Jiří Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). For an even-handed (if critical) review of both works see Barry R. Posen, "Competing Images of the Soviet Union," *World Politics* 39:4 (1987): 579-97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010293>.

(39). A general reader would not know that Khrushchev initiated and won a titanic struggle with the Stalinist legacy, and ensured that no government since would so terrorize the populace. The omission permits the claim later that today's Russian government legitimates itself "by terror," an ahistorical assertion presented without elaboration or citation, which flattens out Russia's obvious historical evolution between the 1930s and today (276). Still, one can debate where differences in emphasis become distortions.

Wherever that threshold lies, the book crosses it in its treatment of the war. There are more suggestions that Soviets and Nazis were allies than indications that they fought at all, and on the nature of that fighting in Russia — far and away the single most important event in Russian historical memory — the book is silent. It does describe the horrors of the war strictly from the perspective of Ukraine — Ukrainian civilians, Ukrainian Jews, and Ukrainian Soviet soldiers — but then the war abruptly ends, simply "after the Red Army defeated the Wehrmacht in 1945" (119). Earlier in the book, after a long passage conflating the Nazis and the Soviets, one finds that Nazi Germany was simply "defeated," and below, when we learn the agent of that defeat, it is only to frame the occupation of Eastern Europe (70).

Perhaps one could contend that the realities of the Soviet war are common knowledge to an American reader. Regrettably as it may be, teachers on this topic know this is not the case. To deny the reader any discussion of the nature and meaning of the war in Russia, in a book ostensibly about fascism in that country, is to deny Russians their history.

And what is that, but the construction of a timeless enemy? We have here a "Nazi-Soviet alliance," but no suffering or sacrifice to defeat fascism, and in fact a blanket denial that Russians know what fascism is (146). There is Stalinist terror, but no de-Stalinization. There is an overblown revival of the "cult of Stalin" in the 1970s, but not a single word on the mass societal reckoning with the Stalinist legacy in the late 1980s (41-42). And at the end of it all, Putin and his ilk channel Ivan Ilyin, who was both Red and White, Soviet and Nazi, Russian and fascist. Snyder writes of "the Soviet state that expelled Ilyin and educated Putin" (38). Ilyin was expelled in 1922, Putin educated in the 1970s, but what difference could fifty years of history make?

The outsized influence of Ilyin is the other strand of this same thesis, and the work of debunking Ilyin as "the orthodoxy of the Kremlin" (27) has already been done by Marlene Laruelle.³ To the extent that Putin quotes Ilyin, it is infrequent, likely not his own writing, and never Ilyin's more inflammatory views. This forces frequent and tenuous associations (which Laruelle catalogued) — "like Ilyin," "similarly to Ilyin," "for Putin as for Ilyin," "familiar to Ilyin." This mirrors several attempts to tie Ilyin to the Bolsheviks. Snyder notes, for instance, that Lenin looked like Ilyin (their strikingly similar portraits are juxtaposed without explanation, in one of few images in the book), Lenin's patronymic was "Ilyich," and he used the related "Ilyin" as a pseudonym. Snyder's own source makes clear that the two hated one another (32). The next page shows, in another dense grouping of associations, that now *Stalin* and Ilyin were quite alike, because they elevated Russia above other nations. Both men, the author continues, wanted to save the world, one *from* fascism and the other *with*, but sharing a sense that Russia is good and the West is decadent (33).

Ultimately, the Red-White-fascist ideology that supposedly guides Putin is established less by argument than by the production of a sinister mood:

In 2005, Putin had reburied Ilyin's corpse at a monastery where the Soviet secret state police had incinerated the corpses of thousands of Russian citizens executed during the Great Terror. At the moment of Ilyin's reburial, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church was a man who had been a KGB agent in Soviet times. At the ceremony, a military band struck up the Russian national anthem,

³ Marlene Laruelle, "In Search of Putin's Philosopher." *Riddle* (blog), April 19, 2018, <https://www.ridl.io/en/in-search-of-putins-philosopher/> and Marlene Laruelle, "Is Russia Really 'Fascist'?" PONARS Eurasia, September 2018, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm539_Laruelle_Sept2018_4.pdf.

which has the same melody as the Soviet national anthem. The man who seems to have exposed Putin to Ilyin's writings... was the son of the composer responsible for both versions. (58-59)

Such breathless dot-connecting suffuses the text, and here it really only demonstrates that Putin had Ilyin re-interred, and that Russia's past is Soviet. The implication, though, is explosive: Putin, via Ilyin, is partaking in the ritual rehabilitation of the darkest period of Stalinism, literally on the graves of its victims. This type of alarming prose is the substance of the book, and amounts to a blurring of causation, correlation, association, intimation, analogy, and outright coincidence as if they carry equal explanatory weight.

The book's alarmist tendencies are furthered by a failure to define key terms, which are nevertheless deployed throughout. At one invocation of "totalitarianism," for instance, the endnote deputizes the reader to "see generally Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*" (328). But the problem is most glaring with "fascism," a central concept that is defined nowhere and applied to Russia without any reference to the vast literature on its meaning and use. In one outing, "Russian fascism" is assembled from "Christian totalitarianism" and "Eurasian Nazism," idiosyncratic terms remote from historical scholarship on Russia (91). Later, Snyder uses "fascism" and its derivatives 21 times on a single page, arguing that Russians are incapable of understanding its meaning, but presuming that the American reader knows its meaning by intuition (146).

Epithets used in this way establish in the Soviets and the Russians a nondescript malevolence, which shows most clearly with proximity to Trump. Snyder lends support to the fringe theory that Soviets and Russians have been grooming Trump since the 1980s, making no distinction between state and private actors. Unspecified "Russian gangsters" laundered money through Trump's properties from 1984; a Russian hitman lived in Trump Tower; other Russians were arrested for a gambling ring in the same building (220). Trump visited the Soviet Union in 1987 and, "interestingly," began talking about the presidency shortly after. At the outset of this section, the author uses the word "interestingly" three times in two pages to imply an unproven connection (220-221); this appears alongside "presumably," "it struck me as odd that," "in an echo of," "it was also noteworthy that," and so on.⁴ In a few instance, the argument depends on broadly drawn insinuation: Michael Flynn, perfectly worthy of scorn, is scorned simply because he "befriended a Russian woman" and used a Russian diminutive in email (241). In another such excess, the reader learns that it is "common practice for Russians" to make loans and then call in favors (221).

Given that the Russian government did meddle in the 2016 election, and that it is in fact possessed of a technically sophisticated propaganda apparatus, one wonders why the book employs such ungainly argumentation. Part of the answer lies in Snyder's choice and use of sources. Snyder is on firmer ground when seeking glimpses of the Russian state in investigative reporting, which in Ukraine specifically has shed needed light on the undeclared invasion. But more often he depends on sources of a flimsier type. The endnotes are rife with news items, blogs, and snippets of Russian state media, which are piled high but without particular care. A series of racist and homophobic comments by Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, for instance, come from a blog without citations (51), and seventeen different endnotes cite Luke Harding, a veteran Russia-watcher and known plagiarist and fabricator.⁵ The book deploys a disputed claim that Russia-backed separatists used a flag inspired by the American Confederacy (149) and a debunked claim about Trump Tower's

⁴ Sophie Pinkham analyzes the place of such devices in Snyder's thought: Sophie Pinkham, "Timothy Snyder's Bleak Vision," *The Nation*, 3 May 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/timothy-snyder-zombie-history/>.

⁵ See the Guardian's corrections to Luke Harding, "The Richer They Come..." *The Guardian*, 2 July 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jul/02/russia.lukeharding1>, or this Washington Post inquiry about a different, unfounded article of Harding's: Paul Farhi, *The Washington Post*, 4 December 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-guardian-offered-a-bombshell-story-about-paul-manafort-it-still-hasnt-detonated/2018/12/03/60e38182-f71c-11e8-863c-9e2f864d47e7_story.html.

communications with the Russian Alfa-Bank (240)⁶. But bad sources cannot account for everything. In one extraordinary passage, Snyder states definitively that Russia began bombing Syria to foist more refugees on Europe, in response to German Chancellor Angela Merkel announcing a high refugee quota earlier the same month (199). Here there is no citation. The author simply introduces the coincidence with the phrase “By no coincidence...”

“Histories of the present” need not be so heedless. Tony Wood, in his sober and insightful analysis of the Russian government, addresses many of the same topics as Snyder, including the Soviet legacy, the ideology of the leadership, and the role of media, with his narrative culminating in the Maidan revolution and subsequent armed intervention.⁷ Wood concludes that Putin’s individual role is overstated, that his kleptocratic mode of government was built almost entirely under Yeltsin (with substantial late-Soviet vestiges), and that NATO’s expansion during a period of objective Russian weakness has consolidated and radicalized the regime. A comparison of the endnotes goes some way towards explaining the difference. Popular and academic journals and books from a range of ideological perspectives, published statistics, and news from the more serious Western and Russian outlets reveal to Wood deep structures of geopolitics and the Russian state. Popular media, with its narrow interest in raising alarm and simplifying narratives, reveal to Snyder a rapidly metastasizing fascism.

Even without this book’s excesses, we could have discarded the notion of battling Russian propaganda from the heights of objective fact - all historians fight from one trench or another, and any meaningful history sets or serves an agenda, lofty or base. We need not announce that agenda, but neither should we misrepresent to the public what historians do. The conflation of “history” with “truth” deters critical engagement, and instead compels the non-expert to trust an authority’s guiding hand. The central question then becomes, where does this book guide the reader? And when the author is hailed by cable stars and presidential candidates; when praise from literary tastemakers and DC think-tankers drips from the promotional inert; when the book’s readership is vast; the question becomes more urgent.⁸ What agenda does this book serve?

A parallel review could demonstrate the book’s construction of an innocent West, which is built on a transparent “no true Westerner” fallacy. At home, Europeans and Americans are victimized by their Russia-backed far right parties (100-104), whose native roots are given only cursory treatment until the book’s conclusion (more on that below). When Trump wins, “America” is defeated (216). Snyder insists that the Russian attack on the West is not only unrelated to any Western action at all (91), but began “precisely because [the West] represented no threat” (54).

Even if we accept that the West is non-threatening, it is certainly not weak. This book runs aground on the simple question of causality. How can a country with one-tenth the economy of the United States and one-fifteenth the military budget of NATO topple Western governments like dominoes, simply by devious tricks and a compelling ideology? Snyder is not silent on this question. Scattered in single sentences throughout, he notes that the West was destabilized by “inequality,” though the lack of elaboration makes this something of an incantation (2, 208, 217).

⁶ Sam Biddle, Lee Fang, Micah Lee, and Morgan Marquis-Boire, “Here’s the Problem with the Story Connecting Russia to Donald Trump’s Email Server,” *The Intercept*, 1 November 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/11/01/heres-the-problem-with-the-story-connecting-russia-to-donald-trumps-email-server>.

⁷ Tony Wood, *Russia Without Putin: Money, Power, and the Myths of the New Cold War* (London: Verso, 2018).

⁸ Between the time I received my review copy and when I submitted this review, Snyder was publicly praised by Hillary Clinton (David Plouffe, “Hillary Clinton,” *Campaign HQ with David Plouffe*, podcast, 59:12, 17 October 2019, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/hillary-clinton/id1479487160?i=1000453830324>) and hosted on *The Rachel Maddow Show* (MSNBC, 27 September 2019). The promotional material for the book featured praise from Karl One Knausgaard, Svetlana Alexievich, Masha Gessen, Daniel Drezner, David Frum, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Economist*, and others.

That is, until the book's final act. In the last thirty pages, the author pivots dramatically, and launches into a wide-ranging criticism of the American order. These passages are compelling if not revelatory, and demonstrate the perfectly obvious truth that Russian interference could only be a marginal factor in America's self-destruction. Snyder highlights the replacement of local news outlets by hyper-partisan cable entertainment and easily-gamed social media; the widespread suppression of Black and Latino voters and the grotesque distortions of the electoral college; the corrosive corporate lobbying enshrined in law by the Supreme Court; the destruction of the unions and the outsourcing of manufacturing; the shameless plunder of the treasury by the rich, the hollowing out of social benefits for the poor, and the off-shoring of ill-gotten gains; and the abomination of the American health care system, and specifically the ravaging of rural communities by opioid-peddling pharmaceutical companies; in short, the mockery that America has made of its values, and the horrors it has wrought on itself. If you're worried about Russia, Snyder now suggests, fight economic and racial inequality at home.

The book finally lands on the correct frame for the 2016 election, but consider its structure: Why must the reader traverse 250 pages of Russian subterfuge, sometimes acting directly, sometimes by inspiration, sometimes by no clear means at all, shapeless, timeless, and inexorable, that is "designed to destroy the United States of America" (250)? Or put differently: In what moral universe is it Vladimir Putin who makes American inequality a problem? In a world guided by objective truth, externalizing America's ills would not make for bestselling history, but Snyder is right about one thing—ours is a world of narratives.

RESPONSE BY TIMOTHY SNYDER, YALE UNIVERSITY

Time is money, goes the cliché; time is power, goes the argument of *Road to Unfreedom*. Its subject was the shift away from the rule of law towards personalism in Russia, Europe, and the United States. Its method was to conceptualize anti-historical ways of thinking about the past that blind us to this tendency and facilitate its development. I give credit to those who have developed and exploited the politics of memory, while exploring the structural sources of social vulnerability to such politicians and propagandists. The book offers a contemporary history of the 2010s, on the basis of primary sources, that is designed to make surprising events—the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the vote for Brexit, the nationalist resurgence in Europe, the election of Donald Trump—more comprehensible. It adds historical excursi to clarify how the politics of memory work.

Two concepts, *the politics of inevitability* and *the politics of eternity*, are meant to alert us to anti-historical ways of regarding the past. They address twenty-first century practices and technology, and reveal national and transnational patterns. It takes some effort to bring the variants of memory politics within historical analysis, since they pose as history itself. It's a bit like telling the story of a costume party: you need a metalanguage, but it's worth it.

By the *politics of inevitability* I mean the sense that there is one possible future, that it is desirable, and that structural factors will bring it about without individual commitment or agency. The politics of inevitability nominally (and lazily) affirms truth, in the form of the pattern of progress it claims for the past, present, and future. The details of the past are, however, unimportant, since they are shoehorned into a teleology. History, it seems to follow, should give way to more instrumental subjects. The study of values is also irrelevant, because what is must be, and what must be is good. And thus the humanities fall by the wayside.

In the book, the foremost example of a politics of inevitability is the American tendency to regard the revolutions of 1989 as the end of history, to identify technology with enlightenment, to proclaim that there was no alternative to capitalism and democracy, and to believe that the former brought about the latter. This politics of inevitability informed both expectations and policy after the revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It also blinded Americans to the rise of authoritarians abroad and at home. What was in fact happening did not fit the story.

The relationship between memory politics and the decline of democracy is of global interest, and readers have correctly pointed out the relevance of the concepts to India, Latin America, and elsewhere. I was only able in *The Road to Unfreedom* to cover what I take to be some clear resemblances and lines of influence back and forth through North America, Europe, and Russia in the 2010s. It is important for the structure of the book, and the argument, that Europe is in the middle. Observers of the United States and of Russia tend to treat their objects of study as exceptional or, relatedly, to imagine that everything that happens between them is the result of some kind of superpower politics.¹ In the northern hemisphere, the politics of memory and its associations with democracy cannot be studied without the European Union and its member states. The European Union (EU) is of intense importance to Russian elites, as the proximate example of the combination of the rule of law and prosperity, and as the place where they send their children to school.

Chapter three of *The Road to Unfreedom* (not discussed by the reviewers) concerns a second variant of the politics of inevitability: the origin story of the European Union. As that tale goes, European nation-states are very old, their peoples learned from the Second World War that violence should be removed from international politics, and their leaders began economic cooperation instead. This politics of inevitability contends that European nation-states are a kind of

¹ I appreciated that Yaroslav Hrytsak recalled in his review that much of the book is actually about Ukraine. I am concerned in the book with the historian's classical problem of structure and agency, and use the concept of 'novelty' (meaning something like what Hannah Arendt meant by 'natality') to describe actions that were historically important, but which escape the narratives of memory politics. The revolution in Ukraine in 2014 was one such event: it cannot be reduced to a play between powers near or far, nor does it fit comfortably into the politics of inevitability or eternity.

suprahistorical constant. Such entities supposedly made rational progress from war to peace, from mass violence to irenic administration. This comforting version is announced countless times daily in EU settings, and is known to every university student in every member state. Like the American ('neoliberal') politics of inevitability, this European teleology ("the fable of the wise nation" in the book) is so often repeated in so many fora that it tends to displace history.²

The major European states do not actually have much history as nation-states: this is imputed to them retroactively. The point is perhaps most familiar with respect to Germany, which established itself as an empire in 1871, ruled imperially over a large Polish minority from the beginning, quickly established colonial holdings in Africa and Asia, and within forty-seven years had ceased to exist in its original form. Weimar Germany dissolved into an even more ambitious imperial project after fourteen years, and Nazi Germany ceased to exist after thirteen. But the point is even more easily made with respect to other cases. When was England a nation-state, exactly? France is our paradigmatic nation-state, thanks to the Revolution, but it was an empire before, during, and after 1789, and regardless of whether it bore that name. 1763 is a more important date for the shape of modern Europe as a whole, since the outcome of the Seven Years' War reshaped the global imperial relationship between France and Britain. Like Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, France and Britain made their careers as maritime empires. Crucial concepts for four hundred years of European history are colonialism and colonial war.

The principle that nation-states were normal was exhibited in 1918, but seven newly created ones—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—had all ceased to exist by 1941. Perhaps the more consequential idea between the two world wars was the application of imperial practices on a large scale by Europeans within Europe itself. Joseph Stalin called for the self-colonization of the Soviet Union.³ Inspired by the American frontier empire, Adolf Hitler imagined the German conquest and exploitation of eastern Europe.⁴ The German defeat by the Soviet Union (and the United States and Great Britain and other allies) was not the end of European warmaking, but it was a crucial early defeat of a European power in a colonial war.

Other European colonial powers did not stop fighting wars after 1945. The Soviet Union fought and won armed conflicts in newly-annexed western Ukraine and the Baltic states, and intervened with armed force in eastern Europe in 1956 and 1968. West European maritime empires fought and lost in Asia and Africa. France and the Netherlands fought for empire until they could no longer do so. Britain awakened from empire after the demonstration of American power at Suez in 1956. Portugal gave up on Africa, although its dictator António de Oliveira Salazar had imagined that empire there would last for hundreds of years.

Europeans, in other words, did not learn a lesson of peace from the Second World War. They lost colonial holdings, then and afterwards, and found an alternative, one that allowed them to obliterate their imperial past. If Europe was imagined to

² Nota bene: Europeans who criticize the United States and Americans who criticize the European Union often do so on the basis of their own politics of inevitability. When there is a duel of politics of inevitability, history is not advanced.

³ See Alvin Gouldner, "Stalinism: A Study of Internal Colonialism," *Telos* 34 (1978): 5-48; Lynne Viola, "Selbstkolonisierung der Sowjetunion," *Transit* 38 (2009): 34-56; Golfo Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in the Gulag* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁴ This is the contention of *Bloodlands: Eastern Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Crown Books, 2015) but it was no innovation of mine: see Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006); Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction* (New York: Viking, 2007); Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008); Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011); Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011); Ulrike Jureit, *Das Ordnen von Räumen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012); Willeke Sander, *Empire in the Heimat: Colonialism and Public Culture in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) for a sample of works that determined this shift in the German field.

be collection of nation-states that eventually learned to cooperate, there was not much need to remember the history of the world. Even the Germans, who are justly regarded as having the most self-critical memory, present the Holocaust as regarding German Jews, even though most of them survived, and 97% of the Jews who were killed in the Holocaust had lived in lands Germany conquered. If the Holocaust is regarded as a national crime, then the imperial character of the war goes missing. Without the German ambition to colonize eastern Europe, the Holocaust as we understand it could not have taken place.⁵

Total German defeat left the much-reduced West Germany open to a European vocation under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Consecutive French defeats in Indochina and Algeria created the same opening for President Charles De Gaulle. The Netherlands, which took for granted that Indonesian colonies would rescue it from the hunger and destruction of the war, pivoted quickly to a mission as a trading state within Europe. In the British debate over joining the European Communities in the 1960s, it was understood that the trade zone would be an alternative to a fading empire. Spain and Portugal joined after conceding in Africa. East European states emerging from Soviet empire joined in the early twenty-first century. None of this is ancient nation-states learning from recent experience of war. The European Union is an answer to the question of what to do after empire.

If we set aside the fable of the wise nation, the challenges faced by the EU in the 2010s are easier to understand. Even if the main lines of actual imperial and post-imperial history disappear within the memory bubble of the European Union itself, they are easy to discern from just beyond its borders, where the stakes are higher. All of this is fairly straightforward and visible from Ukraine, or from Russia. As I tried to show in chapters four and five of *The Road to Unfreedom*, treating the years 2014 and 2015, Ukrainians were correct to understand the European project as the rescue of flawed post-imperial states, and reasonable to see Europe as a solution to their problems with oligarchy and the rule of law. Russian leaders saw the same thing and at the same time, but drew different conclusions: that it would be best for Ukraine to be kept away from the European Union, for the EU to dissolve into weaker individual units, and for Russia thereby to become relatively stronger.

It is the European project itself that had allowed units that look like nation-states to achieve durable prosperity and democracy.⁶ But the European politics of inevitability, by sidelining the actual history of empire, puts the actual European achievement in the shadow, and leaves it more vulnerable than it needs to be. From 2013, Russian foreign policy grasped this vulnerability and exploited it. Russian propaganda about Brexit encouraged the easy fiction that Britain could return to its national past. Russian propaganda towards Poland was meant to bolster the idea that Brussels was reducing the sovereignty of a Poland that would be more independent without integration.

Russian propaganda about Ukraine for Europeans claimed that the Ukrainians had not understood the lessons of the past: they were bellicose and fascist. Of course this propaganda line coincided with a Russian invasion of Ukraine that was cheered on by bellicose Russian (and European) fascists.⁷ But at least for a time, the appeal to European memory culture

⁵ See my “Commemorative Causality,” *Modernism/Modernity* 20:1 (2013), for a discussion of these problems. The calculations can be found in *Bloodlands* and *Black Earth*.

⁶ See Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 278-323.

⁷ When a branch of the *Rodina* party sought to organize European fascists, it cited the Russian Christian fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin (see below for discussion) to define the enemy as “global cabal”: “Europe’s far right flocks to Russia: International conservative forum held in St. Petersburg,” *Meduza*, 24 March 2015; Anton Shekhovtsov, “Slovak Far-Right Allies of Putin’s Regime,” *The Interpreter*, 8 February 2016.

overcame the facts on the ground. This clarity of purpose owed much to Russia's rejection of a politics of integration, and a decision to pursue a policy of empire for itself and nation-states for everyone else in Europe.⁸

Unlike some of the Europeans whose debates they sought to influence, Russians were perfectly aware that a collection of nation-states would be far weaker and more vulnerable than a European Union. Donald Trump followed a similar line after his election to the American presidency in 2016. The kind of reactionary nationalism they pushed abroad was something that had been developed at home, and which I call in the book the *politics of eternity*.

...

In the politics of eternity the past is cyclical, serving as it does only to show that we (the innocent) are constantly threatened by them (the outsider). There is no longer a flow from past through present into future. Whereas the politics of inevitability herds facts into a certain shape and pretends to be scientific in so doing, the politics of eternity dismisses truth altogether, displaying itself openly as cynicism and spectacle.⁹ Citizens are expected to believe nothing at all and yet believe it very fervently. The politics of eternity displaces the future from politics, directs political activity towards fantasies of innocence rather than interests, and exploits technology to generate a ceaseless present of fervent emotion.

Rather than define problems that might be resolved by policy, the politics of eternity tends to focus upon permanent sources of anxiety, such as sexuality, reproduction, and demography. Russian President Vladimir Putin told a surprised German Chancellor Angela Merkel that his political opponents were "sexually deformed" (51), and Russian state propaganda denounced Ukrainian protests as heralding a "homodictatorship."¹⁰ Trump announced his first run for office with the claim that Mexicans were rapists, and campaigned in the second on the claim that black men were coming to violate suburban women.

Other examples of eternity politics in the book include the campaign for Brexit in Great Britain, where advocates imagined that a British or English nation-state was somehow impinged upon by a foreign actor known as Europe, and the politics of the Smolensk catastrophe in Poland, where a horrible air crash due to human error was transformed into a confirmation of eternal Polish innocence. The chief examples are drawn from Russia (the invasion of Ukraine as a defense of the Russian innocence displayed in the Second World War), and the United States (making America great again on the strength of a myth of white innocence). I argue that the rise of the politics of eternity is a global phenomenon, linked to oligarchy, succession anxieties, and the internet. I also maintain that it is transnational: the foreign policy of one state can nudge another further along towards eternity by, for example, using social media to seek to alter the atmosphere of debate at a crucial moment.

⁸ This was summarized as the announcement of the Eurasian Union and a competition of civilizations in the official Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2013, signed by Foreign Minister Lavrov, with the special review and approval of President Putin.

⁹ Vladimir Putin's ideologist Vladislav Surkov, who was responsible at a crucial moment for Ukrainian policy, articulates this well. He exemplifies and confirms my argument about the politics of eternity in his "Dolgoe gosudarstvo Putina," *Nezavisimaiia gazeta*, 14 February 2019, essentially in my terms. Some of his references to Ivan Ilyin: "Speech at Center for Party Studies and Personnel Training at the United Russia Party," 7 February 2006, *Rosbalt*, 9 March 2006; or his "Suverenitet—eto politicheskii sinonim konkurentosposobnosti," in *Teksty 97-07*, Moscow: Evropa, 2008; see also Aleksei Semenov, *Surkov i ego propaganda*, Moscow: Knizhnyi Mir, 2014; Peter Pomarantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014); Natalia Roudakova, *Losing Pravda: Ethics and the Press in Post-Truth Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ "V Kieve aktivisty vodili khorovod i protykali puzyr' evrogomointegratsii," NTV, 24 November 2014, 735116; "The 'gay' maelstrom of euro-integration," *Trueinform*, 22 December 2013; Viktor Shestakov, "'Goluboi' omut 'evrorevoliutsii,' ili Maidan sdali," *Odna Rodina*, 21 December 2014.

The rise of the politics of eternity is a global phenomenon and so demands a general concept, but each case will be national and so demands a close description. In *The Road to Unfreedom* I introduce the figure of Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954), the Russian Christian fascist philosopher, to serve both of these purposes. Ilyin is a beautifully canonical thinker, who shows how the various pieces of eternity politics can hold together in an attractive coherence: a flawed world with a mysteriously immaculate nation, a concept of wholeness where the individual does not matter; a vacuum of truth that commends the holy lie for the cause. His work helps us to see that the politics of eternity, although it need not be the same thing as fascism, draws on fascist ideas. Despite the dulling effect of the politics of inevitability on our own minds, ideas and ideologies are very much alive in contemporary politics. If we can recognize this extreme form of the politics of eternity, we might better recognize its kindred—abroad, at home, in our own minds.

Ilyin served as a point of reference for Vladimir Putin¹¹ during the crucial years when he returned to power and made war against Ukraine. When asked in November 2014, “What body of historical materials do you reference to answer the questions that stand before modern Russia?” Putin referred to Ilyin.¹² Putin also oversaw the effort of reinterring Ilyin’s remains in Russia and of recovering his archives for Russia.¹³ He relied upon Ilyin to define Russia less as a state and more as an idea, and to establish permanent innocence as the basis for a foreign policy designed to destroy Ukraine and weaken the European Union and the United States.

Editors counseled me to remove Ilyin from the book entirely, as a long discussion of right-wing Hegelianism was bound to discourage readers. I left it in because I was convinced that the whole story makes more sense with a guiding thinker than without. Colleagues can agree or disagree about how useful Ilyin is as a reference or how important he is in Russia; the conceptual argument about the politics of eternity and the empirical account of Russian influence campaigns stand with or

¹¹ Joseph Kellner, following Marlène Laruelle, doubts the influence of Ilyin upon Putin. The question of influence is vexed, and interpretations will vary. My own can be found chiefly between pp. 29-61 and in “Ivan Ilyin, Putin’s Philosopher of Russian Fascism,” *New York Review of Books*, 18 March 2018. I am puzzled by the claim that there are few examples of Putin and other Russian leaders citing Ilyin or making reference to his ideas. I began to research Ilyin after a tip that Putin was reading him. This seemed unlikely to me, and so I checked the claim against the written evidence, and then reviewed the chronology of Putin’s actions once I realized that my first reaction had been mistaken. A sample of early references: Vladimir Putin, “Address to Federal Assembly, 25 April 2005,” Putin, “Address to Federal Assembly, May 10, 2006”: also relevant is “Blok NATO razoshelsia na blokpakety,” *Kommersant*, 7 April 2008. The addresses to the federal assembly are Putin’s most important annual speeches. His three references to a philosopher (2005, 2006, 2012) in the equivalent of a U.S. president’s State of the Union address are themselves worthy of note. In 2012 Putin quoted another Russian fascist, Lev Gumilev. Dmitri Medvedev, who traded the jobs of prime minister and president with Putin, wrote the preface to one of Ilyin’s books: “K Chitateliu,” in I. A. Ilyin, *Puti Rossii*, (Moscow: Vagrius, 2007). As Hrytsak mentions, Michael Eltchaninoff made a similar argument about Ilyin and Putin, which predates my own: *Dans la tete de Vladimir Poutine* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2015). Eltchaninoff reports that Putin oversaw the distribution of Ilyin’s works within the Russian government. On Ilyin’s influence see also other footnotes supra and infra.

¹² Vladimir Putin, “Meeting with Young Scientists and History Teachers,” Moscow, 5 November 2014.

¹³ “V Moskve sostoiias’ tseremoniia perezakhoroneniia prakha generala A. I. Denikina i filosofa I. A. Il’ina,” *Russkaia Liniia*, 3 October 2005.

without him.¹⁴ As the study of fascism returns to the mainstream in the American academy,¹⁵ however, the mainstreaming of a major fascist thinker warrants discussion.

Contemporary Russian fascists such as Alexander Dugin, Alexander Prokhanov, and Sergei Glazyev, whose influence I discuss in the book, also merit attention. These are no minor figures in the history of the Russian 2010s: Dugin was given access to the main Russian television station during the invasion of Ukraine, Glazyev was Putin's advisor on Eurasianism (an alternative to the European Union, which I discuss in chapter three), and Prokhanov founded a right-wing think-tank. In December 2011, while Putin was prime minister and running for president, at the crucial moment of his comeback when he was claiming that protestors of rigged parliamentary elections were stooges of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, he joined Prokhanov on a radio program. Putin invoked Ilyin and described his own politics of eternity: a constant "revolution" where Russia is never criticized, the past must never be confronted as such, and nothing ever changes.¹⁶ After Putin won the presidency, Prokhanov was allowed to joy ride in a bomber that was renamed after his think tank.¹⁷

In May 2014, while seeking to defend Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Prokhanov portrayed Russia as the violated victim. To do so, he profaned Paul Celan's "Todesfuge," which is regarded as the most important poetic rendition of the Holocaust. Whereas Celan began his famous poem with the image of "black milk," Prokhanov substituted the image of "black sperm," by which he meant President Barack Obama's rape of Russia.¹⁸ The guiding idea of Prokhanov's essay is that, even as he is indulging in blatant racism, and even as Russia is invading a neighboring country, Russians have an eternal status of victims equal to that of Jews during the Holocaust. The text was read aloud on Russian national television during a celebration of the invasion of Ukraine.¹⁹

Prokhanov, Dugin and Glazyev have pioneered an Orwellian variant of fascism: behaving openly as a fascist (meeting, easily, any definition of the term) while using 'fascist' as a term of abuse for liberals and non-Russians generally. The commonplaces of this tradition are that the Jews were responsible for the Holocaust, and that international Jewry prepared a worse Holocaust for Russia.²⁰ During the Russian invasion of Ukraine Glazyev gathered European fascists on territory that Russia had conquered, then called for an "anti-fascist council." In the book I call this tendency *schizofascism*. It contributes

¹⁴ For some of Putin's references to Ilyin and his ideas as he altered Russian foreign policy, see: "Address to Federal Assembly," 12 December 2012; "Meeting with Representatives of Different Orthodox Patriarchies and Churches," 25 July 2013; "Vladimir Putin called the annexation of Crimea the most important event of the past year," Pervyi Kanal, 4 December 2014; "Rossiia: natsional'nyi vopros," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 23 January 2012; "Remarks to Orthodox-Slavic Values: The Foundation of Ukraine's Civilizational Choice conference," 27 July 2013; "Excerpts from the transcript of the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," 19 September 2013; "Interview with journalists in Novo-Ogariovo," 4 March 2014.

¹⁵ Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2018).

¹⁶ *Russkaia Gazeta*, 15 December 2011, rg.ru/2011/12/15/stenogramma.html; "Vladimir Putin," *Russkaia narodnaia liniia*, 16 December 2011.

¹⁷ Andrei Volkov, "Prokhanov prokatilsia na novom raketonostse Tu-95," *Vesti*, 16 August 2014.

¹⁸ Alexander Prokhanov, "Odinnadtsati stalinskii udar. O nashem novom Dne Pobedy," *Izvestiia*, 5 May 2014. His corporeal reactions to the Obama presidency had been percolating for some time. One can hear the beginnings of the idea in his statement on Ekho Moskv, July 8, 2009, 604015, where he described how he felt when other Russians met Obama: "it was as if they had all been given a black teat, and they all suck at it with lust and mammalian smacking... In the end, I was humiliated by this."

¹⁹ "Bike Show—2014. Sevastopol," 15 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8K3ApJ2MeP8>.

²⁰ Prokhanov: "Jews united humanity in order to throw humanity into the furnace of the liberal order, which is now suffering a catastrophe." "Ukraina dolzhna stat' tsentrom Ievrazii," *News24UA.com*, 31 August 2012.

to a politics of eternity that has since become familiar: blaming the weak for the outrages of the strong, the mobilizing this sense of victimhood against democracy.²¹

...

The politics of inevitability and the politics of eternity are with us, all around us. *The Road to Unfreedom* is meant to defend history against such anti-historical standpoints, which tend to take its place. It accepts that a politics flows from a defense of history: if scholarly history were more prominent and memory politics less so, democracy would stand a better chance. As I argue in the prologue and epilogue, democracy depends upon a certain way of seeing time: that our choices now, based upon a certain understanding of the past, might have some influence on a future that remains open. History depends upon and reinforces a similar tripartite view of time: we seek the structures of the past, we accept (and constantly discuss the shape and significance of) human agency, and we generally agree that the future is hard to predict.

The politics of inevitability claims to affirm democracy, but does so only declaratively. If democracy is thought to be brought about deterministically by some non-human agent, then it is not truly democracy. People do not in fact rule by imagining that abstractions will automatically allow them to rule. By insisting on only one possible relationship between past, present, and future, the politics of inevitability blinds citizens to patterns in the past that might otherwise serve as warnings—and to possibilities in the future that are necessary as inspirations. Politicians of inevitability reflexively dismiss history that challenges their teleology as unacceptable comparisons or analogies. By dismissing the importance of individual action, the politics of inevitability weakens individual responsibility. Its confident determinism makes dissidence seem like marginality or eccentricity.

The politics of eternity is *openly* opposed to the rule of law and to democracy—even if its representatives legitimate themselves through ritualized elections. Donald Trump's actions in late 2020 reflect just this aspiration. In the politics of eternity, a person is important not as an individual or citizen but as a member (or not) of the community of innocence. With truth banished from the scene, citizens have no way to defend themselves from oligarchical spectacle. If truth is just what we feel to be true, we are in thrall to the makers of feelings.

Rising inequality leaves us more vulnerable to organized mendacity, as I argue in chapters four, five, and six. From Plato to Karl Marx, George Orwell, and Raymond Aron, the case has been made that disproportion of wealth leads to a warping of the public sphere. In Russia this was visible in television in the early twenty-first century, in the United States after 2008 with the collapse of local news and the rise of social media in its place. With the profit motive behind algorithms designed to stoke feelings, social media enriches a few owners, enables many advertisers, and leaves those poor in access to factuality poorer still. It opens the way to millions of pre-classified minds to anyone who can pay. The market is in human vulnerability.

History, I argue, is an antidote to both the politics of inevitability and the politics of eternity, and in that sense it is inherently political. To say, however, that historical thinking affirms democratic politics is not to say, as Joseph Kellner does in his review, that history writing is just the expression of personal views, and that we should all admit that we are in combat over turf. To maintain that in the end we all just have a narrative, you have yours and I have mine, is to fall into the politics of eternity; the Russian ambassador to the United States used precisely this turn of phrase when asked about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.²² If we begin from Kellner's axiom that each historian is defending "a trench," we are conceding in advance to our real enemies that the humanities are a façade behind which fatuous elites tussle.²³ The war metaphor makes

²¹ See The New Fascism Syllabus, <http://newfascismsyllabus.com/>.

²² Sergei Kislyak, Yale University, 12 August 2015.

²³ Kellner never says what trench he thinks I am defending. His argument seems to be that I wrote my book to defend contemporary American society. My position on the woes of the American political system is not hard to access: it appears throughout

us look ridiculous. Battlefields are battlefields and history departments are history departments. If we argue by claiming monopolies of expertise (Kellner writes that “Snyder is not a Russian historian”),²⁴ we contribute our voices as scholars to a mindless provincialism. When we abandon objective truth as a regulative principle, we get to say whatever we like: thus Kellner can claim that my book begins with “250 pages of Russian subterfuge.” This is not, to use the old-fashioned word, true.

Most of *The Road to Unfreedom* is a chronological history of the 2010s, based chiefly in primary sources, organized roughly into one chapter and one major event per year. An argument is that, over time, the politics of inevitability opened the way for the politics of eternity. So, for example, the conviction that an unhindered free market is a motor of democracy generates inequalities of income and wealth, and closes down the possibility for social mobility. As I wrote about the United States at the beginning of the book:

“The American politics of inevitability, like all such stories, resisted facts. The fates of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus after 1991 showed well enough that the fall of one system did not create a blank slate on which nature generated markets and markets generated rights. Iraq in 2003 might have confirmed this lesson, had the initiators of America’s illegal war reflected upon its disastrous consequences. The financial crisis of 2008 and the deregulation of campaign contributions in the

the book, and is, as Kellner notes, the subject of an entire chapter. My critique of American digital oligarchy is one subject of *The Road to Unfreedom* which is not broached in this discussion; I continue it in *Und wie elektrische Schafe träumen wir: Humanität, Sexualität, Digitalität*, Vienna: Passagen, 2020. My critique of the American health care system and my argument about the relationship of illness and authoritarianism, also broached in *The Road to Unfreedom*, is extended in *Our Malady: Lessons in Liberty from a Hospital Diary* (New York: Crown Books, 2020). The popular book that I am most known for, *On Tyranny*, was a frontal attack on American exceptionalism which generated, at least at first, the dominant response that I was far too harsh on U.S. institutions and wrong to claim that democracy in the United States was vulnerable to the point of crisis. In my discussions with Tony Judt I say a good deal about America: *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin, 2012). My critique of the second Iraq War I was unable to publish in the United States; it appeared in the United Kingdom as “War is Peace,” *Prospect*, November 2004, 32-37. I also write in the conclusion to *Black Earth* about the flawed Holocaust analogies that were used to justify the second Iraq War.

²⁴ What must I do to become a historian of Russia? True, my first work in the 1990s was on Soviet economics rather than history: “The Economic Crisis of Perestroika,” New York: Council on Economic Priorities Monograph, 1991; “Antitrust for the USSR,” in William Rohl, *An Introduction to Economic Reasoning*, Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1992; “Soviet Monopoly,” in John Williamson, ed., *Economic Consequences of Soviet Disintegration*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1993. There was also some work in post-Soviet international relations. My first history book *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz* (Cambridge: Ukrainian Research Institute, 1997) was a study of the life of a Russian subject. My second history book *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) was a consideration of territories such as Volhynia and the Vilnius region, which were part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It includes discussions of Russian imperial and Soviet nationality policy. My third history book *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist’s Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) treated Polish-Soviet relations. My fourth history book *The Red Prince: The Secret Lives of a Habsburg Archduke* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) was a biography of Wilhelm von Habsburg, who died during interrogation by the Soviet secret police. My fifth history book *Bloodlands: Eastern Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) was a study of the lands between Berlin and Moscow, including the western Soviet Union and western Russia. It chronicled the scale of civilian and military losses in the Soviet Union, devoting attention to the nearly-forgotten fate of Soviet prisoners of war, victims of the second-most-lethal German atrocity during the war. It is one of the few books in English or any other language to describe the horror and scale of this deliberate mass killing of Soviet citizens. My sixth history book *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Crown Books, 2015), described the genesis of the Holocaust on occupied Soviet territory during the German invasion and occupation. Like *Bloodlands*, it relied on primary sources, especially first-person victim accounts, of Soviet citizens. I have also co-edited a volume on the Soviet Union and Europe *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination*, with Ray Brandon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), and written articles that bear on Russian history, including entries for scholarly encyclopedias of Russian history. For the last quarter century I have been working on a collective biography, roughly half of whose subjects are Russians or subjects of the Russian Empire or citizens of the Soviet Union. I am happy to keep trying.

United States in 2010 magnified the influence of the wealthy and reduced that of voters. As economic inequality grew, time horizons shrank, and fewer Americans believed that the future held a better version of the present. Lacking a functional state that assured basic social goods taken for granted elsewhere—education, pensions, health care, transport, parental leave, vacations—Americans could be overwhelmed by each day, and lose a sense of the future” (7).

The feeling that the future is no longer promising is seized upon by politicians of eternity (such as Trump), who relocate the ideal of politics in the past, and work to keep frenzied attention on the present. If one believes, as politicians of inevitability claimed in the 1990s and 2000s, that digital technology brings about intellectual and moral progress, then the way is open for the social media that in fact leave us intellectually disabled and morally enfeebled, and enable the rise of politicians of eternity. The suppression of attention span and the affirmation of emotional commitments again favor politicians of eternity.

The European politics of inevitability, the mistaken view that the nation-state was longstanding and capable of learning, also created a major opening for the politics of eternity. Both advocates and opponents of the European project agreed that the nation-state was historically and analytically prior to the integration project. The opponents could therefore argue in this way: individual nation-states prospered before the European Union, and so individual nation-states can leave it without cost. Given the common-sense quality of the European politics of inevitability, no one saw the objection: there is not much history of a successful Polish or Hungarian nation-state, and essentially no history of an English or Dutch or Spanish or French nation-state (empire blurs into integration, the nation-state has no historical moment).

In the debate over Brexit (discussed in chapter three), we see that no one was able to make the historical argument: to wit, that the discussion about entering the European Communities (as they were then known) was all about the decline of empire, and had nothing to do with a British nation-state, which of course did not exist. Something similar can be said about the EU’s contemporary problems with Poland and Hungary: no one can point out that the nation-states posited by their leaders do not have much in the way of a history. In this way, the triumph of the European politics of inevitability, the fable of the wise nation, makes possible European politics of eternity, a myth of a nation-state to which one can return.

Just as Russia acted to support the candidacy of Trump, it also acted to make Brexit more likely,²⁵ and to support other European actors who opposed integration and advocated a ‘return’ to nation-states. Kellner maintains that Russia could not have made much of a difference, given its relative weakness in traditional measures of power. This is a strange commitment, since he must and does admit that Russia backed the winner in an American presidential election.²⁶ The whole logic of his position, or “narrative” as he calls it, is that such a thing could not have happened—and yet he sees no need to alter it in the face of the brute fact that it did. Yet it is the surprising facts, the ones that awaken us from the slumber of “narrative,” that give us a chance to do history. It is precisely the awkward realities, like the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or the Russian

²⁵ The details can be found in chapter three; some findings about internet influence were published in: Marco T. Bastos and Dan Mercea, “The Brexit Botnet and User-Generated Hyperpartisan News,” *Social Science Computer Review*, 10 October 2017; Yuriy Gorodnichenko, Tho Pham, Oleksandr Talavera, “Social Media, Sentiment and Public Opinions: Evidence from #Brexit and #USElection,” NBER Working Paper 2463, 2018; also Onur Varol et al, “Online Human–Bot Interactions: Detection, Estimation, and Characterization,” Proceedings of the Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 27 March 2017; Carlos Freitas, Fabrício Benevenuto, Adriano Veloso, and Saptarshi Ghosh, “An Empirical Study of Socialbot Infiltration Strategies in the Twitter Social Network,” *Social Network Analysis and Mining* 6:23 (2016).

²⁶ For one indication of how Russia has used this victory to pursue interests that would seem to contravene international security, see Tamsin Shaw, “Trump’s Impact on Nuclear Proliferation,” *JustSecurity*, 1 December 2020.

campaign against Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, or continual Russian victories in cyberwar,²⁷ that give us a chance to challenge “narrative”—a word we apply to ourselves when we have internalized a politics of memory.

Studying the politics of time is one way to get some distance on recent events. If one accepts that the politics of time matters, Russia moves towards the center of the picture. If one follows the importance of social media to national and international politics, as I do in the book, then the route of Russian influence is clear.²⁸ I spend a great deal of the book on a discussion of how power changed in the twenty-first century, and take seriously the Russian thinkers and actors who developed new means of influence. One need not agree with the account, but it is misleading to claim, as Kellner does, that it does not exist. It involves the history of media, the history of intelligence operations, and the history of what we now call hybrid war. It provides, for example, a treatment of Soviet and Russian traditions of influence operations, shows how the internet made such actions easier to implement, demonstrates that the relevant Russian actors understood this, and follows their work from Russia into Europe and the United States.

Digital awakening has meant human slumber. We see the surface of the internet but not its workings, we imagine we are acting when in fact we are being acted upon.²⁹ The internet is hard to conceptualize, and yet it must be conceptualized, because it is one of the forces moving us towards a certain understanding of time as an eternal present.³⁰ Part of the interest of the Russian intervention in 2016 was that nobody experienced it as such. I was one of relatively few people working on the issue of at the time, and I was also knocking on doors speaking to people about politics. It was uncanny to hear words spoken out loud on American porches that I could be fairly certain had been composed before screens in another country: yet people treated the internet as their own knowledge and experience.

This combination of ineffable intimacy and planetary ruthlessness is the magic of social media. *The Road to Unfreedom* has to operate as intellectual history, since it needs to follow these stages of communication, capture the force of ideas that seem like nothing more than personal experience, and define commonsensical notions as ideas.

One point of the book is that the politics of inevitability and the politics of eternity, although they pretend to be history, have to be defined and seen as factors in history. Like other factors in history, they can be placed within a chronology. This can help to explain why Russia mattered so much to America in 2016. The book sets up the Russian intervention in the presidential election by following similar efforts in Europe in the years immediately preceding. But there is, I think, a deeper chronology.

If the subject is the spread of eternity politics, then it matters a great deal that the politics of inevitability fail in Russia *before* they fail elsewhere. They failed once in the 1970s, as the Leninist and Stalinist politics of inevitability—the promise of Communism on the basis of the correct socialist policies—gave way to Brezhnevite politics of eternity, the claim that the present was as good as it gets (‘really existing socialism’) and that the locus of glory was in the past rather than the present

²⁷ David E. Sanger, Nicole Perloth, and Eric Schmitt, “Scope of Russian Hack Becomes Clear: Multiple U.S. Agencies Were Hit,” *New York Times*, 14 December 2020.

²⁸ The arguments I made then are conventional now: see for example Glenn S. Gerstell, “The National-Security Case for Fixing Social Media,” *New Yorker*, 13 November 2020.

²⁹ Timothy Snyder, “And we dream as electric sheep. On humanity, sexuality and digitality,” *Eurozine*, 26 May 2019. This is an English version of the German book I mention elsewhere.

³⁰ Some of the best efforts are Jaron Lanier, *Who Owns The Future?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013); Martin Burckhardt, *Philosophie der Maschine* (Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2018).

(‘the Great Fatherland War.’) This was the formative time for leaders such as Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin.³¹ Then another variant of the politics of inevitability failed in Russia of the 1990s (and here I broadly agree with Kellner, although I am using different terms).³² The rapid and corrupt privatization of Soviet industrial and extractive structures did not lead to some sort of stable capitalism that would enable a functioning democracy. The capitalist (or neoliberal, or American) politics of inevitability were quickly discredited in Russia.³³ Putin’s achievement was to gather up the pieces into a politics of eternity.

Kellner’s review has the problem that everything he says about Russia seems to rule out the actual policy of the actual Russian state: to invade Ukraine in 2014, to intervene in American politics in 2016, to continue cyber war against the United States during the Trump administration.³⁴ Yaroslav Hrytsak pushes me hard in the other direction, seeing more coherence than I do in Russian foreign policy before 2010. Hrytsak disagrees with me about just when what I call the shift to the politics of eternity took place. While I accept the importance of Russian intervention in Georgia (military) and Estonia (digital) before 2010, it seems to me that the crucial moment was Putin’s decision to return to power as president for a new set of terms, which was announced in 2011. In 2004, during his first stint as president, Putin was still of the view that Ukrainian membership in the European Union would be good for Russia. As late as 2009, when he was serving as prime minister, Putin still thought that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was immoral, or at least was willing to go to Poland and say so publicly.

From 2010 or at the latest 2011, from the time of Putin’s campaign to return to the office of president, we see (as I show in chapter two) an explicit Russian politics of eternity, in which Russia becomes not a state but an idea, in which the future gives way to the past, and in which factuality is seen as inimical.³⁵ Formerly taboo positions, such as invading neighborly countries described as fraternal, or defending Stalin’s cooperation with the Nazis, eventually gave way to the idea of a perfect Russian innocence in which aggression is by definition impossible. When Putin returned to power as president in 2012, the future had to truly disappear: the obvious fakery of the parliamentary and then presidential elections removed democracy as a means of succession; his own efforts to prevent any discussion of a successor generated a taboo; and his own success in oligarchical domination froze social mobility. I spell this out in chapter four.

Russia reached a mature form of capitalist authoritarianism before others; its inequality reached the political freezing point of oligarchy. American inequality was also consolidating a politics that made the rule of law and democracy ever more

³¹ I take Hrytsak’s point that the myth of the Great Fatherland War was not directly a rehabilitation of Stalin, and that the overt rehabilitation of Stalin was the work of Putin.

³² We also agree that the election of 1996 was fraudulent, which is by no means generally accepted. I also agree that the Western reaction to the attack on parliament in 1993, which I remember well, was outrageous. It was a textbook example of the politics of inevitability: rather than face squarely that an institution was hobbled, the general reaction was to affirm a story in which the right leader with the right economic policies was somehow engendering processes which we should call democratic.

³³ A powerful and now paradigmatic reflection of an east European liberal: Marcin Król interviewed by Grzegorz Sroczynski, “Byliśmy głupi,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 February 2014.

³⁴ Craig Timberg and Ellen Nakashima, “Russian hack was ‘classic espionage’ with stealthy, targeted tactics,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 2020.

³⁵ There was no change in the international environment that would explain Putin’s new and radical position. The United States had withdrawn most of its troops from Europe: from about 300,000 in 1991 to about 60,000 in 2012. President Barack Obama had cancelled an American plan to build a missile defense system in eastern Europe in 2009, due to Russian objections. In 2010 Russia was allowing American planes to use Russian airspace to supply troops in Afghanistan. No Russian leader feared a NATO invasion in 2010, 2011 or 2012, or even claimed to. American leaders believed that they were pursuing a ‘reset’ of relations with Russia. At the time, the idea that Russia was a threat to the United States was considered ridiculous.

difficult:³⁶ Russia showed where this could lead, and showed the way. Russia was important in the 2010s because its leaders were more practiced in the politics of eternity. Putin's kleptocracy revealed its content during the invasion of Ukraine (2014). The invasion was covered by a myth of innocence, by a series of lies that were not meant to be believed, and by an internet campaign meant to exploit the known vulnerabilities of users of social media in Europe and the United States. This all took place before the surprise victory of Andrzej Duda in the Polish presidential elections (2015), before the Brexit referendum (2016), before the election of Donald Trump (2016). Russia had a hand in all of these events, in part because of a change in the nature of power since 2010, and in part because of intelligent Russian efforts to exploit that change.

As Aaron Belkin suggests, I am trying to make sense of new Russian behavior by revising some familiar categories of international relations theory. As I argue in the prologue and in chapter five, we can observe a confluence of Russian foreign policy and military doctrine, which arose in some measure from weakness, and in some measure from new technology opportunities. The fundamental weakness of Putin's regime is domestic: as a kleptocrat, Putin cannot reform a state. Since meaningful domestic policy is impossible, leadership must be legitimated abroad. Russia has no model to offer the world, but the world does have models to offer Russia: democracy and the rule of law, most immediately in the European Union, much more distantly in the United States. Russia under Putin cannot enact these models, but it can suggest that these models are bankrupt and hypocritical, and support individuals and groups within Europe and the United States who agree. Putinism means depressing the desire for democracy at home by deliberately suppressing its functionality abroad, fighting cyberwars and hybrid wars along the way.

I call this "strategic relativism," (195ff) and mean it in a double sense: Russia accepts that power is relative and that its own power is declining, and so acts to make others decline still faster; meanwhile, the actions Russia take are grounded in a kind of relativism, or perhaps better nihilism, about the world itself: there is no truth, might makes right, anyone who believes otherwise is a fool. As Russian political technologists note, power in the era of the internet is 'evaluative'; and it is much easier to reach minds now than it was during the Cold War.

American inventions such as the internet and in particular social media open vulnerabilities inside the United States, which was not fully understood in the target country in 2016. Russians who had thought all of this through were ready with policy, in Europe from 2013, in Ukraine in 2014, in the United States in 2016. Some of the Russians and Russian institutions (the GRU, the Internet Research Agency) that were active during the Ukrainian war were also active during the effort to bring Trump to power. The tactics on social media were very similar: with a total insensibility to contradiction, the campaigns played on vulnerabilities and fears. During the war with Ukraine, some people were told that the country was Jewish and others that it was fascist; during the campaign for Trump, with some people were told that Hillary Clinton was a racist and others that she loved African-Americans.

I broke the story of Trump and Russia more than four years ago, in spring 2016,³⁷ and was working at the time with primary sources, mainly Russian ones. I finished writing *The Road to Unfreedom* three years ago, in late 2017,³⁸ at a time when less

³⁶ Kellner writes that I am imprecise about American inequality. Here is some sample prose from the book (261): "In the era of inevitability, all of this changed. Inequality of income and wealth grew drastically from the 1980s through the 2010s. By 2016, the wealthiest 1% of the population controlled 39% of American wealth, more than eighty times as much wealth as the bottom 50%. In 1978, the top 0.1% of the population, about 160,000 families, controlled 7% of American wealth. By 2012, the position of this tiny elite was even stronger: it controlled about 22% of American wealth. At the very top, the total wealth of the top 0.01%, about 16,000 families, increased by a factor of more than six over the same period. In 1978, a family in the top 0.01% was about 222 times as rich as the average American family. By 2012, such a family was about 1,120 times richer. Since 1980, 90% of the American population has gained essentially nothing, either in wealth or income. All gains have gone to the top 10%—and within the top 10%, most to the top 1%; and within the top 1%, most to the top 0.1%, and within the top 0.1% most to the top 0.01%."

³⁷ "Trump's Putin Fantasy," *New York Review of Books*, 19 April 2016.

³⁸ I did make a few revisions and add a few sources for the paperback edition, released later in 2018.

was known about the Russian campaign to support Donald Trump. If I were writing now, I would have vastly more evidence to support the major claims; I would emphasize, though, that the contemporary work of journalists, most but not all of them east European, was enough to make the case at the time, and was necessary for all that followed. In Russia and Ukraine reporting on oligarchy tends to overlap with reporting on war; the work that was done, and from which I learned, was therefore doubly courageous.

A number of the Americans I wrote about have been arrested (Steve Bannon), convicted of crimes (Paul Manafort), had their sentences commuted (Roger Stone), or been pardoned after pleading guilty (Michael Flynn). The latter two men then called for the suspension of the constitution and for the imposition of martial law. Putin has admitted that he wanted Trump in office, and Trump has been impeached for a scheme that was meant to humiliate Ukraine. Since the publication of *The Road to Unfreedom*, the Russian policy to help Donald Trump to the White House has been documented, in the March 2019 Mueller report,³⁹ the five-volume July 2019 Senate report, and in a series of other books, some of them excellent and superseding my work in important ways. There is now no doubt that Russia had elaborate policies designed to get Trump elected, and that the Trump campaign was aware of these efforts and endorsed them, as I argued years ago. David Shimer has documented the American side of events and placed Russia's 2016 electoral interference nicely in a much longer historical sweep of American and Soviet operations of this kind; Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the leading scholar of presidential communications, has shown that the Russian action very likely determined who became president of the United States. This does not fit with the American politics of inevitability. But history, when we can apprehend it, is usually surprising.⁴⁰

One aspiration of *The Road to Unfreedom* was to make that surprising turn of events in 2016 seem historically comprehensible and conceptually accessible. It helps when we can see that transition from inevitability to eternity is transnational rather than merely national.⁴¹ The bungled east European privatizations of the early 1990s were, among other things, the result of an American politics of inevitability. The present state of American life is, among other things, the result of a Russian politics of eternity. If, as Jamieson argues, Russian email dumps changed the shape of American presidential debates, and the shape of American presidential debates influenced voting, that is an indispensable moment of transnational history. The empirical account, which allows for contingencies and accidents (are leading Democrats' email passwords easy to guess, or not?), can show us where the rise of the politics of eternity made a difference in specific events, such as referenda or elections. The larger argument, about inequality, technology, and the politics of time, reveals the general tendency. The concepts, inevitability, and eternity, give us a language which, I hope, is apposite and useful.

Belkin makes a convincing case, though, that my dialectical argument, whereby eternity emerges from the contradictions of inevitability, is too neat. I believe that the basic chronology has been confirmed over and over: inevitability does precede eternity. I think I am right about the connections: that believing in only one possible future paves the way for a belief in none, that a habit of herding facts into a single narrative makes it more likely that we will come to disregard them entirely, and so on. I stand by the claim that inequality created by policies of inevitability chokes off a sense of the future, and that misunderstandings of technology have led to a kind of eternal present. Belkin maintains, persuasively, that the substance of what I call the politics of eternity were there all along. I take his point that the politics of eternity is not simply emerging

³⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, *Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election*, Volume I of II, Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III, Washington, D.C., March 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

⁴⁰ David Shimer, *Rigged: America, Russia, and One Hundred Years of Covert Electoral Interference* (New York: Knopf, 2020); Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President: What We Don't, Can't, and Do Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴¹ Seth Fein's definition: "The presence of one nation within another." "Culture across Borders in the Americas," *History Compass*, January 2003.

dialectically from the contradictions of the politics of inevitability, but reveals historical possibilities within a given polity, tendencies which become hegemonic when the facade of inevitability breaks.

Belkin's pertinent examples are from the United States, but his correction can be taken as conceptual rather than empirical, and extended also to my European and to Russian examples, which it also helps to clarify. In the case of Brexit, for example, it is not just that the politics of inevitability blinded people to the basic reality that Britain had never really been a nation-state. A mottled nostalgia for empire also clouded the picture of what a future nation-state would be like. In the case of Russia, it was not just that the double failure of the politics of inevitability in the 1970s and the 1990s produced an intense politics of eternity; it was also that this politics of eternity toyed with the memory of Stalinism, and indeed with the most shocking thing that Stalin did: ally with Nazi Germany.

Putin's politics of eternity involves invocations of particular points in the historical past, their interpretation to match the needs of a regime at present, but also their development into the future. Thus while Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, as I show in chapter four, Putin referred to three moments in the past: a baptism in 988 that supposedly made the Russian and Ukrainian nations a unity for all time, a territorial reorganization under Catherine the Great that supposedly shows that parts of Ukraine were really Russia, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that began the Second World War in Europe. In other words, Russia's war of aggression in 2014 in Ukraine was justified, in part, by rehabilitating the Soviet war of aggression against Poland in 1939. Kellner disapproves of my references to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; but I must discuss it for the same reasons that I discussed the tenth and the eighteenth centuries: it is an element of Putin's politics of eternity, of a politics of memory that draws us away from history, something which seems essential to contemporary authoritarianism.

The young Russian men who painted "For Stalin!" or "Death to Fascism!" on the tanks they drove into Ukraine in 2014 were saying something about the Second World War that is worth interrogating. The idea that Russia invading Ukraine in 2014 is like the Soviet Union defending itself from Nazi Germany in 1941 nicely reverses questions of power and responsibility, making the Russians the weaker side when they are the stronger, and portraying them as the defender rather than the aggressor. In the actual history of the actual Second World War, Ukraine suffered more from German occupation than did Russia; in the actual politics of the two countries in 2014, the Russian far right was more important in every realm than the Ukrainian. What the politics of eternity is meant to do, and in this case did, is to distract from the individual choices made to change history, and to draw attention to powerful narratives that substitute for it.⁴² In chapters four and five I devote intense empirical attention to both the Maidan protests in Kyiv and to the details of the Russian invasion, because these were events that, perhaps more than any others before them, were swamped by technological savvy and eternity politics. I am grateful to Hrytsak for bringing that history into the present in his review, and for his case that values are an important part of historiography as well as history.

A method of the book is to use history to clarify the politics of memory, to bring it into relief. It is impossible to identify and analyze a politics of memory without some grasp of the history. To be sure, history is a pursuit rather than an achievement, and there is not and cannot be perfect agreement about methods. But without this initial analytic separation between history and memory, we are tempted to accept the reduction of history memory. This is indeed where much of the field has gone. I worry that in following the memorial turn we are choosing not just to be wrong, but to be irrelevant.

Some of the subjects I treat briefly in *The Road to Unfreedom*—such as the origins of nations, the politics of espionage, the interactions of Nazi and Soviet power, the causes of political atrocity, the relationship between history and memory, and the workings of digital media—I have written books about. In a single book I could not present a full account of the histories of all countries and all subjects; what I meant to do in *The Road to Unfreedom* was to conceptualize memory policies and reveal their implications by comparison with history, as I will do here again, in brief, on the example of the Molotov-Ribbentrop

⁴² The trope of 'Ukrainian fascism,' which was pushed hard through the internet to vulnerable Westerners during the Russian invasion, survives the evidence of repeated Ukrainian elections in which the far right got negligible percentages of the vote (and which brought to power, in succession, a Jewish prime minister and a Jewish president).

pact. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact began to figure in Russian propaganda as a positive achievement. To see what this means, we need to have an historical overview of the moment that was being exploited.

...

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 23 August 1939 was a non-aggression agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which included secret protocols about the territorial division of eastern Europe; it was in effect an aggression agreement directed against third parties. That mutual intention was advanced when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland and then signed a Treaty on Borders and Friendship. A third agreement then specified the reorientation of Soviet exports to Nazi Germany, food and fuel needed for Germany's offensives in western Europe. When these campaigns were successful, Hitler returned to his fundamental war aim, which was the destruction of the Soviet Union.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact arose at a time when European leaders had understood that territorial concessions to Hitler would not prevent war but rather bring it about. In September 1938, Britain, France, and Italy had granted Czechoslovak territory to Nazi Germany, without the participation of the Czechoslovaks. The Soviet leadership felt excluded from this arrangement, and understandably wondered whether western powers might make another deal with Hitler. When Germany violated the terms of that Munich agreement by taking control of the rest of the Czechoslovakia, however, Britain and France changed course, and offered security guarantees to Poland. Warsaw, for its part, had seized some Czechoslovak territory for itself under the cover of Munich, but then in late 1938 and early 1939 had refused German entreaties to join in an invasion of the Soviet Union.⁴³ At that time a non-aggression treaty between Poland and the Soviet Union was in force, as was a non-aggression declaration between Poland and Germany. Poland's foreign policy was not to ally with either against the other.

Hitler wanted a war, and his war aim was the conquest of the western Soviet Union, in particular fertile Ukrainian soil and oil in the Caucasus, and the destruction of the Soviet state. His intention had been to invade with Polish help, which the Germans had been soliciting since 1935. Furious when he realized in late January 1939 that no alliance with Poland was forthcoming, Hitler reversed course, and on 29 March 1939 ordered an attack on Poland. Given that France and Britain shortly thereafter issued security guarantees to Poland, Hitler sought a way to quickly destroy Poland to avoid a longer two-front war. That new strategic imperative moved the Soviet Union to the forefront of Hitler's thoughts. Having intended to recruit Poland for a war against the Soviet Union, he quickly pivoted to recruit the Soviet Union for a war against Poland.⁴⁴

⁴³ This element of the diplomatic pre-history of the pact is often overlooked. What would have happened had Poland accepted its mission as a (subordinate) partner in a German invasion of the USSR? The Poles had more than three years to think about this, since the idea was present in their discussions with the Germans beginning in 1935. At no point was such a course of action seriously considered in Warsaw. The fact that Poland forced Germany to attack it certainly changed the course of the war: had Poland allied with Germany, it is hard to see how Britain and France would have entered the war, and harder still to see how the United States would have become involved in a European theater. It is also possible that German troops would have reached Moscow; in the memorable words of Poland's foreign minister, Józef Beck, "We would have defeated Russia, and afterwards we would be taking Hitler's cows out to pasture in the Urals." On German propositions to Poland before 1938, see Jan Szembek, "Uwagi i obserwacje," August 1936, Archives of the Józef Piłsudski Institute (JPI), New York, 67/3/9; Beck, "Wspomnienia," JPI 34/7, p. 93; Roos, *Polen*, 151, 209; Marian Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933-1938* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1980), 389; Marek Kornat, *Polen zwischen Hitler und Stalin* (Berlin: be.bra verlag, 2012), 156; Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten. Hitlers geheime Pläne für einen Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion im Jahr 1939* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011), 64; Roman Debicki, *The Foreign Policy of Poland 1919-1939* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1963).

⁴⁴ I cover the German-Polish negotiations of late 1938 and early 1939 in *Black Earth*. For some relevant primary sources, see the archives of the JPI, 67/76, especially Lipski to Beck, 12 November 1938; also 67/3/14, "Krótkie sprawozdanie z rozmowy Pana Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych z p. Himmlerem w Warszawie," 18 February 1939. See also Moltke to Berlin; Hitler and Beck, Memorandum of Conversation, 5 January 1939; Ribbentrop and Beck, Memorandum of Conversation, 9 January 1939 [conversation of 6 January], Ribbentrop and Beck, Memorandum of Conversation, 1 February 1939 [conversation of 26 January 1939], *Documents on*

Stalin was prepared for this situation; he seems to have already decided that Poland was to be eliminated, on the grounds that it would never be a Soviet ally.⁴⁵ It was the Soviets who hosted the discussions and determined the details of their agreements. Stalin had his own worries about a two-front war: with Japan from the east, and Poland and Germany from the west. For most of the 1930s Japan was seen in Moscow as the greatest immediate threat, and Poland as Japan's close partner.⁴⁶ Germany was not at the center of attention until very late. Stalin was mistaken about Warsaw, which had declined Berlin's invitation to join the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact four times (March 31, 1938, September 27, 1938, October 24, 1938, January 26, 1939), and declined to join Germany in a war against the USSR. Stalin was right that Japan was considering a war for Siberia.

Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister, was greeted at a Moscow airport on 23 August 1939 with swastika flags, and the first German-Soviet agreement was signed the very same day. Germany accordingly invaded Poland on 1 September. At the time, Red Army was battling the Japanese at Khalkin Gol. The Soviets were victorious there, and a cease fire was signed on 15 September. The Red Army invaded Poland two days later, on 17 September. From Stalin's perspective, he was removing a hostile power that might align or was already aligned with Japan or Germany; this was likely a miscalculation. Japan, in any event, turned south and the USSR and Japan were not enemies during the Second World War.⁴⁷

However real it might have been, Stalin's specter of a Polish-Japanese encirclement was banished after the defeat of Japan and the destruction of Poland in September 1939; what remained was the Soviet alliance with Germany to partition much of Europe by force. In September 1939, villagers in Poland, unsure as to whether the Red Army or the Wehrmacht would arrive first, prepared welcoming arches with both a swastika and a hammer and sickle. The Wehrmacht and the Red Army met at Brest and organized a joint victory march.

As they were finishing off the Polish army, the Soviet and German sides met a second time in Moscow, on 28 September 1939, to sign a Treaty on Border and Friendship. It revised both sides' territorial claims, as well as providing for an exchange of populations and cooperation in suppressing any future Polish underground activity. This treaty was in some respects more significant than the original pact, coming as it did after the Japanese and the Polish threats, as Stalin saw them, had

German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, D, Vol. 5, respectively 87, 153, 160, 168; *New York Times*, 25 January 1939, 6; Józef Lipski, *Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939*, ed. Waław Jędrzejewicz, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 453; *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*, ed. Józef Zaruski, Vol. 4 (London: Orbis, 1972), 484; *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler, Zweiter Teil: Vertrauliche Vertreter des Auslandes 1942-1944*, ed. Andreas Hillgruber (Frankfurt: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1970), 557. Secondary literature: Müller, *Der Feind*, 110; Wojciechowski, *Stosunki*, 423, 510; Hans Roos, *Polen und Europa: Studien zur polnischen Außenpolitik*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957; 375-396; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 475; Anna M. Cienciala, "The Foreign Policy of Józef Piłsudski and Józef Beck, 1926-1939: Misconceptions and Interpretations," *Polish Review*, Vol. 65, Nos. 1-2, 2011, 148; Piotr S. Wandycz, "Poland between East and West," in Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 203; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 484. On 1938 generally see the recent study by Piotr M. Majewski, *Kiedy wybuchnie wojna? 1938. Studium kryzysu* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2019).

⁴⁵ See Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 141 and passim; *Bloodlands*, chapter 3; *Black Earth*, chapter 2.

⁴⁶ See Hiroaki Kuromiya und Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2016); relatedly Étienne Copeaux, "Le mouvement 'Prométhéen'," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, No. 16, 1993; T. M. Simonova, "Prometeizm vo vneshnei politike Pol'shi 1919-1924 gg.," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, No. 4, 2002.

⁴⁷ This was critical, since it meant that Japan did not block American aid to the Soviet Union. The two powers signed a neutrality agreement in April 1941. The USSR did declare war on Japan right at the end, in August 1945.

been seen off. Following its terms, the Soviet Union attacked Finland in 1939 and annexed some of its territory. After a campaign of intimidation, the Soviet Union occupied and annexed Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in 1940. A further agreement of 11 February 1940 provided for German-Soviet economic cooperation. Soviet foodstuffs and fuels then supplied the German armed forces during offensives in Scandinavia, the Low Countries, France, and Great Britain that year.

Dates matter a great deal. Kellner rightly says that anti-fascist propaganda was not important in the Soviet press from the “war’s outset.” But by “war’s outset” he means the beginning of the German-Soviet conflict in June 1941. Conflating the German invasion of the USSR with the commencement of hostilities in Europe is to accept the Soviet (Russian) chronology and the Soviet (Russian) memorial account of the war. It is to delete, in other words, the Molotov-Ribbentrop period. This means excluding from the war the German-Soviet Polish campaign, the mass killing and deportations of Polish elites by both Germany and the Soviet Union, the ghettoization of Polish Jews by Germany, the Soviet Finnish campaign, the German invasions of Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France, the Battle of Britain, and the Soviet annexations of the three Baltic states and part of Romania.

At the actual outset of the Second World War in Europe, in 1939, anti-fascist propaganda was not a factor in the Soviet Union for a very simple reason: the Soviet alliance with Nazi Germany. Instead the Soviet press reprinted Nazi speeches.⁴⁸ The bourgeois democracies were shambolic façades behind which lurked the true British and French capitalist enemies, went the message, and the Germans were our friends. During the Molotov-Ribbentrop period, Soviet citizens in public meetings occasionally misspoke, praising “Comrade Hitler” instead of “Comrade Stalin” or calling for “the triumph of international fascism.” Swastikas began to appear as graffiti in Soviet cities.⁴⁹

The relationship between Moscow and Berlin began to worsen after Germany defeated France in June 1940, and worsened further after disagreements over the Balkans that fall; still, Stalin refused to believe that Germany would invade the Soviet Union in 1941.⁵⁰ He also turned out to be mistaken in his prior estimation that a war between Germany and France would be good for the Soviet Union; in fact, German victories in western Europe made an attack on the Soviet Union seem economically and militarily feasible. The third major agreement between the Germans and the Soviets, the economic agreement of February 1940, was important to the Germans as they turned to the west. Enabling the German war on the western front in this way was perhaps an error.

The Soviet Union denied the existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact for fifty years, until 1989, and the study of these events has never quite recovered. Thanks to a Russian memory law of 2014, open discussion of the pact risks criminal prosecution, which has a chilling effect on scholarly discussion inside the Russian Federation.⁵¹ Eminent Russian historians sometimes have risked critical public comments limited narrowly to the pact itself; but it is difficult to expect an academic

⁴⁸ For example Julius Margolin, *Journey into the Land of the Zeks and Back*, trans. Stefani Hoffman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 230.

⁴⁹ Vladyslav Hrynevych, *Nepryborkane riznopolossia. Druha svitova viina i suspilno-politichni nastroi v Ukraïni, 1939 – cherven’ 1941 rr.* (Kyiv: Lipa, 2012), 111-120.

⁵⁰ Convincing on this point is Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Stalin’s judgement on himself: “Ленин оставил нам великое наследие, мы – его наследники – все это проспали.” See also Oleg Budnitskii, “The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society: Defeatism, 1941–42,” *Kritika* 15:4 (2014): 267-298.

⁵¹ Nikolay Koposov, “Pakt Ribbentrop-Molotova i Rossiia,” *Novaia Polshcha*, 19 August 2019; and idem, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also Sergei Medvedev, *The Return of the Russian Leviathan*, trans. Stephen Dalziel (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), part four. Of course, it is safe to publish nationalist tracts that mention the pact.

study of the Molotov-Ribbentrop from Russia under present conditions. Scholars beyond Russia risk losing access to archives if they write the wrong things.

Without noting any of this, Kellner gestures at a “historiography” of the era of Nazi-Soviet accord which, he argues, exhibits a “consensus” that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was “a cynical non-aggression treaty” rather than an alliance. This is perhaps an inadequate manner of describing military, economic, propaganda, and resettlement cooperation in an offensive war. Although the issue is of course subject to reasonable debate, historians as various as Geoffrey Roberts, Claudia Weber, and Roger Moorhouse use the word “alliance” to describe the pact and its aftermath.⁵² Kellner leverages his opinion about the term “alliance” to dismiss my work on the subject, and indeed the subject itself.

Yet where would we find such a “consensus”? In which “historiography,” exactly? Kellner is inadvertently raising an interesting question about the weak intersection of Russian history (as practiced in the United States) with diplomatic history.⁵³ Despite the availability of archival resources these last three decades,⁵⁴ no doctoral student of Russian history in an American department has written a dissertation on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact,⁵⁵ and no American historian of Russia has ever published a monograph on the subject. No American historian *in any field* has published a study devoted to the pact *since 1954*—and that single book, nearly half a century old, is the work a scholar who was born in prewar Germany who self-identifies as German-American.⁵⁶ This is a stunning lacuna.

I have written four books that treat the pact and its consequences. My last one was *Black Earth*,⁵⁷ published in 2015. I also write about the subject in *Bloodlands* (2010), *Sketches from a Secret War* (2005), and *The Reconstruction of Nations* (2003).

⁵² Geoffrey Roberts, *Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (London: Tauris, 1989); Claudia Weber, *Der Pakt: Stalin, Hitler und die Geschichte einer mörderischen Allianz 1939-1941* (Munich: Beck, 2019); Roger Moorhouse, *The Devils' Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941* (London: Bodley Head, 2014). Roberts is Irish, Moorhouse British, Weber German.

⁵³ There are notable exceptions, of course, such as Norman Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ Although access in Russia can be problematic, there are Baltic, Polish, Ukrainian and of course German archives. Some of the Russian sources were published in Sergei Kudriashov, ed., *SSSR-Germania. 1933-1941* (Moscow: Vestnik arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2009); valuable as well is A. Kasparavičius, C. Laurinavičius, and N. Lebedeva, eds., *SSSR i Litva v gody Vtoroj Mirovoj Vojny. Sbornik dokumentov. T. 1: SSSR i Litovskaja Respublika (mart 1939 – avgust 1940 gg.)* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2006). See also I. M. Maiskii, *The Complete Maisky Diaries*, ed. Gabriel Gorodetsky, trans. Oliver Ready and Tatiana Sorokina (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁵⁵ To my knowledge, I would gladly be corrected.

⁵⁶ I mean Gerhard Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (Leiden: Brill, 1954). Albert L. Weeks, who is American but not a historian, wrote *Stalin's Other War: Soviet Grand Strategy, 1939-1941* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), about Stalin's intentions. The second volume of Stephen Kotkin's Stalin biography treats the pact, as does Alfred Rieber's *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia*. John Lukacs used the Molotov-Ribbentrop period to frame his *The Last European War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). A tendency in the English-language historiography is to stop at 1939. This is an understandable caesura, but sometimes important work involves reperiodization. See Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39*, (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1984); Alistair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-39* (London: Palgrave, 2011); P.D. Raymond, “Conflict and Consensus in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1933-1939,” (doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1976); Mark David Kuss, “Collective Security or World Domination: The Soviet Union and Germany, 1917-1939,” (doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2012).

⁵⁷ *Black Earth*, 76-177.

The Road to Unfreedom, which cites my earlier work, appeared in 2018. Two scholarly monographs on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact have been published about the pact since then, one in Russian and one in German. Both tend to confirm my positions, or extend them. The most exhaustive treatment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop period now in circulation is Slawomir Dębski's heavyweight *Mezhdu Berlinom i Moskvoi* (official date of publication 2018, actually printed in January 2019).⁵⁸ Claudia Weber has used the German sources skillfully in her *Der Pakt* (2019), which is noteworthy for its discussions of the practical cooperation that followed the German-Soviet Treaty on Borders and Friendship. She presents my work as the locus classicus of the entanglement of the two powers, then correctly maintains that her treatment supersedes mine in important respects. She demonstrates, for instance, that the SS men organizing population transfers inside the Soviet Union in 1940 were impressed by NKVD deportation methods, and reported on what they had learned to their superiors. Kellner is mistaken when he writes that there was "no intermingling."⁵⁹

Russians who use the word "alliance" could be charged with a crime, as we should remember. And of course there are differences of opinion among scholars beyond Russia: Dębski, for example, notes that the arrangement was not presented by the parties as a military alliance, and therefore writes in his study of "close political and military cooperation," of a "de facto alliance" and of "allied armies" during the Polish campaign.⁶⁰ As Dębski points out, Ribbentrop might have been willing to regard the arrangement as an alliance, but Stalin wished to avoid the term: his propaganda problems in 1939 were serious enough already. Weber says something similar: the accords were not meant to be understood as a formal military alliance, but included enough elements of cooperation that she uses the term in a general sense. As she notes, Germany and the Soviet Union were agreed upon the general task of invading Poland, and in that sense were allies, but did not coordinate operationally as closely as experienced allies would have done. The SS and the NKVD worked together in population transfers in 1940, she writes, though by no means in a way that exhibited mutual trust.

⁵⁸ Slavomir Dembski (Slawomir Dębski), *Mezhdu Berlinom i Moskvoi. Germano-sovetskie otnosheniia v 1939-1941 gg.*, (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2018). This is a Russian translation, but also a new edition, of *Między Berlinem a Moskwą: stosunki niemiecko-sowieckie, 1939-1941* (Warsaw: PISM, 2003).

⁵⁹ Weber, *Der Pakt*, 119, 152. Dietrich Beyrau brought the study of German and Soviet terror together, and discussed some of the consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (eg at 39) but did not thematize the pact or the relationship between the two powers: *Schlachtfeld der Diktatoren. Osteuropa im Schatten von Hitler und Stalin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000). Volume 9 of *Kritika* (2009) advanced the discussion of entangled Russian and German history, as did its editors Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin in *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014). On the concept of entangled history, see Shalini Randeria, "Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne," in Jörn Rüsen, Hanna Leitgeb, and Norbert Jegelka, eds., *Zukunftsentwürfe. Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1999), 87-95; Shalini Randeria and Sebastian Conrad, "Geteilte Geschichten. Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt," in Shalini Randeria, Sebastian Conrad, and Regina Römhild, eds., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002, 9-49. On the memory and forgetting of the pact, interesting is Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex: Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945* (Munich: Beck, 2005).

⁶⁰ Dembski, *Mezhdu Berlinom i Moskvoi*, *passim*.

What is at stake in a future American historiography of the Molotov-Ribbentrop period, though, is not so much terminology, as a simple confrontation with the Soviet engagement with Nazi Germany in 1939, 1940, and 1941.⁶¹ That cannot really happen today in Russia, and it unfortunately does not seem to be happening in the United States.⁶²

Perhaps more immediately tractable is the question of whether Soviet engagement with Nazi Germany was defensive and about buying time. This has been part of the Soviet and Russian official position since the existence of the pact was admitted in 1989, but has been the losing side of the scholarly argument. Weber and Dębski agree with me that Moscow joined with Berlin because the USSR in 1939 was a revisionist power seeking territory. (Weber quotes Molotov: “It was my task as foreign minister to expand the borders of our fatherland.”)⁶³ Mikhail Narinskii puts it concisely: “Thanks to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact Stalin gained not time but territory. He regarded dealing with Hitler as the most advantageous possibility and carried out a transaction.”⁶⁴

Kellner describes the war as “a foregone conclusion,” suggesting thereby that Soviet choices were of little significance. The war that began in September 1939 began when and as it did as a result of human calculation and human choice. The Germany of August 1939 was not the confident juggernaut that it became after its later victories. A different signal from Moscow could well have led to a different outcome. Kellner is right that in 1939 Britain and France were not offering Stalin what he wanted, but fails to mention that what Stalin wanted was territory. No western power was in a position to offer Stalin that, not least because doing so would require an offensive war—something that Nazi Germany was proposing. It is also not clear why London and Paris should bear exclusive responsibility for Moscow’s decisions. Had the Soviet Union simply stated that it was honoring its non-aggression pact with Poland, it is not clear in what form Hitler would have begun the Second World War. The powers trying to prevent war in 1939 thought they had a chance of success—until they learned of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, that is.

Poland had refused to join in a German attack on the USSR; that is *exactly why* Hitler decided that it had to be destroyed—and Stalin then joined in the destruction. Would Hitler have invaded Poland at all without the assurance of active Soviet support? He was certainly in a hurry to get it that August: he contacted Stalin on the twentieth of the month to assure Ribbentrop’s meeting with Molotov on the twenty-third. What would the Polish war effort have been like had Polish armed forces been facing a single foe?⁶⁵ Might the British and the French have done more sooner to help Poland if they could have counted on Soviet benevolence, or at least Soviet neutrality? What would Polish resistance to the Germans have

⁶¹ Communists who left the party as a result of Stalin’s pact with Hitler spoke of an alliance. Arthur Koestler: “from then onward I no longer cared whether Hitler’s allies called me a counter-revolutionary.” Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed* (New York: Harper, 1949), 74. For further examples see François Furet, *Le passé d’une illusion* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995).

⁶² Again, I would happily be corrected.

⁶³ Weber, *Der Pakt*, 162.

⁶⁴ Michail Narinskij (Mikhail Narinskii), “Geneza drugiej wojny światowej,” in Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Anatolij W. Torkunow, eds., *Białe Plamy, Czarne Plamy. Sprawy trudne w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich (1918-2008)* (Warsaw: PISM, 2010), 214. Narinskii was publishing this in Polish before the 2014 memory law.

⁶⁵ The German invasion of Poland was not quite the walkover that it is generally thought to be. See Roger Moorhouse, *Poland 1939: The Outbreak of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

been like had the NKVD not murdered so many Polish officers and not suppressed the Polish underground so effectively between 1939 and 1941?⁶⁶

Hitler wanted a war against the Soviet Union and therefore chose to remove the barriers: first Poland in September 1939, which had declined to be a German ally, and then France in May 1940, to avoid a two-front war. Stalin aided Hitler in the removal of both barriers (the Polish and the French) to the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Could Hitler have invaded France in May 1940 without active Soviet support? Could Germany have supplied its troops during logistically sensitive operations on the western front in 1940 without the Soviet food and fuel provided by the terms of the agreement of that February? (Kellner writes of “some material aid”; in 1940 the Soviet Union committed *more than one half* of its total exports to Nazi Germany, chiefly fuel and food.)⁶⁷ If the Soviet Union had not helped Germany to conquer France in 1940, would Hitler have been able to order the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941?⁶⁸ It seems doubtful. The Soviet Union helped supply the war against western Europe; defeated western Europe was then exploited to supply the war against the Soviet Union. As Oleg Budnitskii puts it, borrowing a phrase from Talleyrand, the pact was “worse than a crime, it was a mistake. A mistake for which millions of people had to pay with their lives.”⁶⁹

One can see the intersection of Poland and France in the treatment of Polish prisoners of war. Soviet policy was to destroy Polish statehood, which meant the deportation and in some cases the physical elimination of Polish elites. Polish officers, for example, were shot in the back of the head, as a matter of consistent policy, by NKVD executioners.⁷⁰ This collective murder (remembered as the Katyn massacre, although it took place at four other sites as well) ceased when France fell. Stalin realized then that Polish officers might be needed, and those captured thereafter (for example after the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania) were allowed to live. Aside from all moral considerations, this change of policy reveals the error Stalin made at the outset. It would have been better in 1940 to have murdered fewer Polish officers. Indeed, it would have been better in 1940 to have a Polish army, and a Poland. As Budnitskii notes, it was German-Soviet “friendship” that created the long border between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union across which Germans (and Romanians and other allies) invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.⁷¹

Since neither Nazi Germany nor the Soviet Union pursued a typical policy of occupation, it is artificial to separate the diplomatic history of the pact from its social consequences. As Kellner rightly says, policies of Sovietization on the territory of eastern Poland, the Baltic states, and northeastern Romania in 1939, 1940, and 1941 are significant in their own right: a smaller terror of mass deportation and political murder that followed the Great Terror, by the same methods, with

⁶⁶ Rafał Wnuk, *“Za pierwszego Sowietą”* (Warsaw: IPN, 2007); Piotr Kołakowski, *NKWD i GRU na ziemiach polskich 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Bellona, 2002).

⁶⁷ Weber, *Der Pakt*, 165.

⁶⁸ It was the French victory that made the Soviet campaign seem plausible to the German military.

⁶⁹ Oleg Budnitskii, “Komu pomog pakt Molotova-Ribbentropa,” *Vedomosti*, 23 August 2019. Budnitskii is a distinguished historian of Jews in Russia; in English translation we have his *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, trans. Timothy J. Portice (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁷⁰ For the Russian documents in English translation, see Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ Budnitskii, “Komu pomog pakt Molotova-Ribbentropa.”

wrenching effects upon local society.⁷² The NKVD made more arrests in the newly-incorporated Polish territories in 1940 than it did in the entirety of the prewar Soviet Union.⁷³

During the Molotov-Ribbentrop period, the Jews of western and central Poland, on lands annexed or colonized by the Germans, were placed in ghettos. Although the Soviets and Germans cooperated at the time on population exchanges, the Soviet side was categorically against receiving Jews. Polish Jews tried to sign up on lists intended for transports of eastern Slavs, but without success. Adolf Eichmann asked Moscow in January 1940 to take all of the Jews of Poland; Moscow did not respond.⁷⁴ This was typical behavior around the world: no country was willing to receive Jewish refugees in meaningful numbers. There is however one difference worth noting: only the Soviet Union had taken part in a war of aggression that had left two million more Jews under German control.

It is also worth asking what it meant for the peoples concerned (inhabitants of eastern Poland and the three Baltic states) when the intense Soviet policies of social decapitation and state destruction initiated in 1939 were followed by the even more brutal Nazi policies of racial murder and state destruction of 1941.⁷⁵ In eastern Poland after September 1939, Jewish communities were weakened by Soviet policy. Jews lost wealth in currency conversions, businesses in nationalizations, and the mutual support of civil society. It was Jewish flight to (still independent) Lithuania from the *Soviet* transformation of eastern Poland in late 1939 that led to the justly famed actions of the Japanese Consul Chino Sugihara, remembered in retrospect as a campaign to rescue Jews from the Holocaust. Non-Jews who collaborated with the Soviets were primed to blame Jews for what they themselves had done. The most important Latvian collaborator in the Holocaust had been a student of the Soviet constitution during the Molotov-Ribbentrop period. A number of the Estonian murderers of Jews were former Soviet collaborators who were trying, as it were, to clear their names.⁷⁶

⁷² Jan Tomasz Gross was able to write about this using sources from the Hoover Archives: *Revolution from Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). His insights, for example about the “spoiler state,” retain their explanatory power. The book he edited with Irena Grudzińska *War through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation and the Deportations, 1939-1941* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), brings those sources to life. Working later with Soviet sources as well, Katherine R. Jolluck contributed the important *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002). See also Grzegorz Hryciuk, “Victims 1939-1941: The Soviet Repressions in Eastern Poland,” in Elazar Barkan, Elisabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, eds., *Shared History -- Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland* (Leipzig: Leipzig University-Verlag, 2007), 173-200. These can be understood as studies of the social consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in some of the lands incorporated by the Soviet Union.

⁷³ Albin Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków na ziemiach wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1939-1941* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 292; also Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 236.

⁷⁴ Pavel Polian, “Hätte der Holocaust beinahe nicht stattgefunden? Überlegungen zu einem Schriftwechsel im Wert von zwei Millionen Menschenleben,” in Johannes Hurter and Jürgen Zarusky, eds., *Besatzung, Kollaboration, Holocaust* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008), 1-20.

⁷⁵ This is an issues I pursued in *Bloodlands*, a decade ago; others have explored it in far greater depth in specific regions. The most important twenty-first-century history of the Holocaust, which relies upon Russian as well as German, Lithuanian, Yiddish and Hebrew sources, includes this aspect: Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941-1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011).

⁷⁶ Richards Plavnieks, *Nazi Collaborators on Trial during the Cold War: Viktors Arājs and the Latvian Auxiliary Security Police* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009). For a thoughtful discussion of the relationship between the Bolshevik Revolutions and an earlier episode of the

When Germany did invade the Soviet Union, the first lands it reached were those that the Soviets had annexed thanks to the Treaty on Borders and Friendship. The Germans begin killing Jews in large numbers not on the territories they took in 1939, but on the territories the Soviets took in 1939, and which Germany took from them in turn in 1941. The Holocaust, the murder of the Jews of Europe, began in summer 1941 on the lands which the Soviet Union had earlier occupied thanks to the pact with Nazi Germany, in a Molotov-Ribbentrop zone of territory. The killing spread eastward then, along with the German advance, to the pre-war Soviet Union, then westward back to the parts of Poland that Germany had seized in 1939, and then throughout Europe. At the end of the war, the death rates of Jews were likely higher in the Molotov-Ribbentrop zone of double occupation than anywhere else. Interpretations of such facts can vary, but should not neglect the basic political and territorial reality of the war's origins.⁷⁷

It takes historical labor now to see the connections between the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and atrocities that followed on the territories it defined. This is, at least in part, thanks to the mystifications of Soviet and Russian politics of memory, and the weakness of the English-language historiography on the Molotov-Ribbentrop period and the Molotov-Ribbentrop zone. Of course, as we seek to re-establish history we must be clear about the limits of the entanglement: Soviet warmaking, Soviet terror, and Sovietization might have been necessary conditions for the atrocity by others, but they are certainly not evidence of Soviet intentions to bring about atrocity by others. Causes of the Holocaust are Hitlerian antisemitism, the German war effort, state destruction by the SS and German institutions generally, and the murderous actions of Germans and other Europeans. But precisely because so much of this was already clear in 1939, when Stalin chose to ally with Hitler, the ill omen of the pact was obvious to the people directly concerned. The news of the pact reached Jewish leaders during the World Zionist Congress in Geneva. Chaim Weizmann brought the gathering to a close with the simple wish: "Friends, I have only one wish: that we all remain alive."⁷⁸

Perhaps the war in Europe could have begun without Soviet territorial aims and active Soviet support of German ones; what we know for certain is that the war did begin that way. Perhaps the Holocaust would have proceeded in some other form without the prior destruction of the Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian states and the social experience of double occupation in the Molotov-Ribbentrop zone; what we know for certain is that this is in fact how the Holocaust did proceed.⁷⁹ The German policy to murder the Jews of Europe began, unfolded, and claimed the majority of its victims on the lands affected by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. If we imagine that the Holocaust could have taken place without the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the burden is on us to present a convincing counterfactual narrative of just how that would have happened.

When we look away from the pact, we are not simply botching Soviet history, we are refusing to face some serious questions of the history of Europe in the middle of the twentieth century—and perhaps disabling our critique of tyranny in the twenty-first.

mass killing of Jews, see Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918-1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2021).

⁷⁷ This argument is developed in *Black Earth*. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was also a necessary condition for the most significant non-state ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe: see my "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing, 1943," *Past and Present* 179 (2003): 197-234.

⁷⁸ Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 427.

⁷⁹ Again, this is argued in *Bloodlands* and in detail in *Black Earth*. Some of the arguments were presented in abbreviated form in essays and reviews in *The New York Review of Books*.

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The official Russian line on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact today is that it was a wise defensive measure, no different from what other countries were doing at the time. A bit of historical overview helps us to observe some things we might otherwise miss: that the pact was offensive in orientation, strategically more than debatable, and actually quite different from what France, Britain, and Poland were doing at the time. If we see the larger logic of the pact, we can perhaps sense its appeal to Putin today, given the element of resemblance to his own foreign policy: supporting the far right against the democracies while claiming that democracy is a sham.

The debate about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact continues under the shadow of the Russian politics of eternity, in which Putin praises Stalin's actions while simultaneously maintaining that Russia was innocent of any possible wrongdoing. We can never know what Russian historians would have written or would write today about the pact without police enforcement of Russia's memory policy. Those books can only be imagined. Dębski was banned from travel to Russia in March 2020, right after his book appeared. Weber's book was characterized by Russian state propaganda that August as "the gossip of a lady who hates Russia and has an interest in history."⁸⁰ At present, the Russian government commemorates the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in public, while seeking to deter discussion abroad and prevent discussion of it home.

The longer the Putin regime lasts, the more radical the official formulations become. The latest innovation is to blame the Polish state for starting the Second World War:⁸¹ even though, as a matter of fact, Poland *refused* to fight on Germany's side against the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union then *agreed* to fight on Germany's side against Poland. Victim and aggressor are again inverted to suggest the permanent innocence of the powerful. When Putin asks about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact: "What was so bad?" historians of Russia should have something to say. It is not that we should all speak in one voice; it is simply that the historical event is of such vast importance that it is a matter of basic competence to be able to keep memory politics from controlling the discussion. It might be a low standard, but we are not meeting it.⁸²

⁸⁰ Holger Michael, "Politisch-moralische Zweckpropaganda: Ein neues Buch über den 'Hitler-Stalin-Pakt'," *Sputnik*, 8 August 1920.

⁸¹ Citing a document that was published half a century ago and has been discussed by historians for decades, but claiming that it came from secret archives that the Red Army heroically seized in Poland, Putin called the Polish ambassador to Berlin in the late 1930s a "bastard" and "an antisemitic pig" and claimed that he and Polish policy in general were antisemitic and completely aligned with Hitler. The centerpiece of these claims is Ambassador Józef Lipski's self-reported remark to Hitler on 20 September 1938 that Poland would build a monument to the German leader if Hitler found a way to resolve the Jewish question. The remark is certainly disturbing enough in its proper context: Polish policy at the time was that its Jews should emigrate to Palestine or Madagascar or some other colonial location, and Lipski was expressing the hope that Germany would induce Britain or France to make available some appropriate territory. One must also allow for the flattery that seasoned diplomats direct towards self-absorbed dictators: in the source, Lipski is praising himself to his superior for telling Hitler something that Hitler presumably wanted to hear. More important still is the date. Lipski could not have known that the Jews of Europe would be murdered. The remark is evidence of Lipski's incomplete understanding of Hitler, which he shared with almost everyone, but not of his desire for a Holocaust. Lipski was part of the team of Polish diplomats that refused an alliance with Nazi Germany and refused the repeated German offers that Poland invade the Soviet Union at Germany's side. It seems unlikely that Putin will mention that side of the affair. After the invasion and destruction of Poland, Lipski enlisted as a private in France, and fought against the Wehrmacht -- which was at the time, of course, supplied by the Soviet Union. See Vladimir Putin, "Defence Ministry Board meeting," 24 December 2019; Lipski to Beck, 20 September 1938, in Lipski, *Diplomat in Berlin*, 411; Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 143.

⁸² Anna Dolgov, "Putin Defends Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in Press Conference with Merkel," *Moscow Times*, 11 May 2015; Wacław Radziwinowicz and Michał Kokot, "Komentarze po słowach Putina o sympatii Polski do Hitlera," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 December 2019; Andrew Rorth, "Molotov-Ribbentrop: Why Is Moscow Trying to Justify Nazi Pact?" *The Guardian*, 23 August 2019.

In Russia, as elsewhere, the more the future must be kept at bay, the more the politics of eternity seizes on a myth of innocence in the past. The politics of eternity offer medium-sized lies (Barack Obama is Kenyan, Ukraine was invaded by itself in 2014, Brexit will release funds for British health care, Poland started the Second World War, Donald Trump won the presidential election of 2020), but offers them against a background in which truth itself does not exist.⁸³ The totalitarians of the twentieth century had a single animating Truth, which could also be called a big lie: but the claim to veracity was always present. Our eternity politicians have zero truths, do not pretend to tell the truth, and deny that it exists. In the past, that one Truth included a vision of the future, of socialist utopia or of racial triumph. Such a vision did not of course bring political durability: Nazi Germany lasted twelve years, the Soviet Union sixty-nine. But it did, for a while, blur the question of what would happen after a given leader died or lost power. The one-party state could not solve the problem of succession, but it could obscure it.

A critical issue for twenty-first century authoritarians is that of succession, as I argue in chapter two. Without some kind of mythical legitimacy of the ideological sort, authoritarians today are hounded by their own mortality—and their own tendency to weaken state institutions. How to claim that you are perpetuating a state when you are using it rob your country blind (Putin) or divert EU funds (Viktor Orbán) or solicit bribes (Trump)? Something besides an ideology has to take the place of the future you are consuming. The default succession mechanism now is an election; but if elections are seen by all to be tainted, a leader seems to be dooming his state to the same fate as his person: it has no obvious way to go on. That Putin weakened the Russian state by taking power while delegitimizing democracy, that his main achievement was to elevate one oligarchical clan above others—these are the obvious truths that his politics of eternity sought to shroud. As I show in chapter five, Russia’s war in Ukraine and bombing of Syria did indeed serve that function.

This sort of thing has its limits, though. Making others weaker makes you look stronger for a moment, but it does not solve the problem of succession. The United States is surely a different country now than it would have been after four years of a Hillary Clinton administration, and in foreign relations undoubtedly much weaker. This does not however solve Russia’s basic problem of succession. The closer Putin comes to losing power, the stranger the claims about the past will become.

For Putin’s client Donald Trump, succession is also the basic issue, and his memory politics have also intensified. His politics of eternity were clear from the outset. The slogan “make America great again” put nostalgia over policy. The revival of “America First,” the slogan of prewar American isolationists (and in some cases Nazi sympathizers), undercut the American story of a good war and progress thereafter. Like Putin, whom he openly admired, he had an ambivalent relationship to democracy: he needed an election to come to power, but sought to traduce elections at the same time. Even though he won the Electoral College in November 2016, he claimed that the system was rigged against him, and that millions of false votes had been cast for his opponent. He and Putin both tried to delegitimize democracy by associating it with a woman: in fact, the same woman. In 2011 Putin blamed Hillary Clinton for initiating protests against very real electoral fraud in Russia; five years later Trump claimed mendaciously that millions of her votes were fraudulent.

In 2016 Trump called Putin to be congratulated; in 2020 Putin did not call to congratulate Joe Biden after his victory for more than a month. After his defeat, Trump mounted a campaign to demonstrate that ballots in states or counties that he lost should not be counted, and that therefore he should be regarded as the victor and should remain in office. It is easy to see how an American succession crisis served Russian (or rather Putin’s) interests. As I wrote: “If Russia’s succession crisis can in fact be exported—if the United States could become authoritarian—the Russia’s own problems, although unresolved, would at least appear normal” (252). This did not quite happen: but the United States under Trump has certainly moved the needle of normality much closer to that of a Russian-style oligarchy. The United States was more like Russia in 2016

⁸³ Russian media also pushed the birther story. Sonia Scherr, “Russian TV Channel Pushes ‘Patriot’ Conspiracy Theories,” Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report, 1 August 2010. Obama’s last year in office was referred to as “the year of the monkey”: see for example *Life.ru*, 30 December 2016, 954218. On Obama’s birthday in 2014, Russian students projected a laser light show on the U.S. embassy building, portraying Obama fellating a banana: vk.com/mskstud?w=wall-73663964_66.

than Americans generally would have cared to admit. Amidst Trump's willfully contradictory and baroque disinformation about electoral fraud of 2020, the resemblances become harder to deny.

The politics of eternity has no explicit alternative to democracy: it disguises oligarchy with passive-aggressive fascist flourishes and openly faked elections. No one really has the courage for a revolution. It is reasonable to ask whether Trump's attempt to overturn American democracy in 2020 would have taken place without the Russian intervention of 2016. Flawed though the American system is, this sequence of events would have been extremely unlikely if someone else had been president of the United States.

In addition to the possibility of a causal relationship between one politics of eternity and another, we might also attend to a structural similarity between the succession crises. Thanks to obviously faulty parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012, Putin was able to stay in power while preserving electoral ritualism. The Trump effort was aimed in the same direction: to claim a victory that was known to be fraudulent, including by those who claimed it, with the presumed consequence that democracy itself would become something of a joke.

What Trump is attempting in late 2020 resembles what Putin achieved in Russia. Trump's own politics of eternity now includes the new myth of his martyrdom and innocence: he really won the election, but was stabbed in the back by the Democrats and the African American cities. Trump seems to have convinced tens of millions of Americans that elections are not to be trusted. That is in itself an important step towards authoritarianism. As I wrote: "Democracies die when people cease to believe that voting matters" (251).

A history of power and time in the 2010s allows us to pose these questions and see these resemblances. Using history as a check on the politics of memory, the other method of the book, allows us to see a deeper meaning. Trump's efforts could be presented in simple technical or party political terms: this or that precinct, this or that state, this or that method of voting. In seeking after the election to disqualify votes from Atlanta, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Detroit, and by associating the act of black people voting with fraud, the Trump administration was furthering American traditions of disenfranchising African-Americans.⁸⁴ The racism was Orwellian: white people who had voted for Trump were instructed that they were the real victims, that they were the ones who had been disenfranchised. Historians of the United States explained how the politics of memory was at work here by contrasting it with the elements of the past that it blocked out or perverted.⁸⁵

One of Trump's final acts as president was to sign an executive order that insinuated that both the Civil War and the civil rights movement were about protecting vulnerable white people from future oppression by black people. The historical inversions were reaching Putinesque heights. Near the end of *The Road to Unfreedom* I argue that "In an American eternity, the enemy is black, and politics begins by saying so. Thus the next point of innocence in Trump's politics of eternity, after the 1930s-era racist isolationism of America First, was an alternative 1860s in which the Civil War was never fought. In actual American history, African Americans were enfranchised a few years after the American Civil War of 1861–1865. If blacks are to be excluded from 'the people,' an American politics of eternity has to keep them in bondage." Then I quoted W. E. B. Dubois's classic work, *Black Reconstruction*: American whites distracted by racism could become "the instrument by which democracy in the nation was done to death, race provincialism deified, and the world delivered to plutocracy" (271).

Democracy comes to an end when the complacency of its advocates about the future meets the determination of its opponents to eliminate the future. But politicians of eternity, even as they invoke an imagined past of blamelessness, draw

⁸⁴ Russian television, meanwhile, got into the act with a skit mocking Barack Obama. The former president, whose memoir had just been released, was portrayed by an actress in blackface. Siobhán O'Grady and Robyn Dixon "Pro-Kremlin TV ridicules Obama with blackface skit," *Washington Post*, 30 November 2020.

⁸⁵ For a quick summary see Jim Rutenberg and Nick Corasaniti, "Republicans Rewrite an Old Playbook on Disenfranchising Black Americans," *New York Times*, 13 November 2020.

strength from historical oppression, present inequality, and technological opportunity. Eternity works when the strong claim to be the weak, and ends with a state that does little but maintain an oligarchy. Historians cannot stop this, but we do our part by accepting the challenge of facts and by calling events by their names.