

LIBERALISM'S LOYAL OPPOSITION

**Contemporary Attitudes to Russia in the Wake of
the Cold War.**

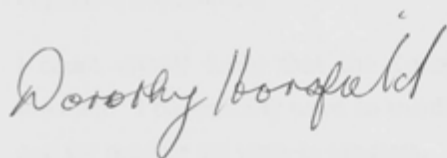
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Declaration

I certify that this thesis comprises only my original work, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text.



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Abstract

The thesis explores the continuities that underpin public debate about Russia in the post-Soviet era. It approaches the question using the conceptual framework of new Cold War warriors and re-invented fellow travellers for two reasons. The first is that debates that seek to re-conjure spectres of Marxism or socialism in contemporary Russia are not a notable feature of the work of today's academic scholarship. Instead most of the analysis is centred on evaluating either civilizational or sociological perspectives on the country. Much of it is focused too on the governance of Vladimir Putin, an approach which includes a singular amount of psychologising about his alleged personal failings, both as a leader and as a foreign policy strategist.

The second reason is that, though radically opposed, these two concepts anchor the dissertation in the spectrum of liberal thought from classical Liberalism, to economic Liberalism, to neo-liberal utopianism and, more recently, liberal pluralism. The implication is that, in one way or another, for most commentators, both within Russia and internationally, Western liberal norms provide a benchmark with which to appraise Russia's response to the demands of modernity and modernisation, the vagaries of capitalism and the institutionalisation of democratic freedoms.

Within these contentious arenas, the dissertation falls broadly into two camps. On one side are those who are still welded to either a Cold War scepticism or an ideological rigidity that invites a ready condemnation of the new Russia; and on the other are those who are more hopeful that the country's future can be more humane than its past. The approach is not aimed at adjudicating about which side will carry the day. Rather it constitutes an inevitably selective, innovative and ambitious commentary about commentaries. Its intention is to foster in both writer and reader a

more reflective understanding of the assumptions and presumptions, as well as the areas of uncertainty, in interpretations of today's governance. Admittedly, given the breadth of historical and ongoing research, as well as the myriad ways real existing social worlds defy easy categorisation, the result is more likely to veer towards an impressionistic effect. Admittedly too, it is also an effect which veers towards an antipathy about many of the claims of the new Cold War warriors.

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INTRODUCTION

'There can be no spectacle as disgusting as that of a post-revolutionary tyranny dressed up in the banner of liberty.'

Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades and Other Essays*, 1955.

'But in seventy-year-old totalitarian soil, what democracy can sprout overnight?'

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Russia Question*, 1994.

What follows is about the public conversations about Russia among contemporary scholars and commentators in the wake of the Cold War. It focuses on the work of a number of prominent figures in Britain, Europe and America, including émigré Russians, as well as Western-oriented intellectuals working from within Russia. Above all, it is informed and framed by the contentious history of liberal ideas. The assumption is that this conversation is carried out not only at a theoretical level by an elite coterie of experts, but is part of an influential trans-Atlantic world of argument, opinion and prejudice about the Putin government that is determining attitudes to contemporary crises, for example in Iraq, Ukraine or Syria.

So what specifically gives focus to this conversation? For a start, it is everywhere steeped in memory and history, seeking to weave strands of continuity and consistency out of the debris of contingent ideas and events. Russia has had an iconic role in contemporary thought - a country whose revolutionary road prompted generations of intellectuals to articulate the failings of their own societies. As British socialist politician Richard Crossman wrote:

The intellectual attraction of Marxism was that it exploded liberal fallacies. It taught the bitter truth that progress is not automatic, that boom and slump are inherent in capitalism, that social injustice and racial

discrimination are not cured merely by the passage of time...¹

Crossman was seeking to explain the hollow idealism of some of the West's best and brightest in the savage Russian decades after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. By their own testimonies, prominent intellectuals including Stephan Spender, Arthur Koestler, Andre Gide and founding member of the Italian Communist Party, Ignazio Silone, embraced Soviet Marxism out of despair of Western liberal hypocrisy. As the essays in Crossman's book also seek to explain, many in this generation were to become equally disillusioned with the Soviet Union. Especially in the years following the Second World War, this rejection was underlined by the increasingly pervasive sense that hubristic Enlightenment ideas of rationality creating a man-made earthly heaven had forged a direct path to the century's European bloodlands. For Russian/ Jewish philosopher Isaiah Berlin, for example, who as a young man in St Petersburg had experienced directly the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik coup, those barbaric years should teach us to be terrified of the oppressors and liberators alike, 'because anyone who has a cut and dried scheme, a straightjacket which he wishes to impose on humanity as a sole remedy for human ills, is ultimately bound to create a situation intolerable for free men.'²

Admittedly, these days the post-Cold War Russian Federation is unlikely to inspire such high-minded ideological deprecations. Nevertheless, assertions about the depressing deficiencies in Western democracies continue to have a strong currency in comparative analyses of the Putin regime. In the century, the Russia conversation is about whether or not, in the arenas of egalitarianism, toleration, the rule of law, parliamentarianism, cosmopolitanism, or geopolitics, the West stands condemned of a Eurocentric 'one-size-fits-all' approach to liberal democratisation.

¹ Crossman, Richard (Ed), *The God That Failed*, Harper and Brothers NY 1949, p5

² Berlin, Isaiah, *Russian Thinkers*, Penguin Classics 1978 p227

The concepts of the new Cold War warriors and the re-invented fellow travellers provide a framework for charting the polarities of this conversation. Both groups have a rich and resonant intellectual history: the first group with a predilection for embracing worst-case scenarios about Russia in the guise of strategic geopolitics; and the second group generally maintaining the happy conviction that much can be tolerated at a distance that would be culturally insufferable at home. Historically, the endorsement of Liberalism by this second group was somewhat muddled and unsteady, but one which nonetheless softened their disenchantment with Western democracy and tempered their embrace of communism. As historian Cauter writes:

The fellow-traveller retains a partial faith in the possibilities of progress under the parliamentary system: he appreciates that the prevailing liberties, however imperfect and however distorted, are nevertheless valuable.³

Fellow travellers were thus primarily heirs, he argues, to Enlightenment Liberalism, rather than 20th century Marxism. Their commitment to idealistic notions of progressivism and modernisation served as a kind of philosophical consolation zone which often circumscribed their fantasies about Russia, particularly as information filtered out about the horrifying realities of communist rule there.

By contrast, the beliefs of traditional Cold War warriors became firmly embedded in the 20th century American policy of containment, of which NATO and the European Union became emblematic. The emergence of this version of strategic geopolitics was anchored in a series of credenda about Stalin's Soviet Union, famously and comprehensively articulated in 1946 by US diplomat George Kennan. Kennan wrote that the country had an enduring, paranoid and antagonistic sense of democratic capitalist encirclement; that it saw no possibility of peaceful co-existence with the West; and that at bottom it was a neurotic, xenophobic, insecure, militaristic, expansionist,

³ Cauter, David, *The Fellow Travellers A Postscript to the Enlightenment*, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1973 p5

economically backward, morally bankrupt, police state.⁴ Moreover, it had not shrunk from inflicting cruelties on its own people, so that Marxism's 'basic altruism of purpose' had become for the heirs of Leninism no more than a 'fig leaf'.⁵ A liberal conservative, Kennan saw the way forward in USSR/West relations at the end of World War II, not in terms of further military confrontation, but through informed diplomacy and firmness of purpose in American foreign policy. Above all, he saw the struggle as a cultural and socio-economic one, in which victory rested on the fostering of shared certainties that West is Best:

To my own countrymen who have often asked me where best to apply the hand to counter the Soviet threat, I have accordingly had to reply: to our American failings, to the things we are ashamed of in our own eyes, or that worry us; to the racial problem, to the condition in our big cities, to the education and environment of our young people,...⁶

For Kennan, America's role therefore should be as a beacon for liberty and for the tolerant, nurturing, forward march of prosperity. His highly-influential contribution to the containment doctrine is described by Kissinger as epitomising 'an extraordinary theory...[that] assumed the collapse of a totalitarian adversary could be achieved in an essentially benign way.'⁷ As for the West's Cold War arch-enemy, Kennan's observations left no doubt that the Soviet Union was an alien, intractable place, whose power elite operated in a poisonous atmosphere of 'oriental secrecy and conspiracy'.⁸ Even the most sympathetic and well-intentioned foreigner would find the world of the Kremlin opaque and darkly sinister. And though there was little about

⁴ Kennan, George, 'Long Telegram', February 22, 1946, www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm

⁵ Kennan, Op Cit. p4.

⁶ Kennan, George, *Russia, the Atom and the West*, Harper & Brothers, New York 1957 p 13

⁷ Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, 1994 p 471

⁸ Kennan, Op.Cit. p 4

Kennan's insights that were original, they were to prove integral to thought and debate about Russia for the next half century and beyond.

It should be emphasised though, that despite a reputation to the contrary, traditional Cold War Warriors were by no means uniformly crude militarists, of the kind that inspired the Anglo-American classic movie satire, *Dr Strangelove*, or the nuclear enthusiasms of the Rand Corporation's Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine. Generally, Cold War warriors were a staunchly conservative kind of liberal, who idealised classical Liberalism both on the homefront, and globally in the form of a kind of 'tough love' democracy promotion.

Paradoxically, though, their foreign policy stances were often infused with what Western governments saw as a purely defensive form of Realism. More pragmatic than ideological, contemporary Realism holds that international relations are at heart a series of strategic power struggles between states, in which there exists no bedrock of an enforceable cosmopolitan rule of law. Instead, economically and geopolitically, each country seeks to maximise its national interests. As a global system believed to be dominated by the self-regarding notions of status and legitimacy of Great Powers, it was exemplified during the Cold War years by the confrontational bipolarity of America versus the Soviet Union. This was interpreted by both sides as the need for an expansionist approach to maintaining strategic alliances, such as NATO or the Warsaw Pact, in order to foster and protect spheres of influence. A determined, strongly militarised resistance to any perceived threat of armed aggression was seen as a guarantee of the enduring success of the system. From a Western perspective, in a Cold War world beleaguered by 'ceaseless conflict that is never far from the state of war,'⁹ the Manichean battle of good versus evil was seen as synonymous with global democratisation versus the Red Peril manifest in Soviet communism.

And the new Cold War warriors? Despite the ongoing wars in Syria and Ukraine, it is clear that Russia no longer occupies centre stage in transatlantic

⁹ Gray, John, *Black Mass, Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, Penguin UK, 2007, p273

foreign policy priorities, especially since the events of 9/11/2001, the resulting intensification of Islamist terrorism, and the destabilisation of the Middle East. Still, the question remains where have Kennan's Cold War presumptions about the legacies of despotism in Russia gone? Are his ideas ready for final demolition, alongside the demise of Soviet communism? Or do they still inform the judgments of those cohorts of academics and policy-makers who cling to Cold War postures despite the new realities? As Said noted in 1996, many of these contemporary analysts came to maturity in a 1950s' America dominated by the McCarthyism that 'shaped a mystifyingly bloody-minded intelligentsia, to this day hung up on a wildly exaggerated internal and external menace.'¹⁰

For the hardliners in this group, Russia is the Other, forever and fundamentally beyond the pale of the civilising culture of the West. They point to the ways in which, through the centuries of Tsarist autocracy, to Stalinism, to the failure of democratic institutions to take root since the end of the Cold War, Russia's elites have continued to wield political power that is a uniquely Slavic mix of charismatic leadership, ethnic nationalism, anti-Western sentiments, and regional and international self-aggrandisement. These diehards also share more than a quantum of 'End of History' triumphalism towards the defeat of communism, as well as, more recently, a nostalgic reassertion of the old enmities of a bi-polar world. Here there lurks the implication that their perspectives may yet prove remarkably adaptable, revitalised in the strategic thinking and soft diplomacy of the West, and stimulated by a new Great Game focused primarily on energy security and the bloody eruptions across the Middle East and in Georgia and Ukraine. Moreover, from this perspective, there is little in Russia's current economic policies or geopolitical aspirations to inspire trust and confidence. Rather, as Roosevelt put it, we would be well served 'to tread softly and carry a big stick.'¹¹

¹⁰ Said, Edward W, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 'Vintage Books 1996, p111

¹¹ Roosevelt, Theodore, Letter to Henry Sprague, January 26, 1990, Manuscript Division, American Treasures of the Library of Congress. www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm139.html

For today's re-invented fellow travellers such views have long been part of the problem. For many in this grouping, such attitudes to a re-emergent Russia are often questionable, because they are so steeped in a shallow and retrogressive form of *realpolitik*. They argue that the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 should be seen to mark a final turning away from the preceding age of extremes¹² towards a genuine toleration of the polyphony of voices that make up the worlds of East and West. Especially in the wake of the wars in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, the second Bush administration's neo-Liberalism is seen as largely discredited as a thin excuse for American messianic militarism - otherwise ridiculed as Pox Americana.¹³ In addition, the West's failed attempt to implant free market capitalism in the new Russian Federation during the Yeltsin presidency has been dismissed as naïve, doctrinaire and venal. British social theorist David Harvey, for example, argues that in this regard Western countries have much to answer for. As with all such projects across the globe, he writes, the significant beneficiaries of neo-liberal economics were the very small number, around 0.01 percent, who rapidly constituted an opportunistic power elite. These oligarchs prospered spectacularly by opting for a path of cooperation with the United States-controlled IMF and the World Bank. In particular, in the immediate post-Soviet years: 'The market shock therapy that was given to Russia after the collapse of the wall ended up with seven oligarchs controlling fifty percent of the economy.'¹⁴ In other words, the opening up of Russia to the world economy was dominated by capitalist greed, with democracy promotion at best a low level secondary consideration.

One point of reference for such accusations about the iniquities of unconstrained capitalism has been the resurgence of interest in the work of the Hungarian theorist, Karl Polanyi. Strongly critical of both Marxist economics and the ideology of a self-adjusting market, Polanyi's *The Great*

¹² Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes: The Short History of the Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995

¹³ Foster, John Bellamy & Chesney, Robert W. (Ed), *Pox America: Exposing the American Empire*, Monthly Review Press 2004

¹⁴ Lilley, Sacha, 'On NeoLiberalism: An Interview with David Harvey,' *Monthly Review Magazine*, 19/06/2006, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/lilley190606.html>

Transformation, has been described as ‘an indispensable guide in current debates about globalisation’ and as having ‘achieved the status of a canonical work for economic sociology and international political economy.’¹⁵ Like many of his generation of European Jewish intellectuals, Polanyi took refuge from German fascism, first in Britain and then in the United States. Writing in the early 1940s, he set himself the task of accounting for the collapse of the world economy that had precipitated the Great Depression a decade or so earlier. His answer was that it was the inevitable result of the contradictory, blind and soulless workings of the self-regulating market eulogised by economic neo-Liberalism.¹⁶ The cataclysm was a century and a half in the making, harking back to the Enlightenment mercantilist debates of Adam Smith, Hume and Mandeville on the corrupting effects of untempered self-interest and greed, and century concerns with the plight of the working man in the Dark Satanic mills of the industrial revolution. Almost from its inception, the free market was undermined by the necessary interventions of governments, labour unions and the churches to protect citizens from the system’s worst excesses.

As an anthropologist as well as a theorist of political economy, Polanyi argued against both Marxist and neo-liberal economic theories that humankind was not fundamentally motivated by material needs and wants, but by social and cultural ones. For Polanyi, this meant that the pursuit of a self-regulating economy was an ‘entirely unnatural’¹⁷ endeavour, the human cost of which was abhorrent and unsustainable. Moreover, it was supported by a bizarre and impossible creed, whose devotion to a utopian notion of greed-driven teleology created ecological wastelands and ‘bleak sloughs of misery’ for the urbanised factory fodder.¹⁸ ‘The mechanism which the motive of gain set in motion,’ he wrote, ‘was comparable in effectiveness only to the most violent

¹⁵ Block, Fred, ‘Karl Polanyi and the Writing of the Great Transformation,’ *Theory and Society*, Vol 32 No 3 2003 p275

¹⁶ Polanyi, Karl, *The Great Transformation*, Rinehart & Company, Inc, New York, 1944, p29

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p249

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p99

outburst of religious fervour in history.'¹⁹ By the 1920s, it was also a doomed one, in the face of the breakdown of the West's shared neo-liberal certainties that a re-establishment of a stronger pre-1914 system would ensure a solid foundation for the re-charging of the global economy after the wreckage wrought by World War I. Currency crises and the fall of the gold standard initiated the final disintegration of the Concert of Powers European order that had been sustained by delusory notions of an international self-adjusting market. As he writes:

Nowhere has liberal philosophy failed so conspicuously, as in its understanding of the problem of change...the common-sense attitude towards change was discarded in favour of a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they may be.²⁰

As the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) indicated, much of Polanyi's analysis provides an historical dimension to the ongoing credibility problems and grassroots protests about the internationalisation, or even regionalisation, of the narrow strictures of neo-Liberalism. In this contemporary context, for many scholars his work points to the urgent need for globalised economic policies that recognise there are very divergent kinds of market societies²¹ manifest in radically different social and political contexts. In other words, his analysis challenges the economic essentialism inherent in the assumption of an autonomous, benignly rational, self-regulating, global marketplace. As Block writes, Polanyi's concept of an economy as always embedded in a particular country 'begins with the premise that any favourable economic dynamic has to be understood as flowing from the interaction among self-interested agents, the actions of the state, and forms of social regulation.'²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p 30

²⁰ *Ibid.* p 33

²¹ Block, Fred, *Op.Cit.* p300

²² *Ibid.* p299

Thus Polanyi's work has also informed contemporary attempts to formulate more expansive notions of economic Liberalism, in order to counter the ways the globalisation juggernaut has served to undermine a sense of national socio-economic security and stability. Given the country's experiences in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has certainly not been immune to the hope that the destructive economic impact of engagement with the globalised corporations and institutions of Western capitalism can be ameliorated. Under the successive Putin/Medvedev governments, the policy of 'Managed Democracy' has largely mirrored similar, often chaotic attempts by Western countries. These include the Third Way Centrist politics, notably articulated at the turn of the century by British scholar Anthony Giddens.²³ Its influence extended to the domestic socio-economic policies of Australia's Hawke/Keating government, Tony Blair's New Labour in the UK, and Gerhard Schroeder's 'Neue Mitte' in Germany. The goal was to balance low-grade restraints on the wealth-generating private sector economy with the protection of the needs of family and other bonds of community that Polanyi argued were the bedrock of stable, enduring cultures. The problem has been that in none of the above countries has this Third Way been notably successful in circumscribing the morally anarchic pursuit of wealth to the point of global recession by an oligarchic power elite - an outcome that unfortunately in Polanyi's view was inevitable in the march of international capitalism.

Still, Polanyi's work brings an economic dimension to the promotion of the more open-ended liberal pluralism inspired by the work of Isaiah Berlin. This philosophical perspective rejects the universalism of concepts such as the common good or the cosmopolitan delights of neo-Liberalism's economic panaceas. Typically though, Berlin adds a quasi-biblical resonance to Polanyi's insistence on the fundamental significance of cultural and economic diversity. 'In the house of human history there are many mansions,' Berlin writes:²⁴ that is, there are many different ethnic and societal conceptions of objective ends

²³ Giddens, Anthony, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, Polity Press, 1998, pp71-72

²⁴ Berlin, Isaiah, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Henry Hardy (Ed), Princeton University Press, 2013, p83

and ultimate values. Against the deterministic beliefs of the romantics and fanatics, who he believed had been inspired by 18th century German Idealism, Berlin argues that there is not one unified answer to humankind's problems. In reality many of the great political and legal concepts underpinning the progressivism inherent in post-Enlightenment debates are incommensurable. Consider, for example, the practical irreconcilability of justice and mercy, communitarianism and individualism, the universal protection of the world's citizens and the inviolability of nation states, and the legislative curtailment of human rights under the banner of the common good and the unfettered pursuit of liberty.

Unlike Polanyi, however, Berlin arrives at a more optimistic conclusion. Drawing on the historicist 'new science' of the 18th century Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico,²⁵ he argues that because history and society are made by human actions, they can be similarly unmade. For Berlin, this philosophical tradition implies that, from the heart of a sense of shared humanity, we have the potential to project ourselves into other socio-economic worlds imaginatively and compassionately. On a pragmatic level, in international affairs this implies an informed, determined commitment to diplomatic and institutional engagement and consensus. At best, multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or the Group of 20 (G20), can foster an inclusive acknowledgement of divergent or interrelated histories and traditions that might help to ensure post-Soviet Russia's gradual accommodation with the West, and vice versa. Here, as the modern fellow traveller might put it, the aim of liberal pluralist politics is not to make the world perfect, just better than it is.

With regard to Russia, Polanyi argued the failure of the international market in 1929-30 tragically diverted the country towards the pursuit of self-sufficiency through forced collectivisation and 'high pressure industrialisation'.²⁶ Similarly, the globalisation agendas and economic

²⁵ Vico, Giambattista, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, (1744) trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fixch, Cornell UP, 1968

²⁶ Polanyi, Op. Cit. p247-48

fundamentalism of the Washington Consensus in the 1990s have been accused of playing a significant role in the debacle of the Yeltsin years. Increasingly the reaction has been that in the last decade or so Russia has sought to negotiate a more sovereign path to social and economic salvation, while still remaining within the existing frameworks of international capitalism. One manifestation of this is Putin's preoccupation with re-institutionalising ties with former Soviet states 'as a buffer against global economic crises,'²⁷ In particular, in a 2011 pre-presidential election speech aimed at rallying regional support 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok,'²⁸ Putin conjured, and not for the first time, a grand vision for a Eurasian economic bloc:

The combination of natural resources, capital and strong human potential will make the Eurasian Union competitive in the industrial and technological race and the race for investor money, new jobs and advanced production facilities. Along with other key players and regional institutions such as the USA, China, and APEC, it will ensure the sustainability of global development.²⁹

By implication, Putin is seeking to consolidate a Eurasian Union modelled, at least in the beginning, on the precursor to the EU, the EEC, which would counterbalance a volatile, American-dominated global market place. This would include regulatory uniformity across member countries and the reducing of border controls, tariffs and other trade barriers to foster the free movement of people and goods. Tacitly, for unsympathetic, Realist Russophobes, such a project bears more than a hint of the ultra-nationalist Neo-Eurasianism, which draws on traditions of Russian exceptionalism and imperialism. With his well-honed flair for the terse insult, Putin was quick to dismiss such criticism: 'Tackle rising inflation, state debt or at least obesity.

²⁷ Adelaja, Tai, 'The Rise and Rise of Capitalism,' Special Report: 20 Years Since the Fall of the Soviet Union, Russia Profile, Issue 4 Volume VIII Fall/11, www.russiaprofile.org/medi/file/79/15179.pdf accessed 27/10/2014

²⁸ Putin Speech: 'A new integration project for Eurasia - the future is born,' October 10, 2011, www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3- p 3

²⁹ Ibid. p3

Mind your own business.³⁰ Though generally sceptical of its viability given the strength of local networks and nationalisms, as well as bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, fellow travelling sympathisers with the initiative are generally more hopeful that: 'Anything that makes Russia more open to people and commerce is positive and can only serve, in the long term, to weaken the foundations of its current hyper-centralised system.'³¹

Such a view is endorsed by the maverick American liberal conservative, Francis Fukuyama. Sharing a panel with Putin in St Petersburg in 2007 on 'Competitive Eurasia: Space for Trust'³²Fukuyama challenged the Huntington thesis that Russia's Orthodox Christian religious traditions augur a clash of civilisations. Whatever one's cultural affinities, Fukuyama argued, regional integration through initiatives such as the Eurasian Union lead in time to a convergence between the West and the Rest through the formal legal and economic institutions that promote trust between strangers and thus shared global prosperity. For his critics who suggest such a perspective might be excessively sanguine, Fukuyama acknowledged that the path to universal liberal democratic capitalism may be a rocky one, with temporary setbacks including sectarian conflict, dead-ends and financial crises. Nevertheless, the dictates of economic rationality will prevail:

while the state begins with coercion, the miracle of the modern state is its ability to solve the paradox of power - namely, that a state has to be strong enough to enforce laws and provide order, yet it must constrain its own exercise of power if there is to be long-run economic growth.³³

³⁰ Putin, Vladimir, Television Interview as quoted in Russia Profile article by Adelaja, Tai. 'The Unwilling Emperor,' 10/20/2011, http://russiaprofile.org/business/47537.html_p2 accessed 27/10/2014

³¹ Adomanis, Mark, 'Putin's "Eurasian Union" - Not a Bad Idea!', *Forbes*, October 6 2011<http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2011/10/06/putins-urasian-union-not-a-bad-idea/> pp7-9 accessed 27/10/2014

³² Fukuyama, Francis, 'The Kings and I,' Transcript of address at the 11th St Petersburg International Forum, *The American Interest*, September 1, 2007 <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2007/09/01> accessed 27/10/2014

Fukuyama's critics also accuse him of blurring the distinction between a socio-economic description of Russia's progressive path to modernity and the promotion of its desirability. The question here is at what point could it be said to have failed? Certainly the current Russian government and Fukuyama appear to be in agreement on one issue: it may yet be a long time in the making. Putin's pursuit of a vision for a unified Eurasian economic order began at least two decades ago and has advanced very little.

In this context, it should be noted though that there are good reasons why 'fellow traveller' has frequently been used as a pejorative term and disciples, such as Fukuyama, of progressive versions of history advancing towards new pinnacles of human technological and cultural achievement have been justifiably ridiculed in the past: 'I have seen the future and it works,'³⁴ American journalist and political philosopher Lincoln Steffens famously wrote to a friend after he had interviewed Lenin in St Petersburg in 1919. That he proved to be almost immediately and decisively wrong prompted one conservative wit to retort: 'I have seen the future and it is just like the present, only longer'.³⁵

Traditionally fellow travellers have had an unfortunate tendency not to let the facts get in the way of their idealism. Significantly, though, in their heyday from the 1920s until Khrushchev's Secret Speech condemning Stalinism in 1956, they often were not card-carrying members of Communist Parties in the West, nor were they necessarily any other kind of a strenuous political activist for the cause of the USSR. Rather many were touched by Utopianism, weaving abstract political dreams about the Soviet Union from the comfort of their book-lined studies. Alienated from their own societies, they often yearned for the exotic political enchantment of other peoples' revolutions, so long as they were happening on foreign shores. Meanwhile, they sometimes made reverential Potemkin tours to the Soviet Union and pronounced

³⁴ Hartshorn, Peter, *I Have Seen the Future. A Life of Lincoln Steffens*, Counterpoint Berkeley 2011, p315.

³⁵ Albran, Kehlog (aka Cohen, Martin A. & Schacket, Sheldon), *The Profit*, Price, Stern, Sloan 1973 Los Angeles, as cited in www.quotecounterquote.com/2010/06/i-have-seen-future-and-it-works.html accessed 27/10/2014

plausibly deniable the reports of widespread starvation in Ukraine, of the massacres of the innocents in the gulags, and of Stalin's executioner's zeal during the Great Purge of the 1930s.

Such posturing can be at least partially explained, but definitely not excused, by the temper of the times. As Brzezinski observed, from a leftist perspective the fellow traveller of the 1920s and '30s has been understood as neither 'an epicurean devotee of vicarious violence,' nor 'the person who drove Stalin's getaway car and then claimed innocence of the crimes.'³⁶ Rather these 'generous-minded progressives who had believed too long and fervently in the Soviet Union'³⁷ were more likely to evoke a sense of pathos, even tragedy. As well, for much of the twentieth century and beyond, the Soviet Union has been so relentlessly vilified by its critics in the West that to embrace communism, or even the mildest form of socialism, was to sup with the devil. For those Western liberals confronted by the inflated ideological zeal of their Cold War opponents, the truth about the communist USSR had seemed hard to come by. Moreover, as the socialist George Orwell discovered, to accept the revelations of Stalin's Totalitarian savagery, or allegations about the uncompromisingly militant nature of Cold War communism, meant being stereotyped as a closet Right Wing recidivist, unable to distinguish what we would nowadays call spin-doctoring from veracious reportage.

In spite of such ideologically-driven historical indictments, these days re-invented fellow travellers arguably can claim a more laudable heritage, though a diffuse and aspirational one. 'Humankind,' observed the poet, T.S. Eliot, 'cannot bear very much reality.'³⁸ To be human is to have an atavistic longing for the more-than-human. Fellow travellers have had much in common, Hollander argues, with the perennial political pilgrims of the post-Enlightenment world. They were secularised truth-seekers, determined on more than the industrialised, bureaucratised societies of the modernising

³⁶ Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Scribners, 1989 p328

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Eliot, T.S., 'Burnt Norton' in *Four Quartets* Harcourt, 1943, p1

West seemed capable of delivering. However fictional, the appeal of an idealised Soviet Union to the West's intelligentsia was sometimes quasi-religious, embodying 'the achievement of or striving for "wholeness," the sense of identity and community, meaning and purpose in life,'³⁹ that had been lost to the nihilism of modernity. In contrast to a spiritually empty, consumerist, bourgeois world, Slavic communitarianism and the embrace of the socialist soul of Mother Russia ostensibly had much to commend it.

More contentiously, Hollander argues that it is doubtful that what he describes as 'an amalgam of alienation and utopia-seeking peculiar to many Western intellectuals...has run its course.'⁴⁰ Rather he sees their contribution to democratic societies as corrosive and aberrant, invoking the baleful spectre of the highly esteemed moral values allegedly inherent in the socio-economic institutions of the West not surviving their estranged Utopianism.⁴¹ Added to this was what he saw as the international resurgence of a posturing, ignorant leftist movement, one that had been quick to forget the fifty million or more who had died in the ideological wars of the first half of the century. 'Perhaps the most enduring message,' Hollander writes, '...has been that the political pursuit of utopian social arrangements... is bound to produce a rich and devastating harvest of unintended consequences such as violence, repression, and mendaciousness, as well as untold material and psychic deprivations for the surviving victims of these experiments in social engineering.'⁴² Like Isaiah Berlin, Hollander warns that today's fellow travellers should pay more careful attention to the lessons of the not-very-distant past.

Hollander's work is almost exclusively concerned with the Utopianism of the Left, ignoring the history of the Right Wing free market Utopianism that so dismayed Polanyi and which continues to be strongly challenged in current

³⁹ Ibid. p28

⁴⁰ Ibid. Preface p x

⁴¹ Ibid. p437

⁴² Hollander, Paul (Ed), *Political Violence, Belief, Behaviour and Legitimation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p5

debate. Moreover, his analysis of the fellow travelling pilgrimages to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba was published more than thirty years ago in the wake of the 1968 Paris Commune and the murderous fanaticism of America's Weathermen and Europe's Red Brigades. With hindsight, these loosely aligned radical groups of the 1960s, whose political naivety Hollander scorned, are more appropriately characterised as a short-lived youth crusade protesting against 'the establishment' whatever its manifestations. By the mid-1970s they had largely dissipated into self-destructiveness or apolitical, middle class self-indulgence. Their notions of rebellion had veered between anarchic violence and a theatrical sense of Fun Power, such as the 1967 attempt by American anti-Vietnam War protesters to levitate the Pentagon. Other elements of a very broad movement included T-shirt sloganising, a Rousseau-style romanticisation of the Third World, and a shifting adulation of charismatic leaders such as Che Guevara, Chairman Mao or George Gurdjieff. As well, there was the widespread commitment to chemically-induced transcendentalism: or as the saying goes, 'if you can remember the sixties then you weren't there.'⁴³ Few of those under Hollander's ample umbrella of Left-Wingism were liberal-minded intellectuals for whom events in the Eastern bloc had become a touchstone in their quest for theoretical and experiential alternatives to the failures of their own societies. Indeed many of those who joined the protest movement during those years had a strident distrust of intellectualism, along with a desk calendar knowledge of Marxism and a firm belief that unreflective social activism should be centre stage. Though written in 1937, a decade before the mutation of East/West hostilities into a 'Cold War,' Orwell's characterisation of such activists is strongly evocative of the 1960s and 1970s:

One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-

⁴³ No-one seems to remember who said this first

wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist in England.⁴⁴

Writing in the early 1990s about her experiences of the stretch of years that saw Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, and the meteoric rise of the New Left, the novelist and member of the British Communist Party, Doris Lessing, reminds her readers that only with hindsight could they be described as an Orwellian 'lunacy...a paranoia essenced.'⁴⁵ Her answer to the puzzle of how was it possible to be a fellow traveller during that time provides a radical contrast to Orwell's totalitarian nightmares. Rather Lessing conjures her engagement with a potent, diffuse, exhilarating chaos:

a fever, an intoxication, every possible social idea up for grabs, from feminism to communal living, all based - and in areas that extended far beyond the Communist Party - on a goody-and-baddy scenario: the Soviet Union was good, everyone else, bad.⁴⁶

One of the earliest usages of the term, fellow traveller, was by Leon Trotsky in a long essay written in 1924 entitled 'The Literary Fellow Travellers of the Revolution'.⁴⁷In it, he singled out as fellow travellers a post-October group of artists and intellectuals whose 'literary and spiritual front has been made by the Revolution, by that angle of it which caught them, and they have accepted the Revolution, each in his own way.' As a very important cohort in Russian literature, he wrote, they were the creators of transitional work in the gap between a dying bourgeois world and one that will be utterly transformed. But ultimately these intellectuals were outsiders, unable to fully articulate the soul of this brave new revolution.

⁴⁴ Orwell, George, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Part 2, Chapter 11, paragraph 6, 1937, <http://www.orwelltoday.com/wiganpier.shtml>

⁴⁵ Lessing, Doris, 'Unwritten Novels,' *London Review of Books*, 11 January, 1990.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Trotsky, Leon, *Literature and Revolution*, http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/ch02.htm accessed 27/10/2014

Among them, for example, was author Boris Pilnyak, whose zeal for the new world-in-the-making in Trotsky's view was constrained by an artistic sensibility that failed to look above the travails of everyday life. As Trotsky writes, though he was an excellent observer, Pilnyak was the kind of fellow traveller who could see 'only at what is under his feet, notice only obstacles, minuses, holes, torn boots, broken dishes.'⁴⁸ Here the driving power of an ethereal Marxism risked being lost to discord and confusion. As well, there were the poets, such as the peasant, Nikolai Kliuev, who 'promises paradise through the Revolution, but this paradise is only an exaggerated and embellished peasant kingdom, a wheat and honey paradise: a singing bird on the carved wing of the house and a sun shining in jasper and diamonds.'⁴⁹ Such writers conjured only the past of medieval folktales and the 'Rus'. For Trotsky, they were blinkered by individualistic preoccupations that curtailed genuinely transformative cultural imaginings.

As suggested above, fellow travellers in the West were often similarly limited, though their failure to imbibe the true spirit of the Revolution had much to do with their Eurocentric preoccupations with what they saw as the hollow liberal ideals of their own societies. By the 1930s, officially in the Soviet Union "there were no more Russian fellow travellers - only "non-Party Bolsheviks"⁵⁰. Sadly, both Pilnyak and Kliuev were executed by Stalin's minions in 1937-38. By contrast, in Europe and in the America of Joe McCarthy, intellectuals could simply renounce the political dabblings of their youth - as the work of Koestler or Andre Gide exemplified. Alternatively, one could look beyond the tragic brutalities of Soviet communism to other kinds of revolutions in Cuba, Portugal or parts of the Third World.

As Lessing suggests, traditional fellow travellers in the West saw in Soviet communism the misguided hope of a future of real existing 'social justice and its many tangible components - material, economic, political, cultural and

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp 12-13

⁴⁹ Ibid. p5

⁵⁰ Caste, Op.Cit. p2

organisational'⁵¹ that appeared to be denied to the less privileged citizens of democracies. This 'family of related notions',⁵² Caute argues, which also includes terms such as progress, scientific rationality, peace, equality, the workers' state, often more closely typified fellow travelling than words such as revolution.⁵³ Like their doomed Russian counterparts, the role of fellow travellers was to be commentators on the realities and potentials of radical progressive change. They saw themselves as having an ethical obligation to write 'a history of the present' in the hope of illuminating a clear way forward out of the morass created by the failed promises of modernity.

But, as British fellow traveller Stephen Spender wrote, 'The conflict of the liberal conscience of men of good will in the 1930s centred on the problem of ends and means'.⁵⁴ Or as Trotsky put it a decade earlier: 'As regards a "fellow traveller", the question always comes up - how far will he go?...The solution depends...mainly on the objective trend of things.'⁵⁵ In the context of Russia's revolutionary era, this meant articulating persuasive answers to the recurrent challenge that fellow travellers were merely over-eager apologists for Totalitarianism; or, since the end of the Cold War, that the liberal pluralist tolerance of a re-invented fellow traveller in reality has amounted to little beyond a dubious justification for the alleged rise of post-Soviet authoritarianism, one that has forgotten the lessons of Russia's history.

Nevertheless, as such focal debates indicate, fellow travellers historically should not be so readily dismissed as the Soviet Union's or the Russian Federation's cheer-squad shouting with increasingly credulous optimism from the distant sidelines. Rather they have often assumed the mantle of a committed public intelligentsia of the liberal Left, which saw itself as providing a deeper, more complex voice, one that was striving to be independent of what they saw as the crude ideological arena of both domestic

⁵¹ Hollander, *Op. Cit.* p28

⁵² Caute, *Op.Cit.*p7

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Crossman, *Op.Cit.* p272

⁵⁵ Trotsky, *Op. Cit.* p2

and international power politics. To paraphrase the unrepentantly Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm, their role was underlined by the understanding 'that human society is a successful structure because it is capable of change, and thus the present is not the point of arrival.'⁵⁶ Moreover, they continued to believe there are few good reasons why it should be. It is this central element of the concept of fellow traveller that has been carried forward into their contemporary liberal pluralist perspectives on Russia.

Ironically for a grouping that is frequently dismissed as naïve and gullible, fellow travellers in the West accuse their opponents of a blind, unsubstantiated pessimism about humankind's capacity for self-improvement. Specifically they saw the end of the Cold War as a window of opportunity to genuinely reset East/West relations by drawing an economically bankrupt and ideologically-moribund Russia into the fold of the open societies of a globalised cosmopolitanism. As suggested above, the Russian reality under the Yeltsin government of the newly-created Russian Federation in the early 1990s was the collapse of the ruble, deprivation and hardship for the mass of the people, and a failed putsch.

Nevertheless, for contemporary re-invented fellow travellers, there are good reasons why it is too soon to pronounce final judgment on today's Russia. The post-Cold War enterprise has not so much failed in the face of Vladimir Putin's ascendancy and the Western-oriented, opportunistic, kleptocratic mindset of many of those in the new power elite. On the one hand, they argue that the inadequately-regulated pursuit of wealth by oligarchic multi-national companies has long been an inherent feature of capitalism; on the other, that the Russian experience demands a more sophisticated recognition of the country's need to negotiate a singular path to prosperous modernization - but not necessarily towards Western-style modernity. The specific lesson of its dramatic stabilisation under the Putin government, and its implementation of policies of 'Managed Democracy' in reaction to the chaos of the Yeltsin era, is the need to revise interpretations of what is meant by democratisation. Like Polanyi's market economies, democracies are necessarily home-grown,

⁵⁶ Hobsbawm, Eric, *The New Century*, Abacus 2000, p6

embedded organically in divergent cultural and historical contexts. Three hundred years or so of modern Western history suggest that they are also slow to develop, never top-down, and appear to constitute a broad church. Moreover, as the European Union's External Action Service Counsellor, Robert Cooper, observes, for former communist countries even the word, 'democracy,' itself sometimes becomes problematic, adding, 'I personally like the Chinese government: it has done amazing things for its people. And it continues to transform the country. In the end the state will be transformed as a result of this activity.'⁵⁷

Thus what some commentators dismiss as a Russian catalogue of retrogressive steps during the last couple of decades or so into the mire of a new Cold War posturing, many of their more optimistic opponents understand as a transitional phase on the road to freedom. For sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, for instance, this phase may require at the very minimum two or three generations and is predicated firstly on constitutional reforms, secondly on economic development, and thirdly on the establishment of the social foundations which transform the constitution and the economy from fair-weather into all-weather institutions. Sixty years, he says, 'are barely enough to lay these foundations.'⁵⁸ Or, as Solzhenitsyn puts it more succinctly and poignantly: 'Putin inherited a ransacked and bewildered country, with a poor and demoralised people...The growth and development of an opposition, as well as the maturing of other democratic institutions will take time and experience.'⁵⁹ The hope for the re-invented fellow traveller is that, like China, Russia is just off the starting blocks on its own unique the path to legitimate, enduringly democratic government.

Fundamentally, though, what emerges from the above cluster of intellectual argument and ideology integral to the conceptual framework of new Cold War

⁵⁷ Cooper, Robert, Interview with the Russian Institute, Moscow, December 2009, as cited in Shevtsova, Lilia, *The Lonely Power*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010 p106

⁵⁸ Dahrendorf, Ralf, *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe*, Chatto & Windus London 1990 p92

⁵⁹ Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, 'I Am Not Afraid of Death,' *Der Spiegel* Interview, 23/7/2007, <http://spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-alexander-solzhenitsyn-i-am-not-afraid-of-death-a-496211.htm> accessed 4/11/2014

warrior and re-invented fellow traveller is on what basis can its contemporary relevance be justified? There are two responses to this. The first is that both concepts continue, explicitly and implicitly, to have a currency in analyses of Russia since the end of Soviet era. As Richard Sakwa complains, in the halls of academe '...any attempt at dispassionate analysis condemned one to the forlorn status of fellow-traveller.'⁶⁰ Among other issues, Sakwa's scholarship has been concerned with the plausibility of the term 'Russian Democracy' in the context of methods of governance of Vladimir Putin. A less forlorn usage can be found in a 2001 Stanford University press release on Michael McFaul's book, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution*, which describes him as 'a fellow-traveller in this new Russian revolution.' McFaul has also been described as an influential contributor to the first-term Obama administration's 'reset' foreign policy of renewed engagement with Putin's Russian Federation.⁶¹ In May, 2011 he was appointed United States Ambassador to Moscow, a posting that was terminated two years later amid considerable controversy about the depth and sensitivity of the diplomatic skills he displayed in fostering America's relationship with the country.⁶²

The second response is that the conceptual framework generates arenas of debate about the various assumptions underpinning the received wisdom about the Putin government. As suggested above, central to these debates is the question of the continued meaningfulness of Kennan's Cold War observations that the Soviet Union's leadership was morally bankrupt, autocratic, militaristic and economically inept, with a foreign policy that was both xenophobic and expansionist. For the new Cold War warriors, like his Communist predecessors, Putin is simply not to be trusted. Nor is he the kind of leader with whom the West can confidently do business or invite into full-scale membership of the West's premium security organization, NATO.

⁶⁰ Sakwa, Richard, *Putin, Russia's Choice*, Second Edition, Routledge, 2008 pxi

⁶¹ Warrick, Joby, 'Obama to name McFaul as Ambassador to Russia,' *Washington Post*, May 29, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/obama-to-name-mcfaul-as-ambassador-to-russia/2011/05/29/AGWkVMEH_story.html accessed 27/10/2014

⁶² Lally, Kathy, 'McFaul leaves Moscow and two dramatic years in relations between U.S. and Russia,' *Washington Post*, February 26, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/mcfaul-leaves-moscow-and-two-dramatic-years-in-relations-between-us-and-russia/2014/02/26/bb360742-9ef5-11e3-9ba6-800d1192d08b_story.html

The overarching contention in the following chapters is that Kennan's judgments generally are more revealing of the strengths and limitations of contemporary doctrinaire Liberalism, and its associated sociological analyses and democratization studies, than about the realities of the new Russia. In using this approach, it is important to acknowledge the underlying influence of the Cambridge school of political theory. The conceptual framework of new Cold War warriors and re-invented fellow travellers draws on the notion from historian of ideas, J.G.A Pocock, that debate among society's intellectuals and commentators does not have an autonomous existence outside or above the social world. On the contrary, it is always variously enmeshed in the times in which it takes place. This is not to say that its influence does not extend beyond when it is written, but rather that it is always important to take into account different historical contexts and the ways old concepts, such as 'Liberalism', or 'democracy' may be encrusted with new meanings that are in no way culturally or ideologically neutral. With regard to Putin's Russia, this approach points to the need to focus on what has changed since the implosion of communist rule, so that our understanding of these two decades does not emerge as a kind of immutable repetition of past assumptions. Instead, what is needed is a dynamic engagement with present events, one that is open-ended and philological in its careful attention to the words we use to describe this process. As Pocock said: 'The history of a concept is the history of its use; but there is typically tension between the user of a concept and the concept which may have been formed for other uses.'⁶³ Put another way, social changes do not follow an inscrutable course independent of our shifting conceptualisation of them.

Consider, for example, the divergent, contextualized interpretations surrounding the meaning of an abstract concept, such as 'European nationalism.' These days it is a commonplace that in the eastern states of the former Yugoslavia and in Russia it involves a re-conjuring of barbaric ancient enmities and past glories, a kind of contemporary mythologising of a unique ethnic solidarity founded on a Schmittian notion of Us and Them.

⁶³ Pocock, J.G.A., 'Antipodean Historians' in *The New York Review of Books*, October 20, 2005

Understanding such nationalism as a largely destructive, exclusionary manifestation of imagined community is believed to be integral to any analysis of regional power politics and fragmentation. By contrast, Western European nationalism is often assumed to be a more benign notion. Ideally, it is simply what enables a country's diverse citizens to assume they belong together, and thus helps to ensure the bonds of a secular modern state infused with civic virtue. For the most part, it is manifested as a banal, everyday expression of communalism, for example, through support for national sporting teams or cultural events.

To contextualize in a similar way the current uses of the concepts of new Cold War warrior and re-invented fellow traveller, the following chapters are divided into five thematic arenas: the contribution of Anglo Russian philosopher Isaiah Berlin's liberal pluralism in promoting understanding of today's Russian Federation; evaluating the role of post-Soviet Russian liberal intellectuals in fostering the kind of civil society eulogised in Western political theory as prefiguring the institutionalisation of democratic governance; Eurocentrism in Western conceptualisations of democratisation and authoritarianism under the Putin government; Where East meets West? Russian conservatism and the notion of expansionist neo-Eurasian geopolitics; and finally the importance of the world of espionage and leaked covert intelligence in consolidating alleged facts and fictions about the Putin regime.

By implication, the consideration of such themes does not constitute a systematic, tightly-structured series of studies. Instead the approach is eclectic and interdisciplinary, ranging across civilizational, sociological, biographical and geopolitical perspectives on today's Russia from a selection of influential intellectuals both within the country and transnationally. It also takes inspiration from the liberal pluralism of Isaiah Berlin, for whom the striving by scholars to press their understanding of human affairs into tidy boxes of ideologically-driven reflection and syllogistic reasoning is a nonsense. The aim is to encapsulate and challenge the focal claims and counterclaims of a number of especially contentious and divisive assertions about Putin's governance and foreign policy initiatives.

As the views, for instance, of Isaac Deutscher suggest, to achieve more than this embodies a formidable, if not impossible, challenge. A sturdy Trotskyist, Deutscher particularly loathed George Orwell, with whom he worked briefly as a journalist in Germany in the mid-1940s⁶⁴ and whose books, especially *1984*, he thought were despicable. Deutscher summed up what he saw as the limitations of Orwell's cultural and political commentary in this back-straightening way:

To analyse a complicated social background, to try and unravel tangles of political motives, calculations, fears and suspicions, and to discern the compulsion of circumstance behind the actions was beyond him.⁶⁵

Despite his purely aspirational standards of analysis, Deutscher's ridicule of Orwell does serve as an appropriate warning about jumping to glib conclusions. Consider, for example, a key accusation of Russophobic new Cold War warriors, the notion of gullibility, with its implication that today's fellow travellers share the shallow Pollyanna-style thinking of many of their forerunners. What does it mean to talk in terms of contextualising and analysing the debates centred on this notion, of elucidating the specific ways 'ideas and social forces roll over in the mud of actuality together?'⁶⁶ One approach is to explore some of the prejudices that thread through today's re-invention of Cold War Kremlinology, otherwise known as Putinology. As online commentator and Putin supporter Vitaly Tretyakov puts it, decoding the hidden or subtle meanings behind Putin's pronouncements has become a favourite obsession of foreign political commentators and journalists. Generally this involves a great deal of amateur psychology about Putin's personal life and ambitions, as well as his public utterances, for example on autocracy, geopolitics or the rule of law. For those new Cold War warriors Tretyakov believes are inclined to ill-informed, literal-minded interpretations, he offers some guidelines. In particular, he claims, Putin is heartily sick of

⁶⁴ Cauter, 'Isaac & Isaiah,' Yale University Press, 2013, p23

⁶⁵ Deutscher, Isaac, *Heretics and Renegades, and Other Essays*, Hamish Hamilton London 1955, p47

⁶⁶ Thompson, E.P., *Writing by Candlelight*, The Merlin Press 1980, p182

answering questions about whether there is democracy in his country. His answers, such as ‘...since the death of Mahatma Gandhi there has been no-one to talk to about democracy,’ are clearly both scornful and ironic.⁶⁷

Tretyakov could well have added another aspect of a more malign Putinology manifest in misleading and out-of-context translations into English by commentators of key words in Putin’s speeches. Consider, for example, an instance where what Putin actually said and what he is reported to have said are markedly different. His April 25th, 2005 Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation has been widely interpreted in the West as expressing Putin’s neo-imperialist ambition to reinvent the great power status and spheres of external control of Russia’s communist glory days. In reports from BBC and Australian correspondents and academic commentators, as well as in statements by US senators such as Senator John McCain, it has been accepted that Putin described the fall of the Soviet Union in superlative terms as ‘*the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.*’ By contrast, in the Kremlin archives, the official English translation of his words is given as ‘...the collapse of the Soviet Union was *a major geopolitical disaster of the century.*’⁶⁸ That is, it was one of many disasters that arguably from a Russian perspective could include the murderous brutality of Stalinism denounced by Khrushchev in his 1956 Secret Speech; or the approximately 20 million dead in the Great Patriotic War. In defence of his insistence that Putin did not say ‘there was no worse geopolitical disaster in the century,’⁶⁹ Armstrong refers to a very lucid explanation in a recent textbook on the intricacies of Russian grammar.⁷⁰ With regard to the meaning of the word ‘krupneyshey’ (major), the book says:

⁶⁷ Tretyakov, Vitaly, ‘About Vladimir Putin, Tiresome Questions and Sovereign Democracy,’ *America-Russia.Net*, October 1, 2007, <http://www.america-russia.net/eng/face/161743375>

⁶⁸ Putin, Vladimir, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, President of Russia Official Web Portal, April 25, 2005, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml
P1 accessed 30/9/2014

⁶⁹ Armstrong, Patrick, ‘DEADLY QUOTATIONS PART 2,’ Johnson’s Russia List, August 3, 2014, <http://russialist.org/re-putin-soviet-geopolitical-disaster-deadly-quotations-part-2/> p1, accessed 2/10/2014

⁷⁰ Pekhliyanova, K.I., and Lebedeva, M.N., *Russian Grammar in Illustrations*, Moscow, 1994, p161

To say an object possesses some quality in extraordinary degree, without comparing it to other objects, the Russian uses a special adjectival form ending -eyshiy (or -ayshiy, after zh, ch, sh, shch).⁷¹

Such an adjectival grammatical form, Armstrong points out, does not exist in English. 'Extremely great' has been suggested as a more appropriate translation, to convey this sense of the superlative degree.⁷²

On the issue of what Putin might have intended by his use of the term 'geopolitical,' Armstrong also insists that the Russian President was not indicating 'he wanted the empire back.'⁷³ Indeed, against the sheer weight of Western-oriented commentary, the context of Putin's words in his annual speech suggests a catalogue of dire domestic challenges.⁷⁴ In the following paragraph from his Address, Putin provides a vivid description of 'the epidemic of disintegration'⁷⁵ that characterised the wretched years that saw the final socio-economic implosion of the Soviet Union:

Individual savings were depreciated and old ideals destroyed. Many institutions were disbanded or reformed carelessly. Terrorist intervention damaged the country's integrity. Oligarchic groups...served their own corporate interests. Mass poverty began to be seen as the norm. And all this was happening against the backdrop of a dramatic economic downturn, unstable finances, and the paralysis of the social sphere.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Anonymous comment to author

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Putin, Annual Address 2005, Op.Cit.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

But these events, he adds with a politician's patriotic rallying cry, generated too 'the energy for self-preservation'⁷⁷ and 'the will for a new and free life'⁷⁸ which has demanded of the Russian people that they find their own path to a viable democracy. Nowhere in the Address does Putin proffer an expansionist foreign policy rebuilt out of the teetering edifice of the Soviet Union as a vision for his country's future.

Behind all this are serious questions about what kind of leadership Putin is assumed to embody and what this might imply about the new Russia. Is he an abstemious, clean-living, anti-materialist judo junkie with a shirtless mid-life crisis? And a notable contrast to his predecessor, the increasingly dysfunctional drunkard, Boris Yeltsin, who opened the door to a generation of billion dollar oligarchs? Is he a nationalistic, multi-lingual intellectual from humble origins, who has steered his country from chaos to stability, not least by ensuring that the workers were actually paid? Or is he a Tsarist-style autocrat and anti-Western xenophobe, who has conducted brutal, self-glorifying wars in the North Caucasus, Georgia and Ukraine? Or a politically-agile pragmatist, an astute balancer of Russia's opportunistic and factionalised power elite? Or a vain, power-hungry populist, raiding the national coffers, just like his select, revolving-door entourage of oligarchs? Or a KGB-trained ideologue, who does not shrink from the exile, imprisonment and murder of his opponents? Or, more realistically, some complex, shifting mix of some or all of the above?

Nowhere is this resurgence of a confluence of Cold War presumptions more evident than in the intensification of the West's vilification of Putin. The following explores the reports and analysis of a series of events that, together with the Khodorkovsky trial, Russian military savagery in Chechnya, the Pussy Riot trials, and the country's involvement in events in Ukraine, have marked this steep decline in the West's regard for Putin's leadership during the last two decades or so. In charting the certainties and known uncertainties surrounding the slow and very painful death in a London hospital in November,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

2006 of the former KGB officer, Aleksandr Litvinenko, it concludes that much of public commentary is more indicative of anti-Russian/anti-Putin prejudice than of the existence of firm evidence of culpability.

For a year or more afterwards, Litvinenko's murder was a consistent source of headlines in the Western media, with the reports characterised by a combination of horror at the manner of his dying and outrage at what seemed clearly to be a contemptuous violation of British sovereign law by Russian nationals. It has continued to be recurrently publicised, in radio and television documentaries, feature articles in tabloid and up-market broadsheets, and in books by commentators on Russia, as well as by Litvinenko's colleagues and close friends, and his wife, Marina.

Within hours of his death, the British government confirmed that Litvinenko had been murdered using an exceedingly rare radioactive poison, Polonium 210. Discovered in 1898 by Pierre and Marie Curie, it is found in sub-toxic levels in naturally-occurring substances such as pitchblende, or is a cancer-inducing by-product of cigarettes manufactured from tobacco fertilised using phosphates. Poisoning by the chemical is not only untreatable and invariably fatal, but a microscopic amount in water or food will kill a healthy adult. Theoretically, one gram of the chemical could poison one hundred million people. Litvinenko's post-mortem indicated that he had ingested around five times the lethal dose which, during the following three weeks, spread systematically through his body destroying blood cells and vital organs including his kidneys, liver, spleen, lungs and intestines. According to British political philosopher John Gray's alarming description, Litvinenko's murder 'suggests that nuclear terrorism may already be a reality.'⁷⁹

Subsequent investigations by Scotland Yard also indicated that the murder was either a masterful piece of obfuscation or an amateur operation by a sinister bunch of blockheads who were intent upon vengeance for Litvinenko's betrayal of his compatriots and/or his motherland. For a start, the Polonium 210 left a radioactive trail across London and on British Airways flights to

⁷⁹ Gray, *Op.Cit.* p256

Moscow and Hamburg, Germany, that appeared to directly implicate the Duma politician and former Russian bodyguard Andrei Lugovoi. In hospital interviews, Litvinenko described his meeting with Lugovoi and his associate, former KGB officer Dmitri Kovtun, in the Pine Bar of the Millennium Hotel opposite the American Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square. The hotel waiter recalled the unusually gluey yellow substance in Litvinenko's tea cup and police forensics confirmed traces of radioactive polonium 210 had been distributed around the area where he had been sitting. In a heart-wrenching public statement published within hours of his death, Litvinenko asserted he had absolutely no doubt it was President and former Prime Minister Vladimir Putin who had ordered his assassination:

...as I lie here I can distinctly hear the beatings of wings of the angel of death. You may succeed in silencing one man but the howl of protest from around the world will reverberate, Mr Putin, in your ears for the rest of your life. May God forgive you for what you have done, not only to me, but to beloved Russia and its people.⁸⁰

Six months later, with the police investigation apparently satisfactorily completed, Britain's Director of Crown Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald, charged Lugovoi with murder and called for his extradition from Russia to face the British courts. The Russian government refused the request.

Much of the ongoing media speculation has focused on the motives for the murder. This has generated a bewildering array of possibilities, which over time has served to unravel an easy assumption of Lugovoi's guilt. 'What kind of idiot poisoner one would be, to act so primitively?' was Lugovoi's not-entirely-unconvincing protestation of innocence.⁸¹ More tenuously it seemed, he added that obviously he was being framed by Britain's foreign intelligence service, MI6, who had itself organised the killing with the help of the anti-

⁸⁰ BBC News, 'In Full, Litvinenko Statement,' Friday 24th November, 2006

⁸¹ Chivers C.J. & Cowell, Alan, 'Suspect in Ex-agent's Poisoning Insists He Was Framed,' *New York Times*, June 1, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/06/01/world/europe/01poison.html?pagewanted=print_r=0 accessed 27/10/2014

Putin, exiled Russian tycoon, Boris Berezovsky. The real culprits were more than likely members of the Spanish arm of the Russian mafia, with whom Berezovsky has close links. Putin's supporters issued similarly paranoid-style denials, pointing out that, despite a reported thoroughgoing antipathy towards Litvinenko⁸², the President would hardly benefit from the weeks of damaging international headlines during his former employee's agonizingly-slow death, followed by years of recriminations, as well as a re-freezing of diplomatic relations between Moscow and London. As Putin aide Sergei Yastrzhembsky commented: '...in this case, I think that we are witnessing a well-rehearsed plan of the consistent discrediting of the Russian Federation and its chief.'⁸³ However he did not speculate on the reasons or the timing behind such a plan beyond the implication that the British government was up to its old Cold War tricks of disinformation and propagandising aimed at undermining the current regime.

Yastrzhembsky's denial of any Russian government involvement in the death has been dismissed by Putin's opponents under the rubric: 'Well he would, wouldn't he?'⁸⁴ Still, the Wikileaks' publication in late 2010 of a United States diplomatic cable from their embassy in Paris to Washington's State Department appeared to lend support to the Russian denial. Dated 26 December, 2006, the cable described a dinner conversation in a Paris restaurant a couple of weeks earlier between the American Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism, Henry Crumpton, and the Russian Special Presidential Representative, Anatoliy Safanov. The latter not only claimed that his country's government had no involvement in Litvinenko's murder, but also that 'Russian authorities in London had known about and followed individuals moving radioactive substances into the city but were told by the British they

⁸² Dunlop, John B., 'Post-Communist Political Violence: The poisoning of Aleksandr Litvinenko,' in Hollander, Paul, *Political Violence: Belief, Behaviour and Legitimation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p103

⁸³Stott, Michael, 'Was spy murdered in internal Russian power fight?' *UK Reuters*, Nov 26, 2006 www.ukreuters.com/article/2006/11/27/uk-russia-spy-theory-idUKMOL74810220061127 accessed 28/10/2014

⁸⁴ Callgirl Mandy Rice-Davies' much-quoted court-room response during the 1963 British Cold War scandal involving a Russian embassy naval attaché and Secretary of State for War John Profumo

were under control before the poisoning took place.⁸⁵ The implication from this line of revelation appears to be that the British intelligence services were either incompetent or, for undisclosed operational reasons, chose not to warn Litvinenko that he was in danger. Equally it could be 'a clumsy attempt by Moscow to deflect accusations that its agents were involved in the assassination.'⁸⁶

Other Western commentators more sympathetic to today's Russia have suggested that Litvinenko was far from having been a morally exemplary whistle-blower whose links with the successor organisation to the KGB, the Federal Security Service (FSB), ensured he had exceptional knowledge of the dark side of Russian power. In this respect, they claimed, most of the Western media, including today's Russophobes, were the singularly gullible ones. According to journalist and author Chris Floyd the widespread, unfounded assumption was:

The Cold war had come again, we were told: a bold dissident against the tyrannical Putin regime has been assassinated in the streets of London by the undead KGB wielding strange poisons concocted in secret laboratories.⁸⁷

The contrary claim was that Litvinenko was probably an obsessive, embittered fantasist whose inside information may well have proved to be worthless. His accusations against Putin and his alleged cronies included 'every major crime of the century',⁸⁸ in particular that the Russian leader had been either complicit or personally involved in: drug trafficking in Afghanistan; the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings; the 2002 Moscow theatre siege; the heart-rending 2004 Beslan schoolhouse slaughter; the training of some of the world's

⁸⁵Howard, Jamie and Dyer, Emily, 'The US embassy cables, Wikileaks Cables: Russia was tracking killers of Alexander Litvinenko but UK warned it off,' *The Guardian*, 11/10/2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec11/wikileaks-cables-litvinenko-murder> p2 accessed 28/10/2014

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Floyd, Chris, 'Pale Fire & London Fog Illuminating outliers in the death of Alexander Litvinenko,' 30/06/2011, <http://www.rense.com/general74/pale.htm> p2 accessed 28/10/2014

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p 3

most bloody-minded terrorists including Carlos 'The Jackal' Ramirez and Osama bin Laden's replacement as al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri; the 2005-06 Danish cartoon controversy; the 2006 assassination of the Russian investigative journalist, Anna Politkovskaya; and finally that Putin was a known paedophile.

Moreover, Litvinenko's deathbed revelations had been carefully stage-managed by Tim Bell, a public relations consultant employed by Boris Berezovsky. Otherwise known as Baron Bell of Belgravia, Bell was Margaret Thatcher's media strategy advisor, and had also worked for imprisoned Canadian media mogul Conrad Black, for Rupert Murdoch, and for the Bush administration's Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq after the American invasion.⁸⁹ The speculation also included the suggestion that, for villainous and somewhat opaque reasons, Litvinenko himself had procured the Polonium 210, which resulted in his accidental, self-inflicted, fatal poisoning. Certainly the subsequent forensic investigations by the Institute of Radiation Physics in Switzerland, which led to its strongly contested conclusion that polonium 210 was also the direct cause of Yasser Arafat's allegedly mysterious death in 2004, might suggest that the rare poison was widely available on the black market in Europe and the Middle East.

So far, neither the British official police investigation nor the Swiss scientific analysis appear to have shed any light on the issues of from or by whom the poison had been bought. As a matter of fact, with regard to Litvinenko case, this view is shared by the Greater London Coroner's Office, which in August 2012 announced an inquest would be held the following year.⁹⁰ Almost two years later, whether coincidental or not, within a few days of the downing of Malaysian Airways flight MH17 in Eastern Ukraine, British Home Secretary Theresa May announced the judge-led inquest was to be converted into a public inquiry. Unlike the inquest, the inquiry would enable the investigation

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* pp 1-4

⁹⁰ Judiciary of England and Wales Press Release, 'Sir Robert Owen appointed to Litvinenko Inquest,' August 8, 2012, <http://judiciary.gov.uk/media/media-releases/2012/sir.robert.owen.appointed-litvinenko-inquest> accessed 1/10/2014

to be specifically directed at the culpability of the Russian government.⁹¹ Significantly, whenever deemed necessary by the relevant government agencies, proceedings of the inquiry that considered 'sensitive material, including intelligence documents,'⁹² would be closed to the public. In other words, with regard to the most puzzling aspects of Litvinenko's death, neither the media nor the ordinary citizen may be necessarily any more enlightened by yet another government-endorsed legal investigation.

Russophile William Dunkerley has gone further, indicting the Western media of having already clouded the issue by serving up a mash of unsubstantiated nonsense about Litvinenko, adding the case 'exemplifies the real process through which Putin is regularly slimed internationally.'⁹³ A Senior Fellow with the privately-funded American University in Moscow and self-styled media commentator on Russian affairs, Dunkerley claims to have been commissioned by the organisers of the 2007 World Congress in Moscow of the International Federation of Journalists to study media coverage of Litvinenko's poisoning. Five years later in November, 2011, he self-published *The Phony Litvinenko Murder*. The book claimed that many of the media stories and headlines published in the wake of the murder not only have 'no apparent basis in fact', but also 'a web of mysterious connections went largely unmentioned upon in the press.'⁹⁴ Presumably these connections include Litvinenko's relationship with the Russian oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, MI6, and the Russian mafia.

So what conclusions can be drawn by an earnest researcher, who could be said to walk an unsteady path between fortifying new Cold War prejudice against Russia and the benefit-of-the-doubtism of a re-invented fellow traveller? In sum, the following interpretation might constitute the best kind of fence-

⁹¹ Aglionby, John, Buckley, Neal, and Warrell, Helen, 'UK to hold public inquiry into the death of ex-KGB spy Litvinenko,' *Financial Times*, 22 July, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0b43ee14-1171-11e4-b356-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Erlo5Ltn> p1, accessed 1/10/2014

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Dunkerley, William, 'Alexander Litvinenko: The Russian Spy Story Unraveled -It Turns Out He Wasn't a Spy,' *OpEd News*, February 9, 2012 www.opednews.com/articles/Alexander-Litvinenko-The-by-William-Dunkerley

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

sitting approach: at this stage there is insufficient evidence for any fair-minded court of public opinion to convict Lugovoi. Further inquiry is required, but unlikely to reveal much accessible information, in the areas of MI6's links with, and/or information about Lugovoi, Litvinenko, Berezovsky and his so-called Mafia associates; or on Litvinenko's relationship with employees of the former KGB and of the FSB. As well, more convincing empirical documentation is needed than the speculative reports in the Russian online newspaper, *Gazeta.ru*, that the Polonium 210 used in the poisoning was manufactured and stored in a facility close to Moscow before being transported to London.⁹⁵ Finally, for those outside the impenetrable shadowlands of British intelligence agencies, of apparently double-dealing Russian exiles, of the factional machinations of former Russian oligarchs and KGB employees,⁹⁶ and of pan-European Russian criminality, the motive for Litvinenko's murder remains uncertain and elusive. In other words, we might be well served to reserve judgment about who is guilty or innocent and be wary of whoever we dine with - at least in the world of spies and apparently unprincipled Russian exiles.

At the heart of Russophobic interpretations of the Litvinenko case is the assumption that Putin would not shrink from covertly endorsing extra judicial killing, whether domestically or 'beyond the territory of the Russian Federation.'⁹⁷ If in fact this were the case, most commentators of varied political affiliations share a common concern. As with the USSR during the Cold War and before, incontrovertible evidence of official involvement in such murders undermines the optimistic conviction that any time soon individual human rights and freedoms will be fully integrated into the social and legal fabric of the Russian Federation. It raises yet again, Kymlicka argues, the question of whether the model of liberal pluralism inspired by Isaiah Berlin

⁹⁵ Dunlop, *Op. Cit.* p96

⁹⁶ Sakwa, Richard, *The Crisis of Russian Democracy, The Dual State, Factionalism and the Medvedev Succession*, Cambridge University Press 2011 p358

⁹⁷ Dunlop, *Op. Cit.* p100

can really help to foster in Russia the growth of a stable, democratic system based on the rule of law⁹⁸

For the new Cold War warriors the answer is 'obviously not:' Litvinenko's murder makes demonstrably clear such Western political ideals are proving irrelevant to the Putin regime. For the liberal-minded, sympathetic fellow travellers the answer to Kymlicka's question is 'maybe not:' the issues are shifting and shifty because Russia watching has so often been an ideologically-charged and strategic guessing-game. Thus what distinguishes today's Cold War warriors from re-invented fellow travellers, at least on this affair of an alleged state-sponsored murder, is not simply the identification of an ethically and politically challenging series of events. Rather it is the readiness or reluctance with which each side decides who is or is not to be blamed. As for accusations of gullibility, in the search for convincing evidence of guilt beyond the probabilities and confusions, it seems possible that on this issue at least, both camps may be susceptible to misjudgment anchored in either presumption, prejudice or uncertainty.

⁹⁸ Kymlicka, Will & Opalski, Magda(Eds), 'Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported?' in *Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p1

CHAPTER ONE

COLD WAR LIBERALISM AND ITS LEGACY

I do hate conscientious, coherent, high-minded torturers of human beings into neat and tidy shapes, very much indeed.

Isaiah Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*

There is abundant evidence that all social movements are to be explained by a variety of circumstances and that the ideological sources to which they appeal, and to which they seek to remain faithful, are only one of the factors determining the form they assume and their patterns of thought and action.

Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxist Thought*, Vol 1

The chapter considers the suggestion proffered as a possibility by the American diplomat and influential public intellectual, George Kennan, and scorned by Moscow-based Russia scholars and intellectuals, such as Lilia Shevtsova, Gleb Pavlovsky or Alexander Dugin, that the voices of Liberalism may yet be revitalized by an intelligentsia in today's Russia. So the liberal argument goes, the stronger the voices crying out for freedom, the more inevitable the development of the kind of civil society in which humanitarian and democratic values flourish.

The first section primarily focuses on the influence of the historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin. Inspired by his personal enchantment with what he believed was the rich scholarship in transcultural Anglo-Russian thought, Berlin was driven by a desire to promote a more robust, adaptive form of Liberalism. His hope was to advance beyond what has sometimes been seen as the self-congratulatory traditional British varieties or the messianic neo-Liberalism of

post-World War II America. Described by some as Liberalism's 'last cry,'¹ his formulation of what he called liberal or value pluralism was anchored explicitly in the work of Russian thinkers of the century. Berlin saw himself and other international scholars as having a moral obligation to reclaim and re-evaluate this pre-revolutionary intellectual heritage.² Fostering an awareness of its fertile seam of ideas had the potential, he believed, to enrich the sense of identity and cultural directions of new Russian generations beyond the 70 years of indoctrination under the former Soviet regime. It would also help to shape a *modus operandi* for cultivating a deeper, more tolerant, mutual understanding between the West and Russia.

Out of the literary and philosophical ferment of Russia's century, Berlin believed there had developed 'a kind of distinctive brand of Liberalism, or of radical humanism ...quite different from anything that existed at that time, or later in the West.'³ At the heart of his Liberalism for the contemporary world was his deep-seated belief that the history and influence of this 'remarkable' 'flowering of Russian culture should teach us that life's experiences and travails were perplexing, contradictory and eluded the comforts of transcendental certitudes about the future. As he put it in his frequently-used misquote of Kant: 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.' A more accurate translation from the German: 'Out of timber so crooked, as that from which man is made, nothing entirely straight can be built',⁵ conveys a somewhat less ambiguous emphasis on our inherent vulnerabilities and susceptibilities stemming from what Kennan called the weakness in our moral temperament.⁶

¹ Walicki, Andrzej, 'Encounters with Isaiah Berlin A story of an Intellectual Friendship,' Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2011, p10

² Ibid.

³ Gray, John, 'A Tribute to Isaiah Berlin,' Interview on The Philosophers Zone, 'ABC Radio National, 6 June 2009 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/a-tribute-to-isaiah-berlin/3154626> accessed 28/10/2014

⁴ Berlin, Isaiah, *Russian Thinkers*, Penguin Classics, 2008, p131

⁵ Kant, Emmanuel, *Idea for a General History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, Proposition 6, Bobbs-Merrill 1963

⁶ Berlin, Isaiah, *Isaiah Berlin Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Hardy, Henry & Holmes, Jennifer (Eds), Chatto & Windus, 2009 p213

In such a world, Berlin believed that protecting the inviolability of each individual's liberty was an essential, universal virtue, to ensure humankind moved beyond the systematic extermination programs and ruinous total wars of the century. His views were strongly enmeshed in his rejection of what he perceived as the dangerous utopianism of an influential German metaphysics that had been dominated by Hegelianism. In recent times such a powerful current of thought, he believed, had helped to create a specifically European vein of psychopathology, in which living human beings had become necessary sacrifices on the altar of abstractions such as nation, church, party, class, progress, democracy, or the forces of history.⁷ At the dark heart of this metaphysics was the yoke of historicist inevitability 'as an instrument of moral blackmail that was meant to compel acceptance of communist totalitarianism...forcing individuals to accept the unacceptable under the penalty of finding themselves in the "rubbish bin of history"'.⁸

A closely-related and sometimes malign influence in human affairs was what Berlin called monism. By way of explanation in a long essay on Tolstoy's wracked and tragically self-destructive vision of the world, Berlin drew from the fragments of ancient Greek poetry by Archilochus the line: 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.' Used figuratively, he believed these words marked a deep chasm between writers, thinkers and possibly human beings in general. On one side, the foxes lead lives of scattered experiences and diffuse ideas, embracing the constantly shifting variety of phenomena, not because they incorporate moral or aesthetic principles or reassuring certainties, but simply 'for what they are in themselves...'.⁹ For Berlin, the foxes sometimes represent the best of us, those alluring, larger-than-life characters, whose motto is *carpe diem* and whose response to life's riches and its exigencies is eclectic, maverick, and full of both a tireless curiosity and a creative resilience. Not surprisingly,

⁷ Berlin, Isaiah, 'On the Pursuit of the Ideal,' *The New York Review of Books*, Vol 35, Number 4, March 17, 1988, p7

⁸ Walicki, Andrzej, Op.Cit. p9-11

⁹ Berlin, Isaiah, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. pp24-25

given such a glowing endorsement, Berlin's supporters have often described him as such a fox.

On the other side of the great divide, the hedgehogs '...relate everything to a single central vision...one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, unitary inner vision...'¹⁰ At worst, such monists are the shapers of nightmares, those utopian dogmatists whose fantasies generated the inhumanity and cruelty of Nazism and Stalinism.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Berlin has endured a thoroughgoing savaging from his critics, especially those on the Leftwing of British politics, including the historians of Soviet Union, E.H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher, or more recently Marxist Perry Anderson. Among the more venomous, for example, in this ongoing and often very public 'intellectual foxhunt'¹¹ is the tirade by the Welsh socialist politician and academic, Hywell Williams who described him as 'an English liberal stooge, a cultural representative of a CIA world view and an early example of US celebrity values.'¹² With regard to his ruminations on Russia, Williams accused him of having the narrowly ideological and parochial view that the country was invented by its century intelligentsia and should be deemed a failure in the century 'for not achieving American-style Liberalism.'¹³ Moreover, Berlin's famous evocation of the intellectual world of these Russian thinkers amounted to 'a kind of classic FM version of the history of ideas - a seamless web of biographical essays of the like-minded which blurred rather than illuminated.'¹⁴

Marxist scholar Perry Anderson is somewhat less vituperative, though his criticisms are similar to those of Williams. Anderson writes that although

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cherniss, Joshua, 'Isaiah Berlin: A Defence,' *The Oxonian Review of Books*, spring 2006: volume 5: issue 2, <http://www.oxonianreview.org/issues/5-2/5-2cherniss.html> accessed 28/10/2014

¹² Williams, Hywell, 'An English Liberal Stooge,' *The Guardian*, April 14, 2004, www.the-guardian.com/comment/story/0,3604,1191334,00.html p1 accessed 28/10/2014

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Berlin is unrivalled in the depth and breadth of his literary scholarship, not least with regard to Russia, nevertheless 'he constructs and pursues very general notions, broad *idees maitresses* like monism or positive freedom, through swooping pedigrees down time.'¹⁵ Anderson also describes him as 'a wayward raconteur,'¹⁶ for whom the connections between concepts and consequences are 'not logical, but historical and psychological.'¹⁷ The implication is that Berlin should more appropriately be described as an eclectic literary and cultural critic, especially of 19th century Russia, rather than either a philosopher or a historian of ideas of any substance or originality. And while he may have engendered a renewed focus on the history of ideas in British and American academia, he was more the fox than the hedgehog on matters of methodological rigor or scholarly consistency. Anderson argues that it was primarily the Cambridge school of intellectual history, forged by Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock from the 1970s, that sought to provide a more systematic conceptual depth to generalizations about the patterns of history. These include Berlin's assertions about the ongoing dominance of a cluster of allegedly dangerous ideas, shaped by the Counter Enlightenment and both enthusiastically embraced and persuasively undermined, at least at a theoretical level, by certain liberal-minded members of the Russian intelligentsia, foremost among them being Alexander Herzen. The primary aim of the new generation of Cambridge scholars was to elucidate the extent to which such ideas were circumscribed by contingencies. Interpreting their shifting meaning and relevance from one era to the next required 'detailed analysis of a corpus of work, and its setting in (especially) the discourses and (optimally) the practices of the age....'¹⁸

Arguably, such a methodology could be seen to challenge any easy assessment of the importance of the work of particular Russian thinkers of a century and a half ago for resurrecting what Berlin believed was potentially a path to a

¹⁵ Anderson, Perry, *Zone of Engagement*, Verso, London, 1992, p231

¹⁶ Op.Cit. p236

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. p231

more realistic and humane form of Liberalism, especially during the final years of the Soviet Era and its aftermath. The difficulty here is whether Berlin is little other than an advocate and publicist for liberal pluralism and his so-called philosophising a kind of extended polemic which, amid a profusion of other considerations, extols its alleged unique Russian-inspired aspects. Central to these criticisms are the debates surrounding his understanding of the political and cultural role of Liberalism in Russian society, in particular his shaky optimism about the conceptual relevance of the term to the post-Cold War generations.

Arguably too Berlin's claims about Herzen's inspirational contribution to his formulation of a unique kind of Liberalism are possibly inflated. As suggested above, Berlin's writings are also strongly influenced by Kant's Christian ethics, as well as by his exploration of the works of 18th century cultural philosopher Giambattista Vico and those of the singularly unpleasant Savoyard arch-conservative and proto-fascist, Joseph de Maistre. In other areas, for example with regard to his passionate rejection of Benthamite Utilitarianism, Berlin does make passing reference to Herzen's 'denunciation of general moral rules',¹⁹ which he says in one of his letters is encapsulated in this neo-Kantian rubric: 'The truly free man *creates* his own morality.'²⁰ But, as part of his contentious assertions concerning the nature and limits of individual freedom and the relationship between Realism and morality, Berlin also utilises the universalist ideas of Russian thinkers other than Herzen, including the determined "outsiderism" of Turgenev or Dostoevsky's articulation of the torturer's dilemma in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Here it should be emphasized that these debates have long been a focal preoccupation within the common tradition of Western political philosophy, from the pre-Socratic dialogues of the Sophist Protagoras whose oft-cited maxim was 'Of all things, man is the measure...'²¹ to Hume's rejection of the rationality of ethical judgments, to Berlin's influential twentieth century fellow Oxonians, A.J Ayer

¹⁹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p108

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Freeman, Kathleen, *Ancilla to the pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Harvard University Press, 1954, DK80b1

and J.L Austin. In this context, it is by no means clear that Berlin's Russian thinkers, in particular Herzen, were as arrestingly original as he claims. In a powerfully literary way, this diverse group of liberals, anarchists, reactionaries, Russian Orthodox conservatives and exiles from tsarism emerge from Berlin's accounts as simply participants in a stream of thought that for a couple of thousand years or more has been integral to the pan-European cross-fertilisation of ideas. Perhaps Berlin's primary importance has been to remind new generations of intellectuals and analysts, from both East and West, of those Russian voices that might merit inclusion in any properly comprehensive intellectual history.

The second section considers whether these arenas of contention are seen to be very meaningful to contemporary perceptions of the dynamics of elite power in Putin's Russia, especially with regard to the composition and strength of the Opposition Movement; or whether they have been dismissed by today's commentariat as part of the fond imaginings of an Oxford don ensconced in the halls of academe and shuffling through the irrelevant liberal pluralist dreams of some members of the intelligentsia of Old Russia.

Section One:

Certainly Berlin provides a notable starting point in any account of the vicissitudes of Russia's liberal intelligentsia. Born in Riga, Latvia, in 1909 to an affluent Russian-Jewish family, who were descended on his father's side from rabbis and scholars, Berlin spent much of his early childhood in St Petersburg. As an eight-year-old boy, he watched from an apartment window the tumult on the streets during the October 1917 revolution. It was a stark memory of the power of the mob, one that is said to have influenced his later reflections on the links between intellectual fanaticism and the rise of totalitarianism.² Being both Jewish and wealthy members of the middle-class, the family fled an uncertain future in Russia in 1921. Apart from his employment with the British diplomatic service from 1940 till 1946 in Washington and then Moscow,

²² Gray, *Op.Cit.* p1

for the rest of his life Berlin lived in Britain, becoming one of the country's most prominent public intellectuals.

An accomplished Russian speaker and translator, Berlin grew up steeped in the literary and philosophical ideas of Russia's cultural elite, especially such celebrated figures of the nineteenth century as Vissarion Belinsky, Ivan Turgenev, Pavel Annenkov, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the radical anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, and, above all, the writer and journalist, Alexander Herzen. During his more than forty years at the University of Oxford, Berlin lectured frequently on what he believed was this largely forgotten Russian intelligentsia who had grappled with the pivotal Enlightenment ideas about the meaning of liberty, traditional religion and personal and political morality.

Berlin sought to nurture a scholarly interest in this small isolated group, because he believed their lives had borne witness to the destructive allure of ideas, in particular 'the intellectual and moral attractions of what he called the great despotic visions of the right and left.'²³ As Walicki writes, Berlin saw intellectual history not simply as a counter to such illusory metaphysical yearnings, but much more significantly 'as the self-awareness of a pluralistic society, a common bond between people striving for mutual understanding despite differences in value systems.'²⁴ There is little doubt his influence was to prove considerable. From the second half of the twentieth century, his former students and regular correspondents were some of the most eminent scholars of Russian history and philosophy, including Martin Malia, Aileen Kelly, Evgenii Lampert, S.V. Utechin, as well as Walicki.²⁵

Among Berlin's circle of admiring academic friends and colleagues was also the American diplomat and public intellectual, George Kennan, who in 1958 spent two years as a visiting professor at Oxford. During his time there, the two men's twice weekly lectures had been held consecutively, attracting a crush of people that left standing room only. Kennan's letter, written on his

²³ Ibid. pxxiv

²⁴ Walicki, Op.Cit. p11

²⁵ Harris, Robert, 'Critical essay, Alexander Herzen: Writings on the Man and his Thought,' in Parthe, Kathleen, *A Herzen Reader*, Northwestern University Press, 2012, n90

return to America, makes clear that he believed Berlin's world view was nothing short of inspirational:

You have unquestionably the greatest critical mind of this generation - warmed with a charity that might be the envy of 99 out of 100 Christians. You have taught numbers of us to find meaning where we would never ourselves have found it...²⁶

Berlin shared with Kennan a love of the great classics of Russian literature. He saw these pre-revolutionary intellectuals and artists as a unique generation of passionate, sometimes tormented souls for whom, more than anyone else he encountered in his lengthy career, the unexamined life was not worth living. During the century, they were an increasingly educated stratum of Russian society, but one that remained largely marginalized by birth from progression through the military and bureaucratic ranks of Tsarist society. Denied a political voice, they sought solace in the intellectual struggle to clarify a singular Russian understanding of the intense Western cultural debates surrounding German Romanticism, revolutionary idealism and liberal reformism. Though of aristocratic background, Alexander Herzen was one of them. Looking back across his long years in exile in his autobiographical writings, *My Past and Thoughts*, he movingly describes his circle of friends as a youth crusade of disempowered outsiders:

The Russia of the future existed exclusively among a few boys, hardly more than children, so insignificant that there was room for them between the soles of the aristocracy and the ground.²⁷

Across the decades that followed the failure across Europe of the revolutions of 1848 and which were marked by the final corrosion of the legitimacy of Russian imperial power, many of them faced imprisonment or internal and

²⁶Berlin, Isaiah, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p795

²⁷ Herzen, Alexander, *My Past and Thoughts*, University of California Press, 1973, p275

external exile for their crimes and misdemeanors under the virulent program of Tsarist repression.

In part, Berlin understood such men as a familiar and very influential prototype for 'one of the characteristic figures in the Russian social novel.'² Like Pierre Bezukhov in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Levin in *Anna Karenina*, and later perhaps Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*, these 'superfluous men'²⁹ were perplexed idealists, touchingly naïve, pure-hearted 'champions of persecuted humanity, the saints and martyrs in the cause of the humiliated and the defeated...'³⁰ Inspired by Turgenev's 1850 novella, *Diary of a Superfluous Man*, Berlin also describes them as those who the bullies and victors dismiss as 'feeble flotsam... historical dust, *lishnye lyudi*, those who have missed the bus of history.'³¹

For much of his life among the declining membership of 'the old diaspora of Russian civil society in exile,'³² Berlin was beguiled by this group. As he repeatedly acknowledged, they were not only the inspiration for his commitment to a 'stoical and tragic'³³ liberal pluralism, but also embodied a kind of intellectual and temperamental homecoming. Berlin's series of essays on Russian thought, Anderson said, 'gives touching testimony on every page to this engagement with his culture of origin.'³⁴ In a letter to Edmund Wilson, full of unreserved praise for his essay in the *New Yorker* on Pasternak's novel, *Dr Zhivago*, Berlin wrote that Wilson's rare understanding that the book represented a great act of faith in art and the human spirit moved him to tears, 'living, as I mostly do in the pre-1917 world.'³⁵ At Pasternak's request,

²⁸ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p172

²⁹ Turgenev, Ivan, 'Diary of a Superfluous Man and Other Stories,' Project Gutenberg <http://archive.org/details/thediaryofasuper09615gut>

³⁰ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p172

³¹ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters, 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. pp219-220

³² Malia, Martin, *Russia Under Western Eyes From The Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999, p367

³³ Gray, John, *Isaiah Berlin*, London 1995, p1

³⁴ Anderson, Op.Cit. p237

³⁵ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. pp667-668

Berlin had helped to smuggle the manuscript out of Russia after it was refused publication by the Soviet authorities.

This mix of cultural enchantment and nostalgia is epitomised in the obituary that Berlin wrote in 1978 for his close friend, Nicolas Nabokov, 'one of the last and most attractive representatives of the pre-Revolutionary Russian liberal intelligentsia.'³⁶ A first cousin of novelist Vladimir Nabokov, a composer, luminary of the Russian émigré community in Berlin and Paris, and Secretary-General of the covertly CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom, Nicolas was described by Berlin as: 'Large-hearted, affectionate, honourable, gifted with sharp moral and political insight, and a well-developed sense of the ridiculous, an irresistible source of torrential wit and fancy, immensely sociable...'³⁷ In an amusing inclusion to the biographical glossary in the second volume of Berlin's collected letters, it is also noted that although Nicolas married five times, 'all five wives attended his funeral.'³⁸

Among the circle of 19th century political and cultural exiles from tsarist Russia, Berlin singled out political dissident and journalist Alexander Herzen as having had the most profound impact on his own work. 'I keep on reading and re-reading Herzen,' he wrote to the Trotsky scholar, Elena Levin, 'who seems to me to have been right about almost everything...'³⁹ Berlin described himself as 'utterly devoted to Herzen's memory...[as] one of the greatest as well as the nicest and noblest men in the 19th century.'⁴⁰

For Berlin, Herzen was the archetypal fox. He admired his spirited intellectual independence, his refusal to be whole-heartedly committed to any political doctrine, whether of a revolutionary, democratic or traditionalist variety. Berlin also characterised him with unstinting praise as vehemently politically engaged, a satirical, exceptionally imaginative social observer and, inevitably

³⁶ Berlin, Isaiah, 'Mr Nicholas Nabokov (obituary),' *The Times*, 15 April 1978, p16

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p796

³⁹ Ibid. p456

⁴⁰ Ibid. p477

perhaps, an uncompromising outsider. For Berlin too, Herzen's self-designated role as a kind of loyal opposition to the creeds of his time embodied above all his compassionate and egalitarian moral sensibility. Human beings were complex and vulnerable and should not be forced into the ideological straightjackets that those 'serious-minded and pedantic saviours of mankind, both radical and conservative, were perpetually manufacturing.'⁴¹

Four interlocking features of Berlin's liberal pluralism could be said to have been influenced by Herzen's writing. The first was their mutual acceptance that individuals across the variety of classes and countries have all kinds of radically divergent values and viewpoints. Neither Berlin nor Herzen saw this as implying an embrace of cultural relativism, that absurd position 'encapsulate[d] in the slogan "Liberalism for the liberals, cannibalism for the cannibals."' ⁴²Implicit here is their rejection of the rationalist proposition that all meaning and moral value is no more than a subjective reflection on events, because paradoxically if this were so, then this assertion itself is self-contradictory and therefore has no value or meaning. By contrast, the two men's endorsement of a multifaceted, pluralist perspective aptly reflected what they believed was a morally-sound assessment of the shifting, scrambled and contradictory nature of our day-to-day experiences, the realities of which defy metaphysical explanation. In answer to the question of whether history had a plan, Berlin affirmed Herzen's response in his political testament, *From the Other Shore*: 'There are no timetables, no cosmic patterns, there is only the "fire of life", passion, will, improvisation, sometimes roads exist, sometimes not; where there is no road "genius will blast a path."' ⁴³ In other words, for both men the meaning of the fulfilled, ethical life was in the living of it.

⁴¹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. pp234-239

⁴² Lilla, Mark, Dworkin, Ronald & Silvers, Robert B. (Eds, *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, New York Review Books, 2001, p57

⁴³Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 'Op. Cit. P222

Interestingly, though there is no direct reference to it in Berlin's work, Herzen has been interpreted as 'the founding father and most exemplary exponent'⁴⁴ of a 'third way' between positivist and Idealist philosophical traditions. This doctrine has been described by the Russian historian of ideas and Herzen scholar, Ivanov-Razumnik as 'immanent subjectivism' which he believed gave meaning to our lives by pronouncing humankind to be 'the one subjective goal of development.' Our aim and challenge, he wrote, is to achieve 'the fullness of being,' which was comprised of 'elements of reality,' such as 'reality of sense,' reality of beauty,' reality of justice,' and 'reality of truth'.⁴⁵ This subjectivism, Ivanov-Razumnik said:

is neither a method or means to an end, it is a kind of sociological mindset, in fact, not only sociological, but epistemological, psychological and ethical...[that is] charged with vitality and giving to both an individual and humanity as a whole new subjectively-oriented meaning of life.⁴⁶

Thus, according to Ivanov-Razumnik, as a philosophical and moral stance, Herzen understood his life as such a self-creation. In other words, the starting point for his immanent subjectivism is his uncompromising endorsement of an expansive form of liberal individualism. He believed this meant he should continually strive to live in such ways that he would become an exemplary realization of humanity's finest aspirations. Here it is possible to speculate that there is much that might have appealed to Berlin in Ivanov-Razumnik's explication of Herzen's anti-Hegelian immanent subjectivism, with its inclusion of psychological, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of human cognition. Such a view certainly resonates with his own characterisation of the Russian intelligentsia's high-minded quest for intellectual and moral

⁴⁴ Harris, Op.Cit. p346

⁴⁵ Leontyev, Y.V, *Razumnik Vasilyevich Ivanov-Razumnik*, Extracts from Ivanov-Razumnik, 'Of Life's Meaning,' in *The Biography Dictionary*, Moscow, 1993, dic.academic.ru, p1

⁴⁶ Ibid.

clarity, especially with regard to what he believed were Herzen's exceptional personal qualities .

The second central influence on Berlin of Herzen's work was the latter's insistence that for the most part we should strive to tolerate and accommodate cultural differences, maintaining the kindness to strangers that stems from an acknowledgement of the very human commonality of our needs and wants, for such things as boots and bread, shelter or meaningful work. Above all, this liberal or value pluralism entailed maintaining a constant vigilance against the political theologians and well-intentioned but delusionary ideologues who preach 'that vast suffering in the present must be undergone for the sake of some ineffable felicity in the future'⁴⁷ It also involved an acceptance that not all conflicting values are able to be reconciled, nor complex problems solved. In face of the chaos of life, there is a need for consensus, compromise and an imaginative empathy in human affairs.

The third influence of Herzen's work was his firm belief in the precept fundamental to all forms of Liberalism that the freedom of each individual is more precious than the imposition of a collective pursuit of grand and elusive visions of a better world to come. As Herzen repeatedly emphasized, we have no way of knowing whether the latter are merely empty dreams, though if our reflections on the past are any guide, this seems to be very frequently the case. Berlin cites approvingly Herzen's account of his conversation in London in the early 1850s with the French utopian socialist, Louis Blanc. It began with Blanc's observation 'that human life was a great social duty, that man must always sacrifice himself to society:'⁴⁸

'Why?' I asked suddenly.

'How do you mean "why?"' said Louis Blanc, 'but surely the whole purpose and mission of man is the well-being of society?'

⁴⁷ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*' Op.Cit. p221

⁴⁸ Ibid.

'But it will never be attained if everyone makes sacrifices and nobody enjoys himself.'

'You are playing with words.

'The muddle-headedness of a barbarian,' I replied, laughing.⁴⁹

The fourth area of Herzen's influence was in what Berlin saw as his prescience about an approaching cataclysm, born of these radical utopian ideas, and in which 'the destruction of individual freedom'⁵⁰ was 'highly probable, unless averted by deliberate human effort.'⁵¹ As Harris writes, Berlin despaired of the seeming reality that, in the wake of the human tragedy of 'Stalinism, Nazism and the escalating Cold War...it is Herzen's totalitarian opponents both of the Right and of the Left that have won.'⁵² Implicit in this view is the aversion to historical determinism that Berlin shared with Herzen, evident in this tacit assertion that to be human is to have an inviolable right and a duty to resist the tyranny of others.

Nevertheless, despite such urgings, it remains unclear how, or the extent to which, each of us can choose to rise above the imposed constraints of circumstance, to divert the history of wars and revolutions through the infinitesimals of our personal actions.⁵³ For both Berlin and Herzen it remains fundamentally important that we are encouraged to do so, so that their writings often appear to be a kind of rallying cry to present and future generations to resist totalitarian ideas and ideologues wherever they are encountered. Whether we are able to do so successfully and decisively at any particular time remains a complex, unanswered question.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p239

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Harris, Robert, *Op.Cit.*p366n46

⁵³ *Ibid.* p52

Berlin was also emphatic that Herzen was 'the most realistic, sensitive... and convincing witness to the social life and social issues of his own time.'⁵⁴ From the mid-nineteenth century he lived in London where he established and funded the Russian Free Press. In 1857 he launched *Kolokol*, (The Bell), in which he provided widely-read, critical commentaries on specific events in Russia. These articles have been characterized as consisting primarily of 'accusatory documents' about his country's 'unrelieved political, cultural and moral darkness, with shocking revelations of systematic injustice, cruelty, oppression, and continuous abuses and misgovernment...'⁵⁵ Initially at least his work is said to have played 'a major part in animating the radical movement among the Russian intelligentsia.'⁵⁶

Still, as Berlin acknowledges, over time Herzen was to prove increasingly marginal and ineffective against the rising political tides of his era. By the late 1860s all his publications, including *Kolokol* and the ongoing chapters of his multi-volume autobiography, *My Past and Thoughts*, had come 'to an indeterminate and melancholy end.'⁵⁷ He died in Paris in 1870. In common with Orwell, increasingly his role had been to attack from the sidelines all forms of doctrinaire politics, with little concern for alienating his contemporaries or wider public opinion. It seems the result was that he became almost uniformly unpopular across the spectrum from traditionalists to radicals. As Parthe writes, the conservatives 'found him despicable, liberals...thought him immoderate, and the radical intelligentsia ...called him naïve.'⁵⁸

Significantly, Herzen has also been described as an aristocratic agrarian socialist. He has been seen as an early advocate for a uniquely Russian proto-socialism, an interpretation of his views that perhaps serves to explain his popularity with subsequent generations of the Russian intelligentsia, including

⁵⁴ Ibid. p238

⁵⁵ Lampert, Evgenii, *Studies in Rebellion*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1957, p187

⁵⁶ Kolakowski, Leszek, *Main Currents in Marxist Thought*, Oxford University Press. 1978 p606

⁵⁷ Parthe, Kathleen, Introduction to *A Herzen Reader*, Northwestern University Press, 2012, pxiv

⁵⁸ Ibid. pxx

Lenin. In common with Tolstoy, though, he has also been dismissed as having an overly-romantic, sentimental regard for the Russian peasant village commune. Certainly, socialism was an aspect of his personal philosophy, in which Berlin displayed only a passing interest. For Berlin, Herzen's temporary embrace of socialist ideas is best understood as the 'cultural despair' of a tired and disillusioned young man. Here Berlin quotes approvingly the 'sober realism'⁵⁹ of Turgenev's characterization of his friend's politics as 'a pathetic fantasy,'⁶⁰ of someone for whom in 1849 'the decaying corpse'⁶¹ of Europe had abruptly ceased to be an ideal model for Russia:

...with his old ideals, social justice, equality, liberal democracy, impotent before the forces of reaction in the West, he must find himself a new idol to worship: against the golden calf of acquisitive capitalism, he set up 'the sheepskin coat' ...of the Russian peasant.⁶²

Turgenev's tough-minded response to Herzen was that socialism offered no prospect of 'some coming Russian Messiah...least of all for the Russian peasant who is, in embryo, the worst conservative, and cares nothing for liberal ideas.'⁶³ Nor it seems were Herzen's socialist views to have much practical significance in his homeland during the final decades of the nineteenth century. In the context of Tsar Alexander II's move towards reform with the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the focus of intellectual debate within Russia and among the émigré community has been described as shifting to the practical economic challenges of agricultural modernization.⁶⁴ This too, Kolakowski argues, is part of the explanation of why, beginning in the 1860s, Herzen's star 'began to fade.'⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p310

⁶⁰ Ibid. P308

⁶¹ Ibid. p309

⁶² Ibid. pp308-309

⁶³ Ibid. p310

⁶⁴ Kolakowski. Op.Cit. p607

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Nevertheless, Herzen's anti-autocratic defence of the rights of the common man has meant that, especially in later times and contexts, he has been variously 'invoked as a pioneer'⁶⁶ not only by liberal pluralists such as Berlin, but by both Marxists and populists. The claims of the latter two groups about Herzen's political legacy, Kolakowski argues, are misleading. Of his immediate contemporaries, the Russian revolutionaries who had fled into exile, Herzen wrote with dismissive scorn that they 'throw themselves into the stream with a handbook on swimming.'⁶⁷ And given his background as a wealthy aristocrat, 'free from material cares and living in the comfort of Western capitals',⁶ Herzen's socialism has been traduced as an entirely theoretical desire to extend his values and advantages to everybody.⁶⁹ As Parthe writes, he saw 'no great virtue in real or assumed poverty',⁷⁰ took pleasure in 'good wine, expensive cigars, and French snuff',⁷¹ and he believed his wealth gave him 'the freedom to accomplish his political goals.'⁷² Ironically, in view of his dealings to secure his substantial family fortune with the nineteenth century House of Rothschild and his close friendship with the banker James de Rothschild, foremost amongst his aims was to oppose what he repeatedly denounced as the barren, competitive spirit of capitalism, which destroyed 'the spontaneous solidarity of all human beings.'⁷³

This scepticism about the genuinely populist roots of Herzen's agrarian socialism is echoed in Lenin's scathing account of what he described as the 'spiritual shipwreck' initially embodied in his youthful ideas. Writing in 1912 on the 100th anniversary of Herzen's birth, predictably perhaps Lenin claimed that they contained 'not a grain of socialism,' but only 'bourgeois illusions', composed of 'sentimental phrases, benevolent visions, which were the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p606

⁶⁷ Herzen, Alexander, *My Past and Thoughts, Volume 3*, Chatto & Windus London 1968, p1441

⁶⁸ Kolakowski, *Op.Cit.* p606

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Parthe, *Op.Cit.* pxii

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Kolakowsky, *Op.Cit.* p606

expression at *that time* of the revolutionary character of the bourgeois democrats....'⁷⁴ It was only in the 1860s, Lenin insisted, that Herzen learned the lessons of 1848 about the impossibility of a fair deal for the masses in any trade-off between Russia's servile liberals and tsarism's butchers and hangmen. Among the regime's so-called henchmen were the soldiers of the Russian Imperial army, whose massacre of 50 Polish peasants in Bezdna in 1861 Herzen had very publicly condemned. He had thus 'raised aloft the banner of Revolution,' Lenin conceded,⁷⁵ against the liberal elite whom Herzen himself described in *Kolokol* as 'the wretches, weed-like people, jellyfish, who say we must not reprove the gang of robbers and scoundrels that [sic] is governing us.'⁷⁶ For Lenin, this meant he was a man whose more mature political consciousness demonstrated that he had successfully overcome his soft-headed, class-ridden, liberal democratic tendencies. Moreover, Lenin said, his 'selfless devotion'⁷⁷ on behalf of the Russian proletariat had not been wasted, 'even if long decades divide the sowing from the harvest.'⁷⁸

Still, despite the strong rhetoric, Lenin's attempt to commemorate Herzen as an accredited member of the revolutionaries' Hall of Fame, seems to be more a matter of timely Bolshevik propaganda than an accurate analysis of his philosophy. Throughout much of his later writing, Kolakowski points out, Herzen made emphatically clear his dislike of the European radicals, for 'their primitivism and contempt for the non-utilitarian values of art and education, their dogmatism, intolerance, and cult of revolutionary apocalypse...'⁷⁹ There is no evidence these perspectives changed in the decade or so before his death in 1870, and it seems highly likely he would have held the same critical views of the Lenin's Bolshevism.

⁷⁴ Lenin, V.I. 'In memory of Herzen,' Marxist Internet Archive, <http://www.Marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1912/may/08c.htm> p2

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p6

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* as cited by Lenin, pp6-8

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p6

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Kolakowski, *Op.Cit.* p607

Similarly, the strong stance against religion that Herzen had in common with Berlin also does not appear to suggest that he was in any way an enthusiast for Marxist philosophy. Nor does his rejection of the sublime Hegelian teleology that was an integral feature of his self-education as a young man, and which he replaced with a passionate commitment to scientific materialism.⁸⁰ In his later years as an exile in London and Paris, Herzen's most trenchant criticisms were directed at what he saw as extremism on all sides of politics. It was a stance which Berlin eulogized as reflecting Herzen's admirable determination to turn in the light the terrifying possibilities unleashed by the conflicts between the need for revolutionary change and the price in individual suffering that would be paid for it. Of his autobiography, *My Past and Thoughts*, Berlin writes that it was Herzen's

greatest title to immortality...his political and social views were arrestingly original, if only because he was among the very few thinkers of his time who in principle rejected all general solutions, and grasped, as very few thinkers have ever done, the crucial distinction between words that are about words, and words that are about persons and things in the real world.⁸¹

Whatever his propensity for hyperbole, in Berlin's literary and philosophical portrait Herzen emerges not so much as arrestingly original, but as extraordinarily difficult to categorise. His caustic approach to Russia's nineteenth century liberals as generally venal and cowardly, together with his similar contempt for revolutionary ideologues, conservative monarchists, crypto-fascists, and for the anarchism of his old friend and countryman, Mikhail Bakunin, has the malodour of pluralist intolerance, a case perhaps of a propagandistic tendency to serve up the worst possible insults for what he believed were the best possible reasons. One of the significant questions here is the extent to which his condemnation of Russia's liberals in particular has echoed across 150 years, for example, in Lenin's work, or during the

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. pp238-239

Khrushchev thaw in the 1950s following the death of Stalin, or during the Yeltsin presidency after the fall of the Soviet regime, or in analyses of the contemporary opposition movement. Inseparable from this question are the debates surrounding what it means to talk of an exceptional Russian liberal intelligentsia, an issue which is further developed in Chapter Three.

In any event, for Berlin at least, Herzen had much to teach subsequent generations both in Russia and the West. As suggested above, fundamentally Berlin believed Herzen was central to an alternative vision of Russia's intellectual heritage which 'in revolutionary Leninist doctrine and Stalin's autocratic rule...' had been 'stifled to a trembling silence...'⁸² Here Berlin was not only seeking to rekindle a radically different philosophical tradition for a post-World War II intelligentsia in Russia, but at the same time to challenge the 'totalitarian image'⁸³ of the country that had become increasingly dominant in the West during the Cold War and its aftermath. In other words, Berlin was harkening back to a humane, liberal stream of thought, by deliberately conjuring Herzen as 'something of a poster boy, the standard bearer of a rich and variegated Russian legacy that was being smothered both in ideological and concrete terms.'⁸⁴

Not surprisingly perhaps, Herzen emerges as closely resembling Berlin's *doppelgaenger* (or vice versa). Both men could be characterized as foxes, with a passionate intellectuality and a formidable immersion in a pan-European literary and philosophical canon that was strongly inclusive of Russian as well as Western thought. They both wrote tracts that were poetical, witty, polemical and deceptively accessible. They were both outsiders in their adopted British culture, with a similarly powerful sense of moral obligation to project their ideas back to the land of their birth⁸⁵ through an open conversation with their country's intellectuals that was full

⁸² Harris, *Op.Cit.* p350

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Parthe, *Op.Cit.* pxxiv

of 'facts, and tears, and theory.'⁸⁶ Independently wealthy and privileged, neither man was a direct-action politician, a joiner in the protest rallies on the streets of London, Paris or Berlin. Above all, they appeared to hold in common a belief in the power of high culture to foster new social directions, underpinned by the conviction that once the world of ideas had been refashioned by resolute, determined individuals, reality cannot hold out for long. As Berlin writes:

But whatever may be thought about the part played by thought in affecting human lives...the chief importance of these [Russian] thinkers, historically speaking, lies in the fact that they set in train ideas destined to have cataclysmic effects not merely in Russia itself, but far beyond her borders.⁸⁷

Thus the intellectual challenge in understanding such an elitist conviction is how to reconcile this shared commitment of Berlin and Herzen to liberal pluralist individualism with their apparent belief in the notion of *Zeitgeist*, that is, in the demonstrable power of the dominant ideas of an era to determine cultural and political directions, however strongly the renegades and heretics may rail against them. Certainly neither Herzen nor Berlin appeared to think that this seeming dilemma could be readily explained as a straightforward interactive relationship between discarnate abstractions and human activities, as if the progress of history were composed of a conspiracy of disembodied Eureka moments in which, for reasons that are never immediately apparent, big ideas such as freedom or individualism or revolution or democracy become the focus of the applied politics of a particular generational time and tide. As suggested above, implicit here is that neither man accepted any taint of a deterministic Hegelian transcendentalism, more specifically the assertion in Hegel's philosophy of

⁸⁶ Herzen, Alexander, *Letters Volume 2*, as cited in Parthe, Op.Cit. pxvii

⁸⁷ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p131

history that ‘...no man can overleap his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit.’⁸⁸

Implicit too is their dismissal of the Hegelian notion that human consciousness and the external world were somehow two faces of the same ethereal, unified world. In his *Collected Letters*, for example, Berlin repeatedly laments the modish preoccupation of his academic colleagues with what he deemed to be Hegel’s impenetrable ravings. Writing in 1958 to the historian of American philosophical thought, Morton White, Berlin described Hegel as ‘all theology and cosmic feeling,’⁸⁹ adding that:

it seems absolute gibberish to me. How can it not have done so to everyone else? I simply cannot tune in. All I hear is atmospherics.⁹⁰

Equally, for Herzen the outcome of his youthful wrestle with Hegelianism was also his later rejection of the concept of a *Weltgeist* (World Spirit) with its guarantees of an optimistic teleological dimension to the march of history, whatever the horrendous exigencies of life in his beloved Russia under tsarism.

In common with Herzen, Berlin clearly saw his ideas as anchored in the philosophical and historical legacies of a post-Enlightenment world. As noted above, he was a member of the generations from Eastern and Central Europe who fled the Bolsheviks and the rise of Stalin in the 1920s and, a little more than a decade later, Hitler’s Germany. For many of these refugees, their self-imposed challenge was to try to make some sense of what they saw as the reversion to barbarism across the blood-stained terrains of Old Europe, that for instance had been prefigured in Herzen’s writing. According to Russian poet and Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, these Cold War intellectuals were driven by heartfelt reasons, beyond tales of vainglory and villainy, for

⁸⁸ Hegel, Georg, ‘Lectures on the Philosophy of History,’ in Magee, Alexander, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p262

⁸⁹ Berlin, *Enlightened Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p623

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

scrutinising our history of thought. 'Given the fruit this century came to bear..., ' Brodsky wrote in his tribute to Isaiah Berlin in the early 1990s, 'These reasons are revulsion and fear.'⁹¹

It was in this context that Berlin sought to re-conjure Herzen as a pioneer of an exceptional form of Liberalism to stand against the dangerous monism of the hedgehogs. Nevertheless, outside Berlin's preoccupation with nineteenth century Russian thinkers and cultured, highly-politicised émigrés, whose lives had been damaged by the savagery of the twentieth century's eruption of oppression and war, other eminent scholars of the era were exploring a similar terrain. Like Berlin, their central concerns were with the consequences of what they believed became degraded, ideologically-distorted interpretations of Marxism, Enlightenment Idealism and Progressivism. These scholars included the fiercely anti-Hegelian LSE Professor, Karl Popper, as well as the interdisciplinary, neo-Marxist Frankfurt School's Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and cultural theorist and proponent of Judaic mysticism, Walter Benjamin. Herzen's and Berlin's anti-Romanticism, anti-progressivist views were certainly given strong endorsement by these non-Russian scholars. Established during the upheavals of the Weimar years in Germany, the Frankfurt School, in particular, sought to account for the rise in Russia and Germany of what was deemed to be a radically new and extreme form of despotism which became known as totalitarianism.

In common with Berlin and Herzen's critiques, much of this scholarship looked back to the ferment of ideas stimulated by Hegelianism, especially as it threaded through the debates in nineteenth century German metaphysics and the myriad ways it was considered to have forged the subsequent turmoil of reform and revolution. For many of these thinkers the answer to the century's descent onto barbarism lay in the dehumanizing, technocratic notion of human perfectibility that they saw as characterising the rise of capitalism and modernity. Of German-Jewish descent, Walter Benjamin, for instance, shared Berlin's abhorrence of Nazism and his philosophy of history

⁹¹ Brodsky, Joseph, 'Isaiah Berlin: A Tribute,' in Margalit, Edna & Avishai (Eds) *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, Hogarth London, 1991, p205

had much in common with Herzen's view that belief in historical progress was a manipulative delusion. In Benjamin's poetical evocation of the Angel of History inspired by the Paul Klee drawing, *Angelus Novus*, the angel stands with outspread wings buffeted by the violence of a storm blowing from Paradise:

The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed....(But) the storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while...ruin upon ruin...piled before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁹²

Still, although like many of his academic contemporaries, Berlin was preoccupied with the fate of the wretched suffering humanity that was emblematic of the first half of Europe's century, there appears to be no evidence that he had much interest in the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School. At least there is no direct mention of their work in his philosophical writings, nor in the more than eight hundred pages of correspondence with friends and colleagues in his post-World War II volume of collected letters.

Perhaps an exception could be made with regard to his several paragraphs scorning the typical Central European use of the 'foggy obfuscating woolly old-fashioned'⁹³ concept of alienation in a doomed attempt to amalgamate the work of Marx and Freud. The term was 'not so much metaphysical as historical and theological,' Berlin wrote,⁹⁴and could only be at all helpful 'if cleaned up.'⁹⁵ Moreover, the use of such an empirically nebulous, 'genuinely obscure notion,'⁹⁶he adds, to support some Idealist 'in the worst sense'⁹⁷ re-

⁹² Benjamin, Walter, *Ninth Thesis on the Philosophy of History*. http://www.barglow.com/angel_of_history.htm pp1-2, accessed 28/10/2014

⁹³ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p712

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

interpretation of their work would have these two 'very iconoclastic and tough-minded'⁹⁸ men turning over in their graves.

Nor in general terms does Berlin have much good to say of that monstrous traitor to our civilization,⁹⁹ Marx, or about the 'psychological rot'¹⁰⁰ of the author of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud. Certainly he did not endorse what he saw as their contribution to post-modernist nihilism or their derisive accounts of modern materialist man, at least in his more bourgeois manifestations. Instead he turned to Herzen, whose writings were yet to be fully included in the canon of European thinkers, in a bid to erect what he believed was a decent, commonsensical form of Liberalism that was 'an attractive vision of life, and one not tied to a quasi-religious belief in progress.'¹⁰¹ He believed it was also one that not only had 'strong roots in the past,'¹⁰² but also offered hope for a reinvented Russia.¹⁰³

Much of the criticism of Berlin's liberal pluralism has focused on two areas of contention. The first centres on accusations that it amounts to little more than the academically sheltered posturing of an intransigent Cold War warrior with a love of old Russia and a loathing for the Soviet regime. The second questions what it has been argued turned out to be his unjustified aspiration for a role for the Russian liberal intelligentsia in the country's future after the fall of the Soviet regime. As indicated above, this second theme is the subject of Chapter Two's exploration of intellectuals and the Putin regime.

The following focuses exclusively on what has been disparaged as Berlin's 'Cold War Liberalism'¹⁰⁴ through the lens of his long association with George

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p215

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p468

¹⁰¹ Gray, John, 'The Cosy Philosopher, Enlightening Letters 1946-1960,' *Literary Review* http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/gray_06_09.html accessed 28/10/2014

¹⁰² Harris, Robert, Op.Cit. p349

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mueller, Jan-Werner, *Fear and Freedom: On Cold War Liberalism*, Princeton University, 2006, http://www.princeton.edu/~jmueller/ColdWarLiberalism/JWmueller-2006pdf_p3 accessed 28/10/2014

Kennan. As outlined in the introduction, Kennan was the primary contributor to the formulation of the Containment Doctrine in US foreign policy in the wake of World War II. To Kennan, the doctrine's foundations were centrally determined by his embrace of Berlin's liberal pluralism. What could equally serve as a paraphrase of the political philosophy of either Berlin or his historical shadow, Herzen, can be found, for example, in the work of Kennan's official biographer, Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis. Drawing on one of his many interviews during their almost 30 years of friendship, Gaddis summarized Kennan's liberal internationalism as based on the view that the great enemy in this age's struggle to secure freedom for all the world's peoples was 'abstraction, which promised perfection while denying the imperfections of human nature.'¹⁰⁵ Without enlightened global norms born of soft diplomacy and toleration, Kennan explained, the result would be 'the polar night of icy darkness,' which earlier had been evoked by the sociologist, Max Weber,¹⁰⁶

...an international Antarctica, in which there would be no germs because there would be no growth, in which there would be no sickness because there would be no people, in which all would be silence and peace because there was no life.¹⁰⁷

The relationship between Berlin and Kennan was formed during World War II in Washington's elite circles of government, and subsequently in Moscow where both men held diplomatic postings in 1945. Perhaps its most significant moment came with their interchange of letters in the early 1950s. Berlin's reply has been reprinted repeatedly and provides one of his most succinct accounts of the social and philosophical issues with which he wrestled.

By his own admission, it was almost nine months before he was able to respond to Kennan's letter of May 1950, which had expressed his anguish over

¹⁰⁵Gaddis, John Lewis, *George Kennan An American Life*, Penguin 2011, p416

¹⁰⁶ Weber, Max 'Political Writings,' in Lassman, Peter & Spiers, Ronald (Eds), Cambridge University Press, 1994, pxvi

¹⁰⁷ Gaddis, Op.Cit. p416

what he had seen of the savagery of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and Fascist Germany. Kennan poignantly described the brittle optimism that made him determined to cling to the 'supreme make-believe'¹⁰⁸ that 'in the long run each man can be taught to rise above himself.'¹⁰⁹ To refuse to manipulate and exploit the points of weakness in others, Kennan wrote, to always acknowledge the ultimate dignity of every human being, was a measure of the success of civilization. Without this indispensable appeal to reasonable, compassionate processes, humankind shames himself as well as others:

I really believe that this thing that the totalitarians have done - this taking advantage of the helpless corner of man's psychic structure - is the original sin. It is this knowledge which men were not supposed to develop and exploit...which Milton really had in mind as his reason for the fall of man....¹¹⁰

Berlin, garrulous and sociable, the Paganini of the lecture hall,¹¹¹ led a busy life of travel, teaching at Oxford and maintaining a voluminous correspondence with many of the notable artistic and political figures of his day. But he also described himself as deeply unsettled by Kennan's letter, because he saw it as directly confronting the core of his entire moral beliefs. How was he to answer Kennan's troubled conclusion that ethics seemed to amount to little more than a blind faith in our capacity for good against the odds? 'I began many letters,' Berlin finally replied, 'but each seemed trivial, and what Russians called *suetlivo* - full of hurrying sentences, scattered and moving in all directions at once.'¹¹²

In the event, Berlin's response to Kennan extended to almost eight densely-written pages, ranging across a history of ethics from Judaic traditions to

¹⁰⁸ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p212

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p214

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Williams, Hywell, 'An English Liberal Stooage,' Op.Cit.

¹¹² *Ibid* 213

Christianity, Islam and secular humanism which he saw as interwoven by the bedrock biblical belief in the Golden Rule that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. But he came back frequently to its formulation in Kantian ethics which he believed had shaped our moral understanding since the beginning of the nineteenth century. For Berlin, Kant's categorical imperative was based on the comforting certainty that we have an inherent capacity to apply our reason to ensure that we treat humanity '...never merely as means to an end, but always at the same time as an end,'¹¹³This implied that even in the most constrained circumstances 'every human being is assumed to have the capacity to choose what to do, and what to be...'¹¹⁴ Dostoevsky's fictional character, Ivan Karamazov, 'speaks for us all,'¹¹⁵ Berlin wrote, when he rejects 'the worlds upon worlds of happiness which may be bought at the price of the torture to death of one innocent child...'¹¹⁶ Moreover, this universal moral understanding constituted a foundation for the optimism about our potential for self-transcendence that Kennan feared was a form of self-deception.

The problem here is that Berlin's claim that we all share a humane conviction that the sacrifice of even a single child constitutes too high a cost for a delusionary utopian 'Kingdom Come' is unsupported by history, myth or anthropology. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in blind obedience to God's will is one of the horror stories of the Old Testament. Though rare, it is nevertheless the case that from ancient times, to the pre-Columbian Incas of Peru, to contemporary Uganda, there have existed cultures that have not shrunk from the ritual murder of children in the hope of some ineffable benefit. By implication, Berlin's reply to Kennan is more morally exhortatory than either factual or philosophically persuasive, a case of if only wishing made it so that appears to have much in common with Kennan's striving for a stoical optimism.

¹¹³ Kant, Emmanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd Edition Hackett p30

¹¹⁴ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p14

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p215

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Or does it? Despite the long history of cruelty and barbarism in pan-European culture, Berlin held fiercely to the view that there existed underlying traditions passed down the centuries, in which the ethical rejection of such savagery was clearly anchored in the natural human sympathies of reasonable people. The question here is the extent to which Berlin's sanguine, minimalist value pluralism rested in his own liberal temperament and in his adopted British culture, especially at Oxford University.¹¹⁷ Although he sought to establish that this liberal pluralist tradition included Russia, he obviously did not believe that this meant human beings could be relied upon to behave compassionately, whatever the contingencies. As Lee Hong-koo argues, the issue thus becomes how to derive practical policy recommendations from Berlin's pluralism to encourage the diffusion of such liberal values to countries where it might be considered notably absent.¹¹⁸ In such radically different cultures, forging a liberal consensus may prove elusive. For example, as Chow Chung Po argues, contemporary Chinese anti-liberals, who became well-versed in Berlin's Liberalism after the end of the Cold War, have suggested pragmatically that if value pluralism provides no clear common guidelines for us to adjudicate between incommensurate values, 'then maybe some individuals are in a better position to make choices for others in the event of conflicts between legitimate values.'¹¹⁹ In reality, given Berlin's milieu was the elite world of 'Oxbridge', of Europe's wealthy upper classes, of successful intellectuals and artists, as well as leading politicians and businessmen, this may have been a view with which paradoxically he necessarily always disagreed.

Preyed upon by his occasional descent into black depressions, especially about seemingly empty concepts such as the progress of civilisation, Kennan held more pessimistic and much less consistent sentiments. For instance, in his account of the dispatches to the American government from the US minister to the St Petersburg court of Nicholas I in 1850, which he claimed had been

¹¹⁷ Hong-koo, Dr Lee, 'Isaiah Berlin's Cold War Liberalism,' *The Asian Institute for Policy Studies, Conference Summary, August 13 2012* p2

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p3

found in a pile of rubbish,¹²⁰ Kennan concluded despairingly that not much in Russia was likely to change. 'Bolshevism,' he wrote, 'with its hullabaloo about revolution,' was not 'a turning point in history, but...only another milepost in Russia's "wasteful, painful progress from an obscure origin to an obscure destiny."' ¹²¹

In Berlin's later interviews with Kennan's biographer, Gaddis, as well as in his private prescriptions of his own encounters with Kennan, he concurs with the view that much of what the man saw and felt were circumscribed by his unfortunate habits of mind. Kennan's narrow, humourless pietism, Berlin said, condemned him to an obsessive pursuit of the moral high-ground, encapsulated in the notion of principle above pragmatism. With his gossipy fondness for psychologising about his acquaintances, Berlin also characterized Kennan as a divided soul. On the one hand, he was the highly-professional geostrategic Realist of America's Cold War, at times wonderfully comical to observe, with his a 'grey fanatical passionate Presbyterian appearance,'¹²² so that for Berlin his company was like being:

in the presence of a dedicated preacher, in front of whom one can't tell off-color jokes. You can't enjoy yourself too openly. No boisterous laughter permitted. To some extent he casts a lampshade over the room. Bright lights have to be dimmed a little. ¹²³

On the other hand, Berlin described him as 'in the empyrean,'¹²⁴ a visionary, with a mystic's ethereal attunement to discordances in the material and emotional world around him. Kennan's diary notes, for instance, describe his visit to St Petersburg in 1945, to a city where there has 'by some strange quirk of fate - a previous life perhaps? - been deposited a portion of my own

¹²⁰ Gaddis, *Op.Cit.* p97

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, *Op.Cit.* p739

¹²³ Gaddis, *Op.Cit.* pp213-14

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p402

capacity to feel and love, a portion - in other words - of my own life.'¹²⁵ His intimate, acutely empathic, filmic descriptions of the city lay claim to spectral memories of Russia's turbulent past:

...of the crowd making across the square towards the Winter Palace on the night the place was stormed...of the unhealthy days of Leningrad's spring thaws...of the cellar apartments,... full of dampness, cabbage smells and rats...the people cutting up fallen horses in the dark, snow-blown streets during the (German) siege.¹²⁶

At times such vivid imaginings appeared to result in a kind of fragility, what from Berlin's perspective was an over-active, self-imposed moral anguish. As he recalled in later years, Kennan 'loved the Russians,'¹²⁷ and was 'appalled by evil';¹²⁸ he was also volatile, easily wounded and unsuited to the slavery that marked success in government service: 'He doesn't bend...,' Berlin observed, 'He breaks.'¹²⁹The implication here is of a man burdened by the unstable combination of staunchly ethical professional earnestness and an intense poetical sensibility.

At least this is the portrait of Kennan that is amplified in Gaddis's very detailed biography from which Berlin's descriptions are drawn. In a more endearing anecdote, Gaddis describes Kennan the Compassionate Cultural Evangelist on a stopover during a series of flights from Siberia to Moscow in 1945 reading Tolstoy aloud in his fluent, elegant Russian¹³⁰ to an audience of his fellow passengers. Among them was an illiterate elderly woman with whom he shared his lunch and whose reflections on life displayed 'all the pungency and charm of the mental world of those who had never known the

¹²⁵ Ibid. p204

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid. p214

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p483

¹³⁰ Ibid. p200

printed word.’¹³¹ Reflecting on his two week journey east across the expanses of the steppes, Kennan emphatically and somewhat chimerically distinguished the ‘unparalleled ruthlessness and jealousy’¹³² of the government from the many ordinary Russians he encountered, who were much deserving of America’s sympathies. In his experience here was ‘a talented, responsive people, capable of absorbing and enriching all forms of human experience,’¹³ emerging from the horrors of the war ‘profoundly confident that they are destined to play a progressive and beneficial role in the affairs of the world, and eager to begin to do so.’¹³⁴ His conclusion, which subsequently characterized all his observations about East-West relations during the Communist era, as well as during its aftermath under the Yeltsin and Putin presidencies, was that the ‘wise American’ would leave the country to find its own path to the future ‘unencumbered by foreign sentimentality as by foreign antagonism.’¹³⁵ It is a perspective that not only reflects the influence of Berlin’s liberal pluralism, but has also been instrumental in the attitudes to foreign policy of prominent Western intellectuals, including Henry Kissinger and his cohorts of the like-minded at the US Council on Foreign Relations.

Tacitly, Berlin’s judgment of Kennan, as well as in his extended literary portrait of Herzen, reflected his fascination with contradictions of character. He believed that, like Kennan, Herzen too embodied this ‘curious combination of idealism and scepticism,’¹³⁶ that is, the insistence that our finest ideals can be achieved, while at the same time acknowledging the futility of such a conviction, given it frequently proves to be inconsistent with our experience that less honourable paths are taken or our choices ill-informed. In a private conversation with Walicki at Oxford in 1960, Berlin agreed that ‘Turgenev’s “hamletism” was ‘...an essential constituent of the outlook ...which he called

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p230

“value pluralism”.¹³⁷ Again here he is implicitly evoking the fundamental distinction between two kinds of humanity, this time as it is articulated in Turgenev’s essay ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’,¹³⁸ On the one hand, there are the ‘fox-like’ superfluous men, those liberal-minded Russian Hamlets whose capacity for effective action is questionable. On the other hand, there are the hedgehog-like monist Don Quixotes, the dogmatic, one-dimensional men ‘capable of action thanks to...simple uncritical belief.’¹³⁹

For Berlin, the consolations of philosophy lay in the enormous, never-ending joy of exploring such ideas about the puzzles of human nature and the world. It was probably his great good fortune that most of the time he could do so from the comfort of an armchair in his rooms at Oxford University. Still, like Kennan, Berlin claimed to see himself as besieged and sometimes challenged by his ‘empathetic understanding of the enemy.’¹⁴⁰ The result was that amid events that seemed to demand hard-nosed political engagement, his hesitancy suggested little more than the worldly articulation of a clear, unequivocally liberal path forward was a never-ending, provisional work-in-progress. But unlike Kennan, Berlin was more able to intellectualise such dilemmas as fundamental to the human condition and so minimize the torment of having to make impossible, blind choices about what practically we should do next.

Nevertheless, this ‘hamletism’ helps to explain one of the focal limitations of Berlin’s liberal pluralism which, for instance, did much to undermine its potential appeal to post-Cold War Chinese intellectuals. Specifically it was this inability to always reconcile, either practically or in the abstract, the demands of political immediacies with conflicting, allegedly universal precepts. For those of us with sufficient agility to conceptualise potential points of moral inconsistency out of the tangles of contingencies, Berlin’s answer to the engendered contradictions seemed to be ‘do the very best you can in an imperfect world.’ After all, whether our actions result in tragedy or

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ As cited in Walicki, *Op.Cit.* p9

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Walicki, *Op.Cit.* p10

in farce is a matter over which we have almost no control. Examples here might include whether, and in what specific circumstances, might it be possible to be at the same time both fair and generous, sympathetic and truthful, or empathic and resolute. Arguably though, it should be noted that Hamlet's tragedy was not centrally his inability to negotiate a way forward out of such polarized ethical challenges, but his descent into an existential nightmare in which morality itself seemed to have lost all meaning. At least in the accounts of Gaddis and Berlin, this was a dark undertow in human understanding that Kennan was not always able to resist.

As Brodsky suggests, what may be above all important about liberal pluralism is not so much the song, but its exemplary singer. Other peoples' lives were Berlin's forte¹⁴¹ and his philosophy never aspired to be a roadmap for intellectual or moral problem-solving. Rather it insisted on a humane personal world view that was 'older and more generous than what it observes.'¹⁴² In his carefully-worded, poetical tribute, Brodsky evokes Berlin's captivating, energetic immersion in 'the life of the mind,'¹⁴³ alert to the currents of ideas that deceive and brutalise us, and fox-like in his evasion of the iron cages of Rationalist systems of thought. For Brodsky, he was:

...neither a philosopher nor an historian of ideas, not literary critic or social utopian, but an autonomous mind in the grip of an outward gravity, whose pull extends its perspective on this life insofar as this mind cares to send back signal.'¹⁴⁴

Moreover, Brodsky adds, Berlin goes beyond Herzen's struggle to re-invent the mental climate of Russia and takes on 'the entire world's weather,' and 'short

¹⁴¹ Brodsky, Op.Cit. p214

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p213

of being able to alter it, he still helps one endure it...One cloud less - if only a cloud in one's mind - is improvement enough...'¹⁴⁵

The possibility that Berlin was an exceptional human being whose feet were firmly planted in the mess of human actuality while his mind soared effortlessly towards the higher reaches of our understanding, seemed to be no guarantee he had all the angles covered. His eclectic and reductionist debunking of any taint of totalitarian thinking in what he saw as the legacy of monism in counter-Enlightenment metaphysics, and his insistence on the wayward, unpredictable, inconsistent nature of our experiences points to other difficulties in his liberal pluralism. As Cauter writes:

He is always commanding the intellectual battlements of a besieged and imminently beleaguered city. Few have propounded the uncertainty principle in more certain tones. Few have advanced the virtues of...pluralism in more positive terms. Few have been more dogmatic about the perils of dogmatism. No one has more clearly insisted that historical outcomes are inevitably not inevitable.¹⁴⁶

In other words, Berlin was perhaps one of those rare individuals for whom the certainty of uncertainty appeared to arouse only passing moments of the private anguish of a Hamlet. Rather throughout all his writing, his world view was underpinned by his notion of a flexible, secular humanism. In common with Herzen, he admitted to having no interest in religious issues, even those with which his beloved nineteenth century Russian thinkers had grappled. For example, in reviewing Walicki's exceptional accounts of the lives and thought of these intellectuals, Berlin insisted somewhat sardonically that 'he had "no understanding" of the "mystical theology"'¹⁴⁷ of the Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyev and thought irrelevant to include 'monadological

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cauter, David, *Isaac & Isalah, The Covert Punishment of a Cold war Heretic*, Yale University Press, 2013 p43

¹⁴⁷ Walicki, Op.Cit. p35

spiritualists like Kozlov, Bobrov, Askoldov or Lopatin,¹⁴⁸ for whom he had a 'visible distaste.'¹⁴⁹ The inveterate human yearning for a transcendent dimension and meaning to life thus has no place in the earthly realm of Berlin's liberal pluralism. The problem here is that theology, whether of a Christian or more modern, focally-political kind, has not proved to be so easily dismissed by lofty, dismissive assertions, such as:

I don't think that the nature of human beings is a mystery, if by mystery is meant something that in principle is not discoverable...if one works hard enough and long enough and is endowed with sufficient natural gifts.¹⁵⁰

For many of us, at worst there is a kind of elitist, reductionist banality in these claims. As Brodsky counters, Berlin's version of Liberalism often amounts to yet another potential ideological straightjacket, in which short shrift is given 'to the notion that man can be driven as much by his appetite for the infinite as by necessity.'¹⁵¹ There is always the spectre of a Stalinist leveling of the 'spiritual tenor'¹⁵² from which emerges 'solo performances' in art, music and poetry and whose absence 'may easily make the finest social tapestry fade.'¹⁵³

In addition, liberal pluralism's paradoxical assertion of both the need for a tolerant acknowledgement of cultural diversity and the moral universalism of Kant's categorical imperative has proved equally problematic. This is particularly evident, for instance, in the intensification after 9/11 of America's post- Cold War global project of making the world safe for democracies, especially with regard to those countries, such as Russia or

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1969*, Op.Cit. p180

¹⁵¹ Brodsky, Op.Cit. p207

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

across the Middle East, which have been categorized by the West as irredeemably authoritarian or only partially democratic. As might be suggested by the last decade's Global War on Terror with its widespread resort to rendition by American and European intelligence agencies, the alleged export of Liberalism has not precluded a ready demarcation between the West and the Rest. The effect has been a blurring of the boundaries between pluralist concepts of tolerance and intolerance, raising the perennial question about how far we should go in protecting individuals from the potential iniquities of societies with value systems radically different from our own? Similarly, with regard to the heirs of the Cold War warrior generation of CIA operatives and MI6 spymasters, it continues to be morally abhorrent the extent to which barbaric methods such as water-boarding are justified as a defence of tolerance.

Perhaps in their reactions to these considerations lie the important differences between the approaches of Kennan and Berlin to the challenges of cultural and ideological diversity. Against the currents of US foreign policy towards Russia during the Cold War and afterwards, Kennan consistently counseled military and diplomatic restraint in the hope his country would be perceived as a paradigmatic democracy. Despite his fine, principled ideals, the reality was the recurrent personal misery engendered by a lifetime of witnessing much of his policy advice go unheeded. If Berlin's exceptional talent was for identifying philosophical and moral dilemmas under the banner of liberal pluralism, then Kennan's experience appeared to confirm that such an informed and imaginative approach was unlikely to be necessarily either influential or helpful when it involved pressing matters of foreign affairs and global security. Nor it seems would it prove to be notably effective in nurturing policy directions in the longer term.

Consider, for example, Kennan's denouncement of the 1998 NATO commitment to further enlargement into Eastern Europe, as a 'strategic blunder of potentially epic proportions.'¹⁵⁴ Predictably, at least in Kennan's view, it is an issue that has remained a deep-seated grievance for the Putin regime. At the

¹⁵⁴ Gaddis. *Op.Cit.* p681

age of 94, in an interview with the *New York Times* following the US Senate's ratification of the expansion, Kennan railed against the superficiality, ignorance and parochialism of the decision:

I was particularly bothered by the references (in the Senate debate) to Russia as a country dying to attack to Western Europe. Don't people understand? Our differences in the Cold War were with the Soviet regime. And now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that regime.¹⁵⁵

Perhaps more in sorrow than in anger, Kennan concluded at the end of the interview: 'This has been my life, and it pains me to see it so screwed up at the end.'¹⁵⁶

By contrast, temperamentally and philosophically, Berlin was far from ever being a demoralized foreign policy pundit, descending into a dark night of the soul as he struggled through the thickets of ongoing Cold War prejudices and foreign policy idiocies towards Russia. For instance, in contrast to Kennan's misery over the futility of his life's work, Berlin's private letters from Paris in 1947 during the protracted drafting and redrafting of America's momentous Marshall Plan for the socio-economic reconstruction of postwar Europe seem egocentric and self-congratulatory in a satirically self-deprecatory way. He had been 'bullied' out of Oxford into joining the UK delegation by the Provost of Queen's College, Berlin wrote, in order to work 'the special Oxford black magic'.¹⁵⁷ His task was to transform an overview of the deadlocked conference 'into deathless academic prose.'¹⁵⁸

I felt I was being summoned by God. I could not refuse, though I knew it was mistake. When the prophet Jonah

¹⁵⁵ Kennan, George, Interview with Thomas Friedman, *New York Times*, May 2, 1998, p1

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p2

¹⁵⁷ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p3

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

was summoned by God, he refused. Everybody realized in a day or two I was hopeless.’¹⁵⁹

Bored, enervated by a severe Paris heat wave, and surrounded by dull people, Berlin extricated himself from the fray after three weeks and headed to Italy for a holiday with friends.¹⁶⁰In the meantime, Kennan had provided an up-to-date policy briefing on the US position to the UK representatives and was writing a comprehensive report to the US State department ‘suggesting practical approaches to resolving the deadlock.’¹⁶¹

After the Cold War:

How then to make sense of accusations that both Kennan and Berlin were liberal stooges, locked in the Cold War’s ideological rigidities of friend and communist foe? The short answer is that they were not, if packaged into such a characterization is the dogmatic, one-dimensional, militant Russophobia of espionage conspiracies, accusations of intractable Tsarist-style authoritarianism and geopolitical hysteria about post-Soviet neo-imperialist spheres of influence. Admittedly, like many former Cold War liberals of our time, both men had been outspoken in their condemnation of the Soviet era as anathema to all that was worth protecting in the unsteady emergence of the century’s liberal democracies. But it should be emphasized that neither man endorsed war, whether hot or cold, as a solution to the complexities of Soviet and post-Soviet international relations.

Three significant reference points emerge from Kennan’s and Berlin’s embrace of liberal pluralism as a humane way forward in East-West relations in the wake of the Cold War. The first is that for both men any conflict with Russia should be primarily a culture war, a battle of ideas in the arenas of soft diplomacy, in which victory would mean that the allure of Western liberal democracy was shown to be beyond contention. Unfortunately, as evident in the ongoing disputes surrounding the global exportability of American-style

¹⁵⁹ Henderson, Nicholas, ‘The Franks Way - Then and Now’, *The Times*, 17 January 1983, 8, 171

¹⁶⁰ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p39

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

economic neo-Liberalism, this has yet to happen in Russia, if indeed it ever will. Secondly, despite Berlin's extensive attempt to bring to the fore what he believed was an exceptional pre-Bolshevik Russian liberal tradition, changing times and circumstances mean there is no certainty it will be focally relevant to the contemporary commentaries on the Putin generations. Thirdly, this overriding concept of the tyranny of contingency elucidated by the Cambridge School, suggests that none of the ongoing Cold War assumptions about the legacy of autocracy, anti-Westernism, or Slavic nationalism in contemporary Russia, may be either necessary or sufficient determinants of the course of events.

On the one hand, the dynamics of shifting cultural, political and economic complexities inevitably qualify any analysis of the conceptual continuities between today's Russia and its past. On the other, there is the issue of how to quantify, or even to give an adequate account of, the historical ingredients in the mixing pot of Putin's so-called authoritarian regime. Consider, for example, the commonplace that Russia's post-communist power vacuum + resource wealth beyond the wildest dreams + an opportunistic, greedy elite = all the corruptions of absolute power. Beyond the tabloid and twitter catch phrases about the iniquities of Putin the Neo-Autocrat and his cronies, what exactly might be the contribution of the country's four centuries of despotism to that equation? In this context, what appears to be important about liberal pluralism is that it is an invitation to an open-ended project, in which there is no finality of understanding, just a scale of plausible opinion from more to less well-informed, which at best keeps a sceptical eye on the received wisdom.

Perhaps the last word on the ways liberal pluralism could be said to span the divisions implied by the terms of Cold War warrior and re-invented fellow-traveller should go to Kennan. In 1995, ten years before his death at the age of 101, his biographer, Gaddis, asked him to write his own obituary. Kennan's response was the following account of himself, which in many ways might serve equally as Berlin's liberal pluralist's creed that individual liberty should be accepted as fundamental to our understanding of humankind:

First of all...I am independent, and have always kept my independence. I've always revolted against trying to say things as a member of a collective group, simply because it's what others said. I don't belong to any organization where I feel that I have to say things they decide they want said.'¹⁶²

Conclusion:

As part of a lengthy, wide-ranging conversation in 2012 between the historian of modern Eastern and Central Europe, Timothy Snyder and the late Tony Judt, the latter described Berlin as one of the most important influences on his conceptualization of what it means to be a scholar of history and politics.¹⁶³ In a kind of contextualisation of his road to Berlinian liberal pluralism in the 1980s, Judt begins with his intuitive rejection of Thatcherism's alleged 'impeccable'¹⁶⁴ logic that as a result of the cumulative legacy of war and decolonisation, Britain could no longer sustain its levels of social expenditure. As Judt puts it, his opposition to the corrosion of his country's social democratic policies under the banner of free-marketeeing developed not only as a reaction to its high costs in terms of lost opportunities and misery for the mass of people. More fundamentally, his condemnation of what he came to believe were Thatcher's ill-informed economic and political fantasies rested on his realization that the Conservative government's assertion of a guiding logic 'was probably a mistake... [that] *all* political theories were by their very nature partial and incomplete accounts of the complexities of the human condition ... *and the better for it* (my italics).'¹⁶⁵ Like his conceptualization of liberty, this last statement could also serve as a mantra for Berlin's philosophical views.

¹⁶² Gaddis, Op.Cit. p692

¹⁶³ Judt, Tony with Snyder, Timothy, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, Vintage Books, London 2012.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p195

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p196

As for the question from China's anti-liberals about the practicality of liberal pluralism, not least for providing a comprehensive, coherent, prognostic narrative about Putin's Russia, Judt refers us to the potentially useful contribution of the professional historian, or perhaps of the like-minded contemporary commentator who rejects glib, emotive generalities. Consider, for instance, Fukuyama's claim that the fall of Soviet communism represented the triumph of Liberalism at the end of history; or alternatively a situation where 'some fool declares that Saddam Hussein is Hitler incarnate';¹⁶⁶ or, for that matter, that Putin has re-invented himself as a century tsar. For Judt, the point of his life's work was 'to enter the fray and complicate such simple rubbish.'¹⁶⁷ His aim was to ensure a clearer, more credible and dispassionate account of the drift of events, as part of an ongoing civic conversation. Meanwhile, in accordance with his acknowledged intellectual allegiance to Berlin's liberal pluralist philosophy, Judt insists that: 'An accurate mess is far truer to life than elegant untruths.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p270

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS AND LOST CAUSES

The Russian Mind
 Willful and avid mind,
 The Russian mind is dangerous as flame:
 So unrestrainable, so clear
 A happy and a gloomy mind.

Like the steady hand of a compass
 It sees the pole through swells and fog;
 It leads the timid will
 From distracted dreams to life

Like an eagle gazing though the mist
 To survey the valley's dust
 It soberly contemplates the earth
 Floating in mystic night.

Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov

The following seeks to substantiate the threads of argument raised in the last chapter about what has been understood by the concept of the liberal intelligentsia in post-communist Russia. Its focus is on the ways Berlin's traditionalist interpretation of its role as a moral storm gauge for the country's culture and politics has been accepted or rejected by today's commentariat. The first section provides a compressed account of the conceptualization of those Berlin eulogized as a unique coterie of Russian intellectuals whose legacy he hoped had the potential to be rekindled down the generations. In particular, it explores the issues surrounding how to define the intelligentsia, its historical role and its alleged influence on events within today's Russia.

The second section looks more closely at the implications of this understanding for Liberalism in Putin's Russia, as it is frequently assumed in the West to be manifested in the post-Soviet opposition movement. Using

the perspectives of prominent intellectual and political commentator Gleb Pavlovsky as a point of reference, it considers the claims that the intelligentsia is now largely composed of a marginal stratum of people in Russia, its membership corroded by Stalin's gulags, by exile and subjugation under the Soviet regime and finally, forty years later with the fall of communism, by its own self-protective political naivety.

Section One:

As Berlin insisted repeatedly in his private letters and in his writings on Russian thinkers, the emergence of the intelligentsia should be understood as a prodigious occurrence. With his usual effusiveness about Russian thought in the nineteenth century, he describes the word as having been invented in the 1860s or 1870s to designate what he believes was a unique and seminal philosophical response to an intensely tyrannical and tumultuous period of Tsarist rule. His account of the birth of this intelligentsia in the wake of the failed Decembrist revolt in 1825 is steeped in a poignant evocation of a past time when the passionate romance with intellectual abstractions could break hearts and ruin young lives.

In a tacit reference to the influence of its ideas on the coming revolutionary era, he claims the group was 'like many precursors of an event...usually more fascinating than the men of action...'¹ Much of his writing on the topic takes inspiration from the reflections of Herzen and Pavel Annenkov, both of whom were closely associated with the emergence of the intelligentsia and, amongst other things, were chroniclers of the thoughts and misfortunes of its members. As Berlin writes:

...both these connoisseurs of human beings, in later years, confessed that never in their lives, had they again found anywhere a society so civilized and gay and free, so enlightened, spontaneous and agreeable so sincere, so intelligent, so gifted and attractive in every way.²

¹ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p120

² Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p154

Berlin also claims 'the phenomenon itself, with its historical and literary revolutionary consequences, is...the largest single Russian contribution to social change in the world.'³ These are very large claims. Berlin's twenty-five pages on the phenomenon in his *Russian Thinkers*, provides a highly generalized characterization of how and why this social cluster came into existence and allegedly exerted such an inordinate influence on the ideological foundations of subsequent political events. According to his dense, compassionate analysis, initially during 'a remarkable decade'⁴ beginning around the 1830s the intelligentsia was a small circle of young men, many of them *déclassé*, who were bonded by their vehement anti-Tsarism. In large measure their philosophical views had been inspired by their experiences of life in the West, but also by the murderous brutality of the reaction of Tsar Nicholas I to the Decembrists.

Though estranged from the masses by their intellectual interests and literary vocations as translators, civic-minded poets, journalists and political pamphleteers, they nevertheless shared 'a profound moral concern for society.'⁵ As Berlin puts it, they 'quite consciously used literature,'⁶ both fiction and non-fiction, to express their relentless, radical protest against 'a status quo which was regarded as in constant danger of becoming ossified, a block to human thought and human progress.'⁷ For many of them, their country's backwardness in comparison to the rest of Europe had become a matter of national shame. Central to this 'moral uneasiness'⁸ was the vast illiterate population of the abused, exploited, wretched peasantry whose squalid living conditions had advanced little since feudal times.

Though only very broadly in agreement with each other on more abstruse philosophical challenges, they nonetheless shared an underlying dedication to

³ Ibid. p133

⁴ Ibid. p130

⁵ Berlin, Isaiah, *The Power of Ideas*, Hardy, Henry (Ed), Princeton University Press, 2000, p108

⁶ Ibid. p106

⁷ Ibid. p107

⁸ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p135

the pursuit of lucidity through the unfettered cultivation of the life of the mind. Berlin argues that in reality their aspirations were undermined and distorted by the high degree of censorship of both domestic and foreign publications in Tsarist Russia. As well, they were circumscribed by a narrowly-focused Western education that was marked by the profound distrust of French ideas by the regime's elite in the wake of the 1789 revolution in France. In practical terms this meant that this emergent intelligentsia was nurtured within a cultural milieu in which their country was 'virtually an intellectual dependency of German academic thought... [so that] scarcely one single political and social idea to be found in Russia in the nineteenth century was born on native soil.'⁹As suggested in Chapter One, especially during the first half of the century, this entailed a fervent, though officially circumscribed engagement with Hegel and his legacy, one that was stripped of much of the energetic clash and collision of ideas that since the Renaissance and before had ranged across Europe 'in a vast variety of patterns...in which no one idea or opinion could hold for long undisputed supremacy...'¹⁰

It was only towards the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly as exiles in Paris, London or Vienna, that the surviving members of the intelligentsia had a more considered and worldly engagement with French or British thinkers, such as The Philosophes, or the French positivists, Comte, Fourier, and Saint-Simon, or the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Significantly, according to Berlin's account, amongst this early nineteenth century cohort, there was only a passing interest in the work of Marx. As British playwright Tom Stoppard puts it, Herzen, for instance, appears to have despised Marx because of his inflated, abstract rhetoric and intellectual ferocity; and apparently these were sentiments that Marx reciprocated.¹¹ Stoppard's trilogy on Russia's radical intelligentsia, *The Coast of Utopia*, draws heavily on Herzen's autobiographical writings, as well as on

⁹ Ibid. p139

¹⁰ Ibid. 139-140

¹¹ Stoppard, Tom, 'The Forgotten Revolutionary,' *The Observer*, 2 June, 2002. <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/jun/02/featuresreview.review3>

Berlin's work. Its third part, *Salvage*, is devoted to a portrayal of Herzen, in particular his anti-Marxist aversion to historical determinism. With a poetic resonance worthy of Herzen's own polemical writings, Stoppard's character declares:

History knocks at a thousand gates at every moment and the gatekeeper is chance. We shout into the mist for this one or that one to be opened for us, but through every gate there are a thousand more...¹²

At the same time, Berlin also insists that the German metaphysical writers such as Hegel, should be rightly said to have liberated his cohort of youthful nineteenth century intelligentsia from both the ultra conservative dogmatism of the Russian Orthodox Church and from 'the dry formulae of the eighteenth century rationalists, which had been...discredited by the failure of the French Revolution.'¹³ One manifestation of this new freedom was an embrace of Romanticism which he claims found particularly fertile ground amongst these politically disempowered, persecuted intellectuals.

At the centre of the loose cluster of ideas that constituted the Romantic Movement was the highly subjectivist Hegelian notion of *innerlichkeit* (inwardness). According to this psychological mindset, the meaning and purpose of an individual's life can only be fully-realised through his/her essentialist spiritual attunement to the eschatological march of history towards liberty and enlightenment.¹⁴ Each man's duty, Berlin writes, was believed to be 'to penetrate the soul of the world...to grasp the hidden, "inner" plan of the universe, to understand his own place in it, and to act accordingly.'¹⁵ In other words, the Russians' enchantment with the German Romantics was primarily a secularized¹⁶internalisation of ancient religiosity, as

¹² Stoppard, *Salvage*, Faber & Faber, 2008, p7

¹³ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p145

¹⁴ Ibid. p136

¹⁵ Ibid. p137

¹⁶ Ibid. p136

encapsulated for instance in St Augustine's enjoinder to the Christian faithful: 'Seek not abroad, turn back into thyself, in the inner man dwells the truth.'¹⁷ Moreover, in a language that is deliberately biblical in its resonances, Berlin describes the burden of the Romantic, pseudo-religious revelation of a benign and ethical higher reality, as binding this dedicated group to a belief in their mission to help their oppressed brothers similarly 'to see the light.'¹⁸

Increasingly too, from the early century onwards, the intelligentsia came to see Mother Russia as a more appropriate candidate for the forging of a new world by the creative, beneficent cosmos.¹⁹ Like Germany, theirs was a young nation, energetic and untainted by the decaying, materialist West. But it was more so, that is more barbaric, uneducated and politically and economically backward and, ironically perhaps, therefore endowed with 'an even more powerful hope.'²⁰ As Berlin argues, stimulated by the derivative philosophising of this new generation of thinkers, Romanticism became linked with cultural nationalism in Russian society. This meant, he writes, that the notion suffused through the communities of intellectuals that if each individual fulfilled his[sic] unique calling, 'as history surely intended them to do, the future of Russia might yet be as glorious as her past had been empty and dark.'²¹

Interestingly, in this context Bauman offers a similar focus to Berlin's in answer to the question of how exactly to understand the concept of this century Russian intelligentsia. But his interpretation is considerably less sympathetic and forgiving of what Berlin often saw as their well-intentioned though misguided philosophising. Bauman argues that the creation of this intelligentsia is best described as the result of the anthropological notion of

¹⁷ Daur, K.D., & Martin, J (Eds), *De Doctrina Christiana. De vera religione*, Aurelius Augustinus, 39 72, 12-13. Brepols, 1962, P34

¹⁸ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p144

¹⁹ Ibid. p139

²⁰ Ibid. p137

²¹ Ibid. p139

'stimulus diffusion,' from the more highly developed West to the non-industrialised countries of Europe's East. He describes this diffusion as:

a process in which an idea of a "superior" social form travels on its own, unaccompanied by the socio-economic conditions which gave it birth, having thus acquired the status of utopia - of a dream to be reforged into reality by conscious human effort.²²

Like Berlin, he argues that the term *intelligentsia* thus referred to those aspirationally high-minded intellectuals who carried the West's notions of superior social forms into Russia and theorized about the advantages and pitfalls of seeking to nurture them in alien soil. It should be noted, though, that given the term 'intelligentsia' was not in common usage until after 1860, in Berlin's anachronistic use of the word in *Russian Thinkers* it is synonymous with the pre-1948 social stratum which was composed of his so-called radicals, as well as those few intellectuals in subsequent generations whom he identified as having been inspired by them. Similarly, in Bauman's analysis of the usage, 'intelligentsia' and 'intellectuals' both refer to Berlin's Janus-faced century men of ideas. That is, the terms refer to those Russian thinkers who had looked critically outwards through the rosy lens of an Idealist belief in Enlightenment progress at the world transformations taking place outside their country; and inwards, into themselves, with an intense, self-regarding, pious conviction of their role as moral pioneers - a role which they came to believe had been demanded of them by these processes of modernization and modernity. From either perspective, their self-importance and their postulates for the future, Bauman argues, had always been and would continue to be delusory. With obeisance to Hegel, he reminds us of the apothegm that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings at dusk:

Intellectuals came to see themselves as intellectuals (as distinct from just being journalists, novelists, poets, or university professors) only at the twilight of the century,

²² Bauman, Zygmunt, 'Love in Adversity: On the State and Intellectuals, and the State of the Intellectuals,' Thesis Eleven, Number 31, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, circa 1992, p84

when their unity of function (if it ever existed) was but a memory; perhaps a dream.²³

In other words, Bauman suggests that the combination of rapid social change and the infusion of Marxist thought from the West amongst a new generation of intellectuals, meant that by the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the numbers and mythical status of Berlin's classical Russian intelligentsia were already in decline.

The social role of the Intelligentsia:

In a letter of encouragement, written in 1958 to the Harvard scholar of the Soviet Union, Richard Pipes, in response to his 'excellent idea for a book on the Russian intelligentsia,'²⁴ Berlin raised two key questions which he believed should 'be ventilated.'²⁵ The first asked what the concept involved, in the sense of which specific philosophers constituted the intelligentsia and what did it mean to subsequent generations? The second was whether the usage of the term 'is co-terminous with liberals in general or has a special meaning in countries like Russia...etc?'²⁶

Pipes had asked Berlin whether he might consider contributing to his book, as well as for some suggestions about which Russian intellectuals might qualify for inclusion in the country's intelligentsia. Pleading he was 'overloaded'²⁷ with commitments, Berlin refused Pipes' first request. But his letter of reply did contain a couple of scattered names as strong claimants to the title of an *intelligent*, with a special mention of 'only say Turgenev among the great

²³ Ibid. P82

²⁴ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p644

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

writers'²⁸ to be admitted into the ranks, and Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoevsky as clearly 'not intelligentsia.'²⁹ Nor did Pasternak quite make it onto the right side of the divide. As Berlin wrote, he was 'too odd, too religious, too remote from the ideals of scientific enlightenment, political democracy etc.etc.'³⁰

Admittedly the letter appears rushed and typically a riff crammed with tangentially coherent words and ideas and a somewhat frustrating use of 'etc.' But Berlin does assert his own very abbreviated answer to at least one of the questions he put to Pipes. 'The real members of the intelligentsia,' he said, '...are the high-minded, liberal, anti-clerical, pro-Western, constantly indignant, old-fashioned radicals.'³¹ They began as a specifically Russian pre-1948 phenomenon, which was composed of those few exceptional men whose cultural and moral preoccupations were carried forward by certain of their countrymen throughout most of the century. That is, to Berlin at least, they formed part of a cross-generational coterie which was broadly liberal, definitely non-Marxist, and which was certainly not synonymous with civil society or with a rising middle class. Nor was this intelligentsia, Bauman too suggests, simply made up of artists, writers, literary critics, academics, well-educated scientists, engineers or medical practitioners, though they could be found within all these professions. Like Bauman, elsewhere in an essay on the power of ideas, Berlin characterizes members of this group according to their conviction they had taken up residence on a uniquely scholarly and ethical high ground:

The concept of the intelligentsia must not be confused with the notion of intellectuals. Its members thought of themselves as being a dedicated order... devoted to the spreading of a specific attitude to life, something like a gospel.³²

²⁸ Ibid. p645

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. p646

³¹ Ibid. p645

³² Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p133

In common with his explication of the virtues of liberal pluralism outlined in Chapter One, Berlin's portrayal of the intelligentsia thus also strongly relies on his fondness for speculative psychologising. As he himself puts it, quoting German poet Karl Wolfskehl, 'people are my landscape.'³³ Throughout his account in *Russian Thinkers* he imaginatively conjures what he sees as very special, larger-than-life characters as the exemplars of the mindset of these intellectuals. Notably only four such men, Turgenev, Bakunin, Belinsky and Herzen are specifically mentioned as the intelligentsia's 'true original founders.'³⁴

Admittedly such an approach is not so very different from the kind of familiar scholarly endeavour that seeks to embed biography within cultural and philosophical trends to produce an inductive and sometimes richly impressionistic effect. But the problem remains how exactly then to distinguish, across the ensuing two hundred years or so from the second quarter of the century, a *bona fide* member of the intelligentsia from an individual Russian scholar or artist? As Bauman puts it, explaining in a general way the meaning of the word is an issue separate from identifying which actual individuals might qualify for inclusion. In other words, asking the question, 'Who were the Russian intelligentsia?' he argues, is an inquiry about 'a role, a function, a systemic location.'³⁵ The question 'Who were its members?'³⁶ is a highly contested area about 'personal qualities that permit (or entitle) their bearer to perform such a role or occupy such a position.'³⁷ The distinction is important to considerations about whether its historical role has continued into today's Russia.

In more recent times, the search for a credible answer to the second question might suggest the need for some kind of more directed profiling of the

³³ Berlin, *Building Letters 1960-1975* Isaiah Berlin, Hardy Henry & Pottle, Mark (Eds), Chatto & Windus 2013, p359

³⁴ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p133

³⁵ Bauman, Op.Cit. p81

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

clustering of cognitive and affective personality traits among those who could now be broadly termed 'a public intellectual.' This might include an assessment of a Russian intellectual's oppositional political views, dedication to the cause of the dehumanised and dispossessed, penchant for bookish proselytizing, overall individualistic and independent ethical stance, and personal commitment to wrestling with the abstruse heights/depths of moral and metaphysical philosophy. For those who appear to be Romanticism's devotees, this list might also include underlying patriotism inspired by century German organic nationalists such as Herder or Fichte, as well as a measure of the intellectual gravitas with which they were committed to catching the tide of history to the furthest shore of a new Russia. Perhaps, as Bauman concludes, such a definitive answer might prove to be elusive, if not 'virtually impossible.'³⁸

Alternatively, Pipes suggests more soberly the trope 'a critically thinking personality,'³⁹ which has often served as a generalisable means of identifying a member of the intelligentsia. Perhaps deliberately, it is one though that appears to evade the issue of whether his political stance is as a liberal pluralist, a liberal conservative, a Socialist, a Leftwing or Centrist liberal, a Utopian liberal, or as some other form of liberal with adjectives. Bauman adds to this the more tendentious suggestion that membership was in the end a matter of self-definition. As he writes, for the intelligentsia, the ongoing squabbles about what kind of elite, dedicated, secular order a Russian intellectual saw himself as joining, as well as who else was or was not deserving of the status, was the core of his self-construction. 'Indeed, as Valery paraphrased Descartes,' Bauman said, 'they complain; therefore they exist.'⁴⁰In his letter to Pipes concerning the issue, Berlin also offers the more informal, irreverent opinion that: 'No doubt they were often quite foolish,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pipes, Richard, 'The Historical Evolution of the Russian Intelligentsia,' in Pipes, Richard (Ed), *The Russian Intelligentsia*, Columbia University Press, 1961, p49

⁴⁰ Bauman, Op.Cit. p81

pompous, madly irritating, etc., and generated a quite phenomenal quantity of platitudes...'⁴¹

Not surprisingly, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Berlin's portrayal of them as a kind of small, ethical, scholarly brotherhood appears to be magisterially unspecific. By his own admission he was an historian of the currents of thought that flowed into century Russia from the West, rather than of the miscellany of events that could be or have been documented as providing contexts to these ideas. As suggested in Chapter One, the result is that he often appears to have had somewhat too fleeting an engagement with contingency, that is, with unraveling the contextualized meaning of the words used to explain the tangles of chance, circumstance and human actions that are integral to any credible explanation of the complexities of the past and the present. To paraphrase Lenin, the challenge is not only to elucidate the ways the objective world is understood to be reflected in our consciousness, but also how our consciousness deliberately or unwittingly creates that world.⁴²

More specifically, Berlin's zone of engagement with the influence of what he believed was an exceptionally significant social group points towards the need for a more forensic scrutiny of the relationship between its members' thoughts and either their own actions or their influence on the deeds of others. In other words, there is a need to trace the links between what he believed to be the intelligentsia's dedication to powerful and dangerous ideas and their effect on the real human struggles to gain and maintain political power in pre-revolutionary Russia and afterwards. Without this stronger substantiation, our understanding of the role of this group is inherently vague, obscured within the unexplained dynamics of philosophical reflection in interaction with socio-economic conditions, political opportunism, power mongering amongst elite groups and *realpolitik*. In *Russian Thinkers*, Berlin emerges as primarily focused on providing a retrospective on how certain

⁴¹ Berlin, *Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p645

⁴² Lenin, Vladimir, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic Book III: Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion*, Collected Works Vol 38 1914 Marxists Internet Archive, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/subject/philosophy/index.htm p246

members of the Russian intelligentsia had devoted themselves unsparingly to a mutual dialogue about their interpretations of Hegelian Idealism, Romanticism, Populism, Socialism and Materialism in the wake of the Enlightenment. What also emerges in his work is that these were predominantly theoretical debates about the question of what was to be done for their country's oppressed people. Despite their literary talents and sometimes fierce political commentaries, this approach creates the impression that they were simply up the back of the grandstand booing the failing home team, consoled by thoughts of next season's certain victory. Moreover, as Cauter scornfully suggests, in Berlin's account 'books become as potent as rays of the sun;⁴³ and those of his followers who replicate his interpretative abstractions risk spinning 'into orbit above actual history without ever touching down.'⁴⁴ As he puts it:

The British cabinet in 1914 had not been reading Maistre or Nietzsche before pressing its young men into slaughter more extensive than the one generated by the monist-utopian mind of Lenin.⁴⁵

Berlin's reply to sceptics, such as Cauter, who deride his assumption that philosophy is centrally what drives human behavior, seems to be that it is not really such a difficult issue to grasp. The connection is rather obvious, he tacitly insists, manifest in the ways we experience and interpret the world. Apprehending this connection is a matter of deeper insight and scholarly sophistication. The general ideas, for example of Tolstoy or Marx, he says, 'do have great influence,' though in the case of Russia in cataclysmic ways its century thinkers had not necessarily anticipated:

Without the kind of out of outlook of which...the Hegelian philosophy, then so prevalent, was both the cause and the symptom, a great deal of what happened might,

⁴³ Cauter, *Isaac & Isaiah, The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic*, Op.Cit, p119

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

perhaps, either not have happened, or else have happened differently.⁴⁶

Still, there may be somewhat more down-to-earth, circumstantial reasons for Berlin's characterization of the birth of the Russian intelligentsia first and foremost through the lens of culture and philosophy. In common with his re-invention of Herzen's liberal pluralism and disenchantment with political dogmas, Berlin's explicit aim is to re-claim for posterity what he lamented was an almost-forgotten world of pre-Soviet Russian thought, not least amongst Western scholars. Though he only indirectly acknowledges it, his literary approach can be vindicated perhaps by the realities of the successive Tsarist and Soviet regimes, in which members of the group are said to have been relentlessly excluded to the point of negation from the world of effective direct action politics. The implication here is that the intelligentsia's role as the 'spiritual leadership of the nation,...the guardian and the censor of its values,'⁴⁷ *ipso facto* was also symptomatic of their self-protective, disempowered retreat from a direct public language of power politics.

Paradoxically, as Berlin repeatedly insists, their obliquely subversive, high-minded ideas about historical progress, Russian Socialism, or the liberation of the impoverished masses, are said to have been re-interpreted and implemented by later generations. Most immediately and conspicuously, for Trotsky, Lenin or Stalin, they appeared to have epitomized a clarion call to bring to fruition the previous century's abstracted programmes for their country's road to a socialist modernity. If so, perhaps Berlin is right to accuse the old radical intelligentsia, with the exception perhaps of Herzen or Turgenev, of helping to conjure out of the brutal, intractable mess of Tsardom's realities what turned out to be impossible tragic futures. As Herzen warned, the implication is that in the world of transcendently good ideas about the creation of a perfect society, the Russian intelligentsia should have been more careful what they wished for.

⁴⁶ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p131

⁴⁷ Bauman, Op.Cit.p82

At least, this seems to be a plausible view. Consider in this context, for example, Berlin's liberal endorsement of Constant's distinction between positive and negative liberty. In common with his French predecessor, he argues that in contemporary liberal societies these two concepts of freedom should balance and circumscribe each other. In particular, the normative and legal endorsement of negative liberty should ensure that every individual has the opportunity to pursue both publicly and privately what are in fact blind choices about a desirable path to his/her future. The only constraint should be the non-interference in others' expressions of the same freedom. For Berlin, this form of liberty is thus the fundamental condition of human life, one that makes possible all other activities, such as love or friendship or political engagement. It also entails the freedom to do nothing, to sit on the back-step and watch the grass grow, ignoring the intrusions of positive liberty in the form of the demands of friends, colleagues or, more especially, the dictates of Big Brother the State. As suggested above, the Tsarist regime's failure to accept that negative liberty is inherent to what it means to be human was strongly manifested in the outbreaks of savagery with which it sought to relegate the critical intelligentsia to the sidelines of immediate pre-revolutionary politics and policies. For Berlin, this implied the dominance of a collectivist concept of positive liberty that across subsequent events effectively stifled the flowering of the fundamental condition of negative liberty. He believed that sadly this dominance was also carried forward into Stalinism as an undiluted current of malevolence.

The pressing question, though, for the future of the ascribed role of the intelligentsia in Russian society is whether or to what extent Berlin's notion of negative freedom should be always be understood as an inherently fragile, impermanent human condition? Is it the case, as Arendt argues, that it can be totally destroyed in totalitarianism societies in ways that deprive us of all sense of humanity?⁴⁸ To his more optimistic liberal critics, Berlin's mistake is in assuming that negative liberty is a 'condition.' Instead it should be understood as one dimension of a shifting dynamic with positive liberty, which

⁴⁸ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism.*, Harcourt Inc, 1968

requires a liberal-minded vigilance to moderate extremes in either direction. As Crick puts it in his comical poem, *Freedom as Politics*, which satirises Berlin's two concepts of liberty, for liberals freedom can never be a passive condition of being, that is, merely a kind of platform from which takes flight a variety of desirable human behaviours. Rather it is only ever meaningful as the exercise of a continuous plebiscite through pro-active, creative, and sometimes courageous, political and social choices:

Liberty is surely not just taking care
 But taking care to get somewhere...
 Is shaping, through some mutual pact
 Some hand-made thing which once we lacked.
 Freedom is not just avoidance of the State
 Like some computerized blind date,
 Nor just an angry affirmation of 'my will',
 It's more like doing something meant to fill
 The social gap between the loneliness of I
 And groups of demonstrators in full cry....⁴⁹

Which brings us back to the question of how then to credibly interpret the predominantly philosophical and ethical impact of Berlin's liberal intelligentsia on historical events in Russia across more than a century and a half? In terms perhaps of the ideological comforts of a kind of powder keg theory of change, where the more obviously deep-seated the despotism, the more inevitable the explosion of liberty? That is, for instance, without a thorough-going, institutionalised commitment by the regime to Berlin's universalist concepts of liberal freedom, Tsar Alexander II's piecemeal reforms, such as the partial emancipation of the Russian peasantry in 1861, did little to avert the storm on the horizon.⁵⁰ The underlying reminder here is

⁴⁹ Crick, Bernard, 'Freedom as Politics: Popular Summary,' in Berlin, *Building Letters 1960-1975*, Op.Cit. p604

⁵⁰ Tocqueville, Alexis de, Speech to the Chamber of Deputies on the eve of 1948, as cited in Barrot, Odilon, *Memoires Posthumes*, Harper Press, 2013. Vol 1, p478

the Tocquevillean precept that: 'The most dangerous moment for a bad government is when it begins to reform.'⁵¹

Still, despite this sweep of interpretation, whatever aspects of these intellectuals' radical dreams might be deemed to have been influential in the longer term, a revolutionary outcome only appears to have been inevitable with hindsight. Equally, in accordance with the illusory nature of retrospective determinism, the diffusive power of their ideas could be dismissed as partly incidental and certainly distorted. That is, the implication is in choosing between the domination of pre-conceived, deliberative, programmatic human behavior, ad hocery, or the haphazard march of folly and fanaticism as ways of understanding the past, the primacy of the first option is often the least persuasive. For instance, as Pipes argues, the loss of freedom under the importation into Russia of what he calls Western totalitarianism was unexpected, sudden and complete.⁵² It did not, he emphasizes, evolve 'organically from Russia's development in the century, from the era of the classical Russian intelligentsia.'⁵³

Nikolai Chernyshevsky: A Case Study

In common with Berlin's approach in *Russian Thinkers*, Kolakowski appears less exercised by seemingly futile efforts to elucidate an encompassing, pan-historical conceptualization of the Russian intelligentsia than in encapsulating the evolving styles of thought in which members of this intellectual stratum actually argued with each other. Like Berlin, he too describes the intelligentsia's shift during the later century away from Hegelian metaphysics to a devotion to materialism. As Berlin writes, the latter had become more appealing than 'the noble flights of the romantic idealists of the 1840s'⁵⁴ to the tough-minded, angry, young radicals who had grown up during

⁵¹ Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Harper & Bros, 2010, p214

⁵² Pipes, Op.Cit. p50

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p257

'the dead years after 1849.'⁵⁵ Combined with the preoccupation with populism pervasive amongst Russian thinkers after 1870, this shift also provided a kind of limited intellectual harbinger of, as well as a local context to, the fierce polemics about marxist doctrine that began towards the turn of the century. And like Pipes's claims outlined above, Kolakowski too conveys the sense that these debates were in no way a clear and necessary determinant of Russia's ideological directions. Instead he describes the interweaving of ideas that appear to overlap and resonate with each other. At the same time he stresses that, in contrast to the later Leninist or Trotskyist revolutionaries, many in the radical intelligentsia drew back from Marxism. Or they used it very selectively in their discussions about what they saw as the unique challenges for their country's development.⁵⁶

Consider, for example, Kolakowski's account of the work of one of the century's most high-profile claimants to membership of the radical intelligentsia, Nikolai Chernyshevsky. A liberal socialist, Chernyshevsky has been labeled an exceptionally influential ideologue, though as much for his charismatic personality, as for his provocative writings. In the 1860s his prison-cell advocacy of the overthrow of Tsardom by force is said to have inspired the more violent form of *narodnichestvo* (Russian populism), whose campaign of terror culminated in the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. As a liberal as well as a populist, he was a proponent of the human rights and the spiritual and material wellbeing of the individual against the intrusion of State power,⁵⁷ as well as of universal education and the emancipation of the peasants.⁵⁸ These inter-related views, Kolakowski writes, stemmed from his stance in the Russophile debates on whether Russia could mitigate the dark, exploitative nature of European-style industrialisation. If properly managed, Chernyshevsky insisted, the transition to capitalism was in no way

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kolakowski, Op.Cit. pp609-611

⁵⁷ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. pp263-264

⁵⁸ Kolakowski, Op.Cit. p608

incompatible with homegrown Socialism. Rather by spreading more widely the communality of rural life, his country could :

enjoy industrial progress and Liberalism without extinguishing the communist flame that burnt on in the 'obshchina' [commune], and that the horrors of capitalist development could be avoided.⁵⁹

Significantly, both Berlin and Kolakowski argue that there is no indication in Chernyshevsky's populism of his having been influenced by Marxism. For instance, there is no known evidence, Berlin writes, that his assertion that 'the State is always the instrument of the dominant class, and cannot... embark on those necessary reforms, the success of which would end its own domination...'⁶⁰ was in any way derived from the writings of Marx.

In the early 1860s, while he was imprisoned for his outspoken views in St Petersburg's Peter and Paul Fortress, Chernyshevsky wrote the novel, whose historically resonant title was *What is to be Done?* Berlin characterises the work as 'a social Utopia' populated by the "'new men" of the free, morally pure, cooperative socialist commonwealth of the future...'⁶¹ Despite also being described as 'didactic, pedantic and boring'⁶² and its 'harsh, flat, dull, humourless, grating sentences ...grotesque as a work of art,'⁶³ it nonetheless has been credited with having had an extraordinary effect on public opinion in Russia in the later decades of the century.⁶⁴ Berlin argues that as the son of the provincial lower classes and therefore regarded as untainted by aristocratic self-indulgence or aestheticism, Chernyshevsky became the prototype of radical heroism and martyrdom amongst the country's rebellious youth. He was much emulated for:

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p258

⁶¹ Ibid. p261

⁶² Kolakowski, Op.Cit. p608

⁶³ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p261

⁶⁴ Ibid.

...his self-discipline, his dedication to the material and moral good of his fellow men, ...his self-effacing personality, the tireless, passionate, devoted, minute industry, the hatred of style...[and] indifference to the claims of private life.⁶⁵

As Kolakowski suggests less charitably, he is best characterized as a grim fanatic, who totally lacked any sense of humour. He adds that his personal style had a powerful effect on Lenin, who was not only one of his strongest admirers, but was 'an ideal specimen of the type Chernyshevsky portrayed... an intellectual...[for whom]any discussion which cannot be made to serve the revolution was idle chatter.'⁶⁶ Lenin's own monograph, *What Is To Be Done?* is said to have been inspired by Chernyshevsky's novel of the same name.⁶⁷ So too was a scathing nonfiction work by Tolstoy published in 1886, whose title has been variously translated from Russian as *What Is To Be Done?* or alternatively as *What Then Shall We do?*, allegedly in deference to its deliberate biblical connotation, from Luke 3:10-14 where the crowds ask this question of Jesus Christ. In the book and in his letters to friends, Tolstoy railed against what he saw as Chernyshevsky's shallow, irreligious sloganising, his fundamental misunderstanding of peasant life, as well as the undeserved popularity of 'that bedbug-smelling gentleman.'⁶⁸ He is said to have despised him for 'his dreary provincialism', 'his intolerance', and 'his maddening self-assurance.'⁶⁹

Berlin dismisses Chernyshevsky's liberal socialism as ultimately 'vague or inconsistent, and often both'.⁷⁰ He claims that he preached an unsophisticated utilitarianism, and a theoretically confused populism, which

⁶⁵ Ibid. p262

⁶⁶ Kolakowski, Op.Cit. p608

⁶⁷ Amis, Martin, *Koba the Dread*, Miramax, 2002, p27

⁶⁸ Tolstoy, Leo, Letter of July 2, 1856 in Tolstoy, L.N. 'Polnoe sobranie sochinenii,' Volume 7, Moscow, 1936, p390

⁶⁹ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, Op.Cit. p262

⁷⁰ Ibid. p261

failed to adequately address the critical question of who would plan and control the transition to capitalism.⁷¹ But Berlin does also judge him to have been a kind, sincere man, full of disarming moral charm, who 'at his worst... was never impatient, or arrogant or inhumane...'⁷² and who was repeatedly warning his readers that the good of the peasants did not mean 'to ram "our" remedies down "their" throats.'⁷³

After spending most of the last three decades of his life in prison and in exile in Siberia, Chernyshevsky died in the city of Saratov on the Volga River in 1889. At least according to Berlin's portrait of him, it seems unlikely that he would have reciprocated Lenin's admiration for him.

The Legacy of the Russian Intelligentsia:

As it happened, by the 1920s those who remained of Berlin's century's radical liberal intelligentsia were not to be tolerated by the new Bolshevik regime. Trotsky and Lenin, for example, were in the vanguard of a line of intellectuals across the decades of the twentieth century to write its obituary. In a pamphlet in the *St Petersburg Review*, written in 1910 in response to a lengthy opinion piece by social democrat Max Adler in the *Wiener Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Trotsky had already condemned them as 'a corporation of priests of culture'⁷⁴ who were neither welcome in, nor relevant to, any socialist agenda. In 1917, Lenin reportedly was expressing the more savage view that their soft-headed politics and venality meant that they had sold out to the bourgeoisie and that they were therefore enemies of the Bolshevik Revolution, deserving to be exterminated:

No mercy for the enemies of the people...War to the death against the rich and their hangers-on, the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. p264

⁷⁴ Trotsky, Leon, *The Intelligentsia and Socialism*, New York Publications, London 1966, p5

bourgeois intellectual...the spawn of capitalism, the offspring of aristocratic and bourgeois society...⁷⁵

By contrast, in his discussion of the fate of Isaiah Berlin's radical intelligentsia, Pipes laments not only their fragmentation and decline, but that of what he celebrates as the whole, broad, splendid, cultured class in pre-Revolutionary Russia.⁷⁶ Unlike Berlin, he distinguishes two kinds of intelligentsia. Though he characterises both groupings as Westernisers, according to his terminology the 'philosophical' intelligentsia was composed of the narrowly philosophical, moderately left-of-centre liberals whose literary talents and missionary zeal are eulogised in *Russian Thinkers*. The 'cultural' intelligentsia was a more diffuse, sociologically amorphous phenomenon, the political views of whose members were 'just as compatible with conservative as with liberal and radical attitudes.'⁷⁷ The latter's lifestyle often reflected the comfortable affluence of European secular society. In what was still a predominantly agricultural society in Russia, food and servants were inexpensive, which Pipes concludes somewhat airily 'provided an excellent environment for cultural and intellectual dilettantism in the best sense of the word.'⁷⁸

As was the case, for example, with Herzen but certainly not with Chernyshevsky, membership of the two groups sometimes overlapped, particularly amongst those aristocrats with philosophical and vocational interests in common with the radical sons of the non-gentrified, white collar professions. More frequently they remained divided by class background and status. Here Pipes appears to be reflecting Lenin's analysis of the hierarchical social strata which had nurtured the intelligentsia, but obviously not his horrific prescriptions.

⁷⁵ Lenin, *Collected Works*, Op.Cit. Vol 26, pp404-415

⁷⁶ Pipes. Op.Cit. pp50-54

⁷⁷ Ibid. p47

⁷⁸ Ibid. p50

In common with Bauman, Pipes also argues that both the philosophical and the cultural intelligentsia were in a terminal state of crisis a decade or more before Lenin's ideological damnation of them. Beginning in the final years of the century and continuing until the first decades of the Stalinist era, he writes, the combination of persecution, mass education and an increasingly 'intense and ruthless industrialization ...knocked out the very social foundations from under it.'⁷⁹ In its place emerged the salaried ranks of a technical and administrative semi-intelligentsia, whom Pipes describes as lacking the breadth of knowledge, spirit and intellectual sophistication of its forbears.⁸⁰

With his reverence for traditional liberal arts education and his seeming nostalgia for the lost world of genteel conversation over a generous lunch in the manicured gardens of a dacha, Pipes' perspective appears both poignant and unapologetically elitist. In Bauman's less sentimental view, those *fin de siècle* members of the intelligentsia who chose not to linger on the margins of European society as a revered but declining coterie, transformed themselves into 'the trainers.' That is, they became the producers and purveyors of culture as a means of ensuring social order through indoctrination, of transforming social domination into a cultural hegemony. It is perspective that is redolent of the Gramscian notion that modernity is primarily a process of turning human beings into uncritical non-thinking personalities.

Pipes' hopeful counterview is that the concept of the Soviet cultural intelligentsia after 1917 should be understood as 'inherently vague and evolving'.⁸¹ Given the opacity of the communist regime, about which he was writing at the time, he suggests we should suspend judgment on the issue of its historical continuity. There may yet prove to be sound reasons, he says, why the spirit of critical opposition it embodied will not be so readily extinguished in the longer term. Paradoxically, he argues, even under the despotism of subsequent Soviet regimes, the classical heritage of Russia's

⁷⁹ Ibid. p52

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp51-53

⁸¹ Pipes, Op.Cit. p49

'single greatest glory',⁸² its nineteenth century literature, permeated society. For Pipes, a rich and compassionate humanitarianism that enthralled the reader in worlds of understanding beyond Soviet communism was embodied in this literature. He points out that even during the Stalinist era, the works of Pushkin, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov were distributed in 'astronomical numbers.'⁸³ He believes the result may be that its legacy will continue to endure through a process of cultural syncretism:

The hold this culture exercises on Russians is so strong that through it a class which is historically dead acquires, posthumously, ever new heirs and successors. In particular, a fraction of the technical and administrative semi-intelligentsia of the second and third generation ... may be expected to model itself on it.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, Pipes's edited collection of essays on the intelligentsia was published in 1961 on the eve of Brezhnev's rise to power. The fall of Khrushchev was followed by the dismantling of many of his government's liberalizing reforms, which arguably had provided a brief springtime for those members of the cultured and semi-cultured strata who had survived Stalinism. The next section looks at the claims that the Brezhnev era's cultural and economic stagnation, exacerbated by his government's renewed repression of dissident artists and intellectuals, ensured the Russian intelligentsia's final obituary can now be written.

The End of the Intelligentsia?

This section begins with an exploration of the views of the contemporary Russian political analyst, Gleb Pavlovsky, whose life and times have spanned the implosion of communist society and the determined, though initially chaotic, struggle to reconstitute the New Russia under Yeltsin and then Putin. In particular, it explores Pavlovsky's historical ruminations about what he sees

⁸² *Ibid.* p54

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp54-55

as the cumulative ineffectiveness and ideological disarray that is a mark of liberal intellectuals in post-Soviet Russia. In Pavlovsky's scathing judgment, Pipes's cultured intelligentsia are now 'a forgotten people,' largely irrelevant to the political demands of a modern, quasi-democratic society.

It should be stressed though that this detailed focus on Pavlovsky's commentary on the fate of the so-called intelligentsia in his country during the last few decades is not meant to be interpreted as providing a definitive history. As it happens, much of what he says appears to be highly contested amongst intellectuals in Moscow and St Petersburg. As a result, his denial of the current conceptual validity of the term intelligentsia can be interpreted as an intensely ideologically-charged feature of wider debates about the perennial Russian question of 'What Is To Be Done?' These debates, which span the political spectrum from the Left to the Right, are the subject of the next chapter.

In ways that reflect Ivanov-Razumnik's interpretation of Herzen's autobiographical *My Life and Times* as an immanent subjectivist expression of the striving to pursue an engaged and exemplary life, Pavlovsky's highly articulate, opinionated descriptions of his own experiences and aspirations provide a significant portal through which to negotiate the murky terrain of contemporary Russian politics. Like Herzen too, humility has not been a notable feature of his self-definition. Nor have his innumerable critics been particularly consistent in assessing the contribution of his liberal-oriented intellectuality or committed political stances. Over time Pavlovsky has been variously portrayed as a liberal sell-out, an ultra-conservative, a pragmatist, a nihilist, a reformist, and a decadent opportunist. The underlying assumption in much of the commentary has been that the extent to which the voice of Liberalism is deemed to have been lost or gained in the Russian arena is inseparable from a shifting consensus about who is believed to have been either marginalized or the most skilled in the cynical, self-serving craft of elite politics.

From his student days during the slow decay of communist rule, Pavlovsky's influential analyses and interviews indicate that he has sought with considerable success to position himself as a high-flying participant in the post-Soviet arena. By his own admission he has never aspired to be 'an impartial observer.'⁸⁵ These days, it seems, he has not only become a historian of the drifts of political ideas during his own life and times, but above all, of what he sees as the struggle within Russia to articulate a discourse that credibly charts the political landscape of Putin's world. The section begins with an account of his widespread denigration, both within Russia and in the West.

A Case Study of Liberalism Lost?

In part at least, much of the analysis of the alleged fortunes of the voices of Russia's intelligentsia since the end of the Cold War could be said to be typified by the characterisations of Pavlovsky as the Kremlin's longstanding, morally bankrupt 'political technologist.' In common with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's communications strategist, Alasdair Campbell, or Bush Junior's master of 'junkyard dog politics,' Karl Rove, Pavlovsky's singular talents are said to have been shameless spin-doctoring, bogus polling, black PR, and running dirty tricks election campaigns. Moreover, his catchphrase, 'the politics of no alternatives' has been seen as a calculated smokescreen for what is in reality an endorsement of Putin-style authoritarianism.

Indeed, Pavlovsky's scurrilous reputation appears at times to have outstripped his so-called dirty deeds. In late 2004, for instance, he was deployed by the Kremlin to Ukraine during the election campaign there, to provide strategic support to the pro-Russian presidential candidate, Viktor Yanukovich. Though the evidence is shaky and the criminal investigation by Ukrainian prosecutors has proved to be prolonged and inconclusive, he was accused of ordering the dioxin poisoning of opposition, anti-Russia candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, which left his face badly disfigured. The allegation was based on a supposed

⁸⁵ Krastev, Ivan & Zhurzhenko, Tatiana, 'The Politics of No Alternatives or How Power Works in Russia: Gleb Pavlovsky,' Institute for Human Sciences, Transit 42, Vienna 8 July, 2011 www.iwm.at/tag/russia-transit/ p5

tapped telephone conversation, aired in 2005 on Kiev's Channel 5 television and whose authenticity has never been publicly substantiated. Not surprisingly perhaps, Pavlovsky has always strenuously denied the accusation as an absurd lie, claiming that initially 'I took it as a joke.'⁸⁶ He added that even as a joke, it was 'a bit vulgar for my taste',⁸⁷ reminding him of the public panic created by Orson Welles' halloween radio episode of H.G. Wells' sci-fi novel, *War of the Worlds*, which simulated a news bulletin announcing a Martian invasion.

Together with a handful of men who have been said to constitute the inner sanctum of the post-Soviet regime, he has also acquired the sobriquet of 'The Gray Cardinal,' with its implication of secretive and sinister manipulation of power. In the Western commentaries, it appears to be a popular nickname for Putin's high-flying supporters and is suggestive perhaps of Kennan's characterization in his 1946 Long Telegram to the US State Department of the unscrupulous, fearful, grovelling functionaries who he believed had buttressed the Stalin regime. According to media reports and analyses over recent years, the recipients include the oligarch Boris Berezovsky who fled to London in 2000 following an acrimonious falling out with Putin and allegedly killed himself 13 years later; and Igor Sechin, who is said to be the leader of the Kremlin faction comprised of former intelligence agents (the siloviki) and is the current president of the gigantic, state-controlled oil company, Rosneft. Reputedly very close to Putin, Sechin's other russophobic epithets are 'Darth Vader' and 'the scariest man on earth.'⁸⁸

Also on the list of Gray Cardinals are the expatriate multi-billionaire Sergei Pugachov, who allegedly funded the siloviki faction and is currently under investigation for corruption after fleeing Russia owing the government one billion dollars; Vladislav Surkov, said to be one of the Putin government's leading ideologues and the so-called 'puppetmaster' of managed or sovereign

⁸⁶ Whewell, Tim, 'Who Poisoned Viktor Yushchenko?' *BBC Newsnight* Interview <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/4288995.stm>

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Dryden, Alan, 'Putin Calls in Darth Vader to Tighten his Grip on Russia's Energy Assets,' *The Observer*, 24 June, 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/jun/24/putintightensgriponeconomy>

democracy. Surkov's personal philosophy has been characterised as post-modernist nihilism and his special talent as convincing Russians black means white.⁸⁹ In addition, there is the former KGB officer, Yevgeny Shkolov, appointed in late 2012 to investigate illegal financial transactions by Russian officials. Described by the Kremlin as part of a post 2012 presidential election, anti-corruption initiative by Putin, his appointment was interpreted by some commentators as meaning the compilation of *kompromat* (compromising evidence) as an allegedly well-trying tactic amongst Russian intelligence operatives for controlling the country's businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians.⁹⁰

Whether accurate or not, much in the above job descriptions and character assassinations are based on hearsay, emerging from the underbelly of Moscow-based political gossip and repeated without much substantiation, especially in online blogs and journals such as La Russophobe or Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's The Power Vertical. But even among this allegedly invidious list, Pavlovsky appears to be a more confusing figure. Born in 1951 in Odessa, he was a teenager during the Brezhnev era of economic and ideological stagnation which has been seen as culminating in the demise of the Soviet Union. As a young student dissident in Moscow in 1982, according to his somewhat obscure self-description, 'a Zen Marxist,'⁹¹ he was arrested for distributing samizdat copies of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Confronted with the likelihood of a long prison sentence, he has admitted to having collaborated with the authorities,⁹² but 'during the trial backtracked on his testimony.'⁹³ In any event, he received a softer sentence of internal exile to the Komi Republic, approximately 1600 kilometers north-west of Moscow. Far from enduring a life of imprisonment with hard labour in sub-

⁸⁹ Pomerantzev, Peter, 'Putin's Rasputin,' *London Review of Books*, Vol 33 No 20, 20 October 2011

⁹⁰ Whitmore, Brian, 'Putin's Little Helper,' *The Power Vertical*, *Radio Free Europe*, *Radio Liberty*, 29 January, 2013

⁹¹ Krastev, Ivan & Zhurzhenko, Tatiana, Op.Cit. p1

⁹² Warren, Marcus, 'Interview with Pavlovsky,' Email from Russia, 30 January 2001 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1320324/Email-from-Russia.html> Accessed 28/10/2014

⁹³ Krastev & Zhurzhenko, Op.Cit. p1

Arctic temperatures, he was employed there as a stoker and house painter.⁹⁴ Three years later he returned to the capital just as perestroika under the newly-elected Secretary-General of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, was gathering momentum. By September 1986 he had become what he describes as 'politically active,' helping to found the first legal 'Social Initiatives Club' with the aim of critically engaging with the emerging ferment of ideas and ideologies.

From this time, he also became a prominent, though factious, member of the dissident movement,⁹⁵ as evident, for example, in his establishment of the independent Post-Factum news agency in 1989. Until its demise in 1994, the agency disseminated its low-key coverage of Kremlin politics and assorted events across Russia to a limited array of domestic outlets, as well as to the *Los Angeles Times* on America's West Coast. During this time Pavlovsky also worked as editor-in-chief of *Vek XX I Mir* (Twentieth Century and the World) magazine, described as 'one of the most interesting publications of the perestroika era.'⁹⁶ In 1995 he established the think-tank, The Foundation for Effective Politics, for which he continues perhaps to be best known outside Russia. Under the aegis of the foundation, he is credited with having developed a successful new 'political language'⁹⁷ through motifs, such as 'stability', 'the Putin majority' or 'the politics of no alternatives' that are said to have been an influential determinant of the direction of post-Soviet politics. In particular, this 'informational support'⁹⁸ is said to have played a focal role in the campaign strategies behind Yeltsin's re-election in 1996, Putin's victories in 2000 and 2004, and Mevedev's ascendency to the presidency in 2008.

⁹⁴ Zhurzhenko & Krastev, 'Gleb Pavlovsky: the final act,' *Open Democracy*, 15th May 2011 p1

⁹⁵ Warren, Op.Cit.

⁹⁶ Zhurzhenko & Krastev, Op.Cit. p3

⁹⁷ Ibid. p2

⁹⁸ Chto Delat Online, 'An Open Letter to Alain Badiou & His Rejection of Gleb Pavlovsky's Invitation,' February 1 2008 www.chtodelat.wordpress.com/2008/02/25/ accessed 28/10/2014

In other ways too Pavlovsky was an early exponent of what he believed was a need to cultivate a 'political language,' that would bring meaning to the ideological void in post-Soviet society, especially through the opening up of social media. In 1997, for example, he helped to create one of Russia's oldest online websites, *Russkii Zhurnal* (Russian Journal). Featuring literary and cultural commentary, the journal gathers expert scholarly analysis on national affairs and provides a link to an archive of reviews of high-profile books in Italian, English and Russian on political philosophy, religion, history and sociology, many of them from the West's most prestigious academic publishers.

Throughout the last two decades, he is said to have helped to build an internet media conglomerate, which included the Russia-based websites, Lenta.ru, Vesti.ru and Strana.ru.⁹⁹ Initially these were low budget sites that covered events in Russia and internationally, mainly through news aggregation by editorial teams of reports from Reuters, the BBC and domestic news agencies such as Ria Novosti, Itar-Tass or Interfax. In the early 2000s both Vesti.ru and Strana.ru were sold to the government-controlled, All Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK). Strana.ru continues as an innocuous e-zine with a particular focus on feel-good travellers' tales from remote and colourful places in the Russian Federation. In 2014, Vesti.ru was providing a tabloid-style daily news round-up derived from its link to the television channel, Rossiya 24. Lenta.ru, which is currently owned by Russia's third largest internet and search engine company, Rambler Media Group, has become a popular online Russian/English newspaper and continues its mix of international and local coverage, for example, with a headline story about the birth of a baby boy to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, with other stories about the fortunes of Russia's national football team, and the release of a man briefly detained during a street protest in support of dissident Alexei Navalny.¹⁰⁰ In short, the news site mirrors the proliferation of similar sites in the West. By implication,

⁹⁹ www.lenta.ru; www.vesti.ru; www.strana.ru

¹⁰⁰ Lenta.ru Op.Cit. 24th July, 2013

whatever Pavlovsky's lamentations about the absence of a constructive intellectual debate about his country's political directions, the result of his initiatives seems to have been to facilitate the creation of a mainstream monopolistic media, for which the ideological ruminations of the dissident movement and the post-communist role of the liberal intelligentsia have become largely incidental issues. These days, his most provocative commentary can be found in conversations with friends and acquaintances on blogsites such as Facebook.

To many of his critics, especially those among the sympathizers with the post-Cold War Opposition Movement, Pavlovsky simply remains a would-be liberal with a shady past who finally lost all morality in the service of the government of crooks and the thieves¹⁰¹ in the Kremlin. In their eyes, his 'greatest sin was to support a regime controlled by former enemy-spooks.'¹ Moreover, others among the ranks of his critics, such as the Russian liberal thinker, Lilia Shevtsova, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow, have suggested his inflated self-regard and simple-minded nationalist sentiments often resulted in pronouncements defending the current domestic and foreign policies of his beloved Russia that she claims were ludicrous.¹⁰³ In particular, she points to a collection of essays entitled *What does Russia Think?* which was compiled from a 2009 conference sponsored by the European Council on Foreign Relations. In the Afterword, Pavlovsky describes 'the reality of global Russia'¹⁰⁴ in terms of its central contribution to international security through its containment of Islamist terrorism in Chechnya, thus preventing it 'from turning into a global force like Al Qaeda.'¹⁰⁵ As well, it has promoted global peace and security by helping 'other new nations in Eastern Europe create identities of their

¹⁰¹ Navalny, Alexei in Parfitt, Tom, 'Russian blogger Alexei Navalny faces Criminal Investigation,' *The Guardian*, 10 May 2011.

¹⁰² Zhurzenko and Krastev, Op.Cit. p 2

¹⁰³ Shevtsova, Lilia, *Lonely Power*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010, p105

¹⁰⁴ Pavlovsky, Gleb, 'Afterword,' in Krastev, Ivan, Leonard, Mark & Wilson, Andrew (Eds), *What Does Russia Think?* www.ecfr.eu, p76

¹⁰⁵ Pavlovsky, Gleb, 'Is Russia Weak?' Project Syndicate, 29 October 2009, p1

own.¹⁰⁶ Shevtsova's scornful response is that this latter view would probably come as a surprise to many Eastern Europeans.¹⁰⁷

More interestingly, in this context, Pavlovsky gives a provocative account of the dilemmas confronting what he sees as Russia's adherence to a high-minded internationalist stance on foreign policy. Consider, for example, his claim that his country plays a leading role in the security of Eurasia. In contrast to the hypocrisy of the US or the EU, for Pavlovsky this demonstrates a genuine Russian commitment to a cosmopolitan liberal legal order. 'In the words of Boris Mezhyuev,' he writes, "'Pity the Hobbes who does not dream of becoming Kant!'"¹⁰⁸ Instead the reality is the determined, uncompromising hegemony of the US. Unlike Russia, he says, the American-dominated Western powers are driven by little beyond crude self-interest in a continuing Great Game in which:

Russia is expected to play the role of a global caryatid that always provides external support but is never invited inside the building...from an American point of view, the new Russia is either still the former Soviet Union or else an inchoate state - a blank spot on the map somehow supplied with strategic armaments and sovereignty for no good reason.¹⁰⁹

And the Western responses to such views? For a start, there has been a familiar insistence of the credibility gap between Russia's declared intentions and its actions. Apart from the crises in Syria and Ukraine, an example is the unresolved trilateral hostility involving Abkhazia, Georgia and the Putin regime in the wake of the 2008 regional war which included the Russian invasion of Georgia. In its report almost half a decade after the cessation of the fighting, the International Crisis Group (ICG) has appealed for constructive

¹⁰⁶ Pavlovsky, 'Afterword,' Op.Cit. p74

¹⁰⁷ Shevtsova, Op.Cit. p105

¹⁰⁸ Pavlovsky, 'Afterword,' Op.Cit. p74

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

diplomacy to help ensure stronger initiatives to address the misery that has been the consequence of more than 20 years of regional warfare. In diplomat-speak these include dealing with 'basic security-related and humanitarian issues';¹¹⁰confidence building and violence prevention measures; and the alleviation of the plight of more than 280000 Georgian internally displaced persons.(IDPs)¹¹¹ The ICG report concluded that 'Russia's lack of implementation of the EU-brokered 2008 ceasefire agreement...remain(s) of fundamental importance,'¹¹²as an obstacle to providing aid to the region's various ethnic minorities.

In sum, at least on this issue, perhaps even the most sympathetic fellow travellers might find it difficult to unravel the enigma of Pavlovsky's notion of Russia's ethical cosmopolitanism, an issue that will be explored in the final chapter. Still, especially since its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan there has been an increasingly pervasive sense among the West's liberals that any accusation of sanctimoniousness in American foreign policy might often be justified. In defence of Pavlovsky's views, the unheeded warning by Russia's security services, some months before the 2013 Boston marathon bombings, of a likely terrorist threat to America from a group of Chechens evokes a sense that the Kremlin's motivation might perhaps have been more humane than self-interested. As Hill argues, since his first term as president in 2000 and the events of 9/11, Putin has consistently maintained that coordinating anti-terrorism measures, especially in Chechnya 'was his central idea for Russian-US cooperation'.¹¹³

Nevertheless, as Hill also points out, the FBI's failure to take heed of the intelligence gathered by the Russians in Chechnya as part of their continuing surveillance operations there simply demonstrates that it is extremely

¹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Europe Report No224, 'Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation,' 10 April 2013, p1

¹¹¹ Internally Displaced Monitoring Centre, 'George: partial progress towards durable solutions for IDPS,' 31st December, 2012, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-and-central-asia/georgia/summary>

¹¹² *Ibid.* p2

¹¹³ Hill, Fiona, 'The Limits of Cooperation with Russia,' Brookings Institute, 22ndApril, 2013, p1

unlikely that the two countries can find way to work together beyond the occasional limited counter-terrorism measures. This is despite the reality that geopolitical self-interest and *realpolitik* has meant a somewhat unsteady commitment to ethical cosmopolitanism on both sides. More specifically, there has been little distinguish the methods used in dealing with terrorist suspects whether in the North Caucasus, in Iraq, or in Afghanistan. From a Russian perspective, Hill points out:

They have conducted targeted assassinations, we have conducted assassinations. They have used car bombs and missiles, we use unmanned drones. We accuse them of abuses. They accuse us of the same abuses.¹¹⁴

By implication, according to Hill at least, in critical matters of foreign policy not much appears to have changed in US-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War. For the new Cold War warriors, the answer to Pavlovsky's assertion that his country's place is firmly on the moral high ground in matters of international law is most often the straightforward counterclaim that moral hypocrisy is the traditional bailiwick of the Russians. 'Throw in Putin's KGB background,' Kotkin writes, 'and all the lingering emotions and politics of the Cold War, and Russia's ostensible singularity becomes magnified.'¹¹⁵ And whatever Pavlovsky's public statements to the contrary, the Putin regime is at heart suspicious and scornful of the West, especially of the US; as well as expansionist in its determination to re-consolidate its traditional spheres of influence, not least in North Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East; as well as self-aggrandizing in its sense of entitlement as a major participant in international affairs. As an exponent of the Realist school of international relations, Bobo Lo claims, 'Putin's vision of Russia as a re-emerging global power means that the US ...will remain the primary reference point of Russian foreign policy. This bias reflects a strategic culture rooted in hard power and

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Kotkin, Stephen, 'Sticking Power,' TLS March 2 2012, p7

geopolitical priorities.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, if the reference to Putin in the above is excluded, Lo's commentary could have been written almost anytime during the last 70 years. This theme too will be considered in more detail in the last chapter, especially with regard to Russia's role in the Syria's civil war and its cosmopolitan, conciliatory initiative to abolish the use of chemical weapons in that country.

As many of Pavlovsky's critics have argued, it should come as no surprise that he has been demonized as an integral part of what they believe are the hubristic geopolitics and corruption of post-communist Russian elites. Among such critics is the small cohort of intellectuals, artists, philosophers and writers from an 'anti-liberal, communist and internationalist'¹¹⁷ collective called by the resonant historical title, *Chto Delat/What is to be done?* During the last decade, its collaborative works have been exhibited across Western Europe, in London and in Australia. Like the liberal Shevtsova, the collective has singled out Pavlovsky as a target of its derision, though in language that is considerably more castigating. It accuses him of having become from 1996 'the principal beneficiary of the Kremlin's ideological commissions', who not only 'doesn't believe a word he utters,' but also promotes 'extreme anti-westernism and the Putin personality cult.'¹¹⁸ It also claims that, as well as being a professional liar and somewhat of a fanatic, 'he has now settled on an ultra-rightest version of nationalist and imperialist conservatism.'¹¹⁹

In an open letter to the French communist, Alain Badiou, published in its online newspaper in 2008, the collective made a successful appeal to a fellow member of 'the great contemporary liberation movement.'¹²⁰ They had asked Badiou to reject Pavlovsky's invitation to visit Russia, on the grounds he has become 'a frank collaborationist and a businessman trading in propaganda,

¹¹⁶ Lo, Bobo, 'Russian and the European Dimension,' *ABC Radio National*, Big Ideas programme, 4 April 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/russia-and-the-european-dimension/4592392>

¹¹⁷ *Chto Delat* website, chtodelat.org

¹¹⁸ *Chto Delat*, Op. Cit. p1

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p2

exploiting the impoverished social and economic status of Russian intellectuals and thus turning them into cynical servants of power.’¹²¹In other words, whatever Pavlovsky’s pretensions about creating a new language of politics, he should be dismissed as a post-Soviet opportunist, rather than considered to be either a credible political theorist or an intellectual of any depth of understanding.

Formed in 2003 in the city of the first workers’ soviets in 1917, St Petersburg, the Chto Delat Collective self-consciously derived its name from the iconic writings of Chernyshevsky and Lenin of a century or so ago, discussed in the last chapter. The group describes itself in language deliberately reminiscent of those more revolutionary times as: ‘a self organizing platform for cultural workers intent on politicizing their “knowledge production”....’¹²² As a platform, the core collective has a flexible, project-oriented membership of fewer than a dozen, while also describing itself optimistically as part of a growing global network that, inside Russia at least, currently includes the Forward Socialist Movement, the Pyotr Alexeev Resistance Movement, and the Moscow-based Institute for Collective Action, headed by the vocal French sociologist, Carine Clement. However, despite its heart-felt, neo-Marxist aspirations, it is not clear Chto Delat will continue its collaborative political and artistic endeavours to elucidate the images and inner landscapes that it believes define contemporary Russia. In May 2013, the group appears to have shared the fate of many earlier socialist collectives, especially in the West, with the announcement of the termination of its blog site due to ‘irreconcilable differences between the editorial staff of *Chtodelat News* and the Chto Delat work group.’¹²³

Ironically, after almost two decades as a controversial, self-designated policy advisor to the Kremlin, Pavlovsky appears to have shared an analogous fate. In April, 2011 the Putin government appeared to have decided that he was one of Isaiah Berlin’s ‘feeble flotsam’ who had not so much missed ‘the bus of

¹²¹ Ibid. p1

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Chto Delat website Op.Cit. p1

history' as deserving to be figuratively thrown under it. His special, semi-official, high-status access to the regime's elite insiders was withdrawn, reportedly because of his vocal support for Medvedev as the preferred candidate in the March 2012 presidential election. His political agitations on this issue had allegedly included a reference to Putin as 'deadwood.'¹²⁴ Elsewhere Pavlovsky has obliquely suggested that a quote from a member of the 19th century Russian intelligentsia and Herzen associate, Vissarion Belinsky, provides a more appropriate explanation of the reasons for his dismissal: 'Unfortunately for oneself, one's too smart, too gifted, knew too much and could not hide one's superiority.'¹²⁵ In December 2011, he published a caustic satire of Putinology with the mockingly self-congratulatory title of *The Genius of Power! A Dictionary of the Kremlin's Abstractions*.

Despite the scorn of his critics, since Pavlovsky's ejection from the corridors of power in 2011, he has gradually emerged as a considerably less diabolical character. Instead, in media and academic analyses, which are frequently written by members of the same group of Russia commentators, he has begun to appear more acceptable as a politically committed but now marginal public intellectual. Though a patriot, he is now seen as accessibly trans-cultural in his articulation of his country's perspectives. His own writings are embellished with references to literary and popular culture from both his homeland and from the West. These have included, for example, what he describes as the irrelevant, 'ancient writings' of Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* on the cultural mystery exemplified by Russia; or the suite of poems attempting to decipher the Russian soul by the early 19th century fellow traveller, Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke; or the main currents in Western political theory, especially the works of Kant; or the legacy of 19th century Russian legal philosophy; or more prosaically a radio production by Orson Welles.

¹²⁴ Shevtsova, 'Lonely Power,' Op.Cit. p105

¹²⁵ Masyuk, Elena, 'Gleb Pavlovsky: "What Putin is most afraid of is to be left out,' *Novaya Gazeta*, November 6 2012 <http://en.novayagazeta.ru/politics/55288.html> accessed 28/10/2014

In interviews and in his online journals, he has continued in his self-styled role as an energetic and occasionally satirical commentator on the daily clamour of his country's politics, not least as a provider of catchy one-liners for foreign journalists from the major British and American broadsheets, such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. He has become a regular contributor to the Russia coverage by the American global news agency, *Bloomberg News*, whose online reports include a puffbox citing Pavlovsky. Like his predecessor, Herzen, his public face increasingly appears to be as part sceptic and part idealist, on the one hand conjuring a cynical, scathing disenchantment with the post-Soviet turn of events, while at the same appearing to hold to the tacit belief that circumstances are fluid, transitional and open to change, if approached appropriately. It is a mindset he no doubt shares with the majority of true believers in the transformative power of political systems, whether of the Right or the Left, anywhere in the world.

So How Exactly to Characterize Pavlovsky's Political Persuasions?

As the conclusions drawn so far in this chapter and in the last one about the importance of contextualizing abstractions such as democracy, authoritarianism or even the concept of the intelligentsia in contemporary Russia might suggest, the challenge in answering the above question is how to negotiate the foggy terrain of terminology. As a reflection of current circumstances in Russia, what might Pavlovsky's alleged liberal conservatism really imply? Or his dismissal of the intelligentsia as moral egoists? Or his apparent despair of liberals generally? Or his relentless condemnation of Putin in the aftermath of the 2012 Presidential election? Or his suspicions about the political meaningfulness of the dissident protest movement?

One of his most comprehensive interviews was carried out by the European Council on Foreign Relations' Ivan Krastev and his colleague, Tatiana Zhurzhenko, just before his fall from grace under the Putin regime. In it, Pavlovsky describes his own path to effective politics, richly embedding it in

what he believes are the terminal failures and timidity of the last remnants of Russia's intelligentsia. In the 1960s its members were those survivors of Stalinism who have been described somewhat inaccurately as Zhivago's children¹²⁶ and whom Pavlovsky now rejects as insignificant. Contrary to Pipes' wishful thinking, he says, their education in Russia's high culture has not ensured they have had much influence in their country's future.

Pavlovsky's primary focus is on their role across the years from the end of the Khrushchev thaw in what he sees as the intensified hollowing out of the world of effective politics that reached its nadir during the debacle of Yeltsin's rule in the early 1990s. In translation at least, his extended interview resonates with what poet Kirill Medvedev characterizes as a kind of confessional post-post-modernist new sincerity, which he claims is currently fashionable in Moscow's intellectual circles and which appeals 'to biographical experience as a zone of authenticity.'¹²⁷

Pavlovsky's account begins with his embittered obituary to the intelligentsia. As a member of the generation that reached maturity in the 1960s and 1970s during the period of liberalization that was an integral feature of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation, Pavlovsky believes he witnessed directly both the destruction from above and the complicit self-destruction of this traditionally revered, cultured sector of society. At the same time he stresses that overwhelmingly its members were never liberals in any Berlinian sense of an unequivocal pluralist embrace of the negative liberty of the individual and an abiding distrust of collectivist dreams. Rather as Pipes has argued, they emerged from a professional stratum of highly-educated, privileged intellectuals, doctors, academics, writers and scientists, whom Pavlovsky describes as 'the Stalinist Soviet man liberated of Stalin.'¹²⁸ He also characterizes them as a kind of 'in-between generation who often believed in

¹²⁶ Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 'Cultivating their Dachas,' Review of Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia by Vladislav Zubok, *London Review of Books* Vol.31 No.17 10 September 2009, pp12-14

¹²⁷ Medvedev, Kirill, *It's No Good: poems, essays, actions*, Ugly Duckling Presse, NY 2012, p237

¹²⁸ Krastev & Zhurzhenko, Interview with Gleb Pavlovsky, *Transit online* 42 Op.Cit. p5

the potential of Khrushchev's 'Soviet power "with a human face."'129 That is, in general they were pacifist, idealistic, liberal-minded socialists :

People toughened by Stalin's industrial ethics and by the labour quotas they had to meet or face the gulags... incapable of not doing their job well, they were simply too scared.¹³⁰

In the years of the thaw after Stalin's death, Pavlovsky claims, this fear had been tempered by hope and a progressive spirit.¹³¹ Memories of 'past horrors,'¹³² he says, had inspired 'this incredibly optimistic culture...There was a sense that everything terrible was over.'¹³³

But not for very long. By the late 1970s, he contends, as a result of Brezhnev's firm grip on the reins of power, the ranks of this cultural intelligentsia had again been depleted to the point of political unimportance. Central to this was the backlash instigated by the government against the wave of protests that followed the 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. According to Pavlovsky's account, it had taken little more than half a dozen years for the Kremlin to destroy the loose alliances that constituted the dissident movement at that time, including the last of the liberal intelligentsia which had been an integral part of it. During the years of Brezhnev domination, increasing numbers of civil activists were exiled or imprisoned in the gulags, not only those from Moscow but also 'from Kharkov, Odessa, Lvov, Leningrad, Tbilisi, Baku, Erevan - cosmopolitan centres, capitals with a tradition of intelligentsia.'¹³⁴In addition, there was his government's strategic partial opening of the borders, which deliberately aimed to foster the migration of cultured, urban Jewish professionals to Israel

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p2

or the United States. As well there was the 'mercenary'¹³⁵ submissiveness of high profile artists and intellectuals to the authorities in exchange for KGB permission to travel to Paris or London.¹³⁶ These were years, Pavlovsky says, during which he witnessed directly the recreation of a climate of fear that effectively deterred a new generation from filling the void left by people who had been arrested,¹³⁷ or who had left, or had been forced to leave, for the West.¹³⁸

Despite the fixation on the Soviet Union's dissidents by the West's Cold War liberals, Pavlovsky claims the 1960's generation should not be remembered as especially heroic in the face of the regime's renewed oppression. In common with their century predecessors, theirs was a case of lost opportunities and a naive embrace of 'moral purity' rather than an effective engagement with political power. And in the following years through the rise and fall of Gorbachev, nor did they have much understanding of the 'opportunities and risks,'¹³⁹ inherent in his particular policies. In this context, Pavlovsky's judgment of some of the West's most respected Russian anti-communists, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner, is harsh and dismissive. Initially, he says, such members of the intelligentsia had been committed to what he calls 'Soviet Republicanism',¹⁴⁰ that is to the Eastern European model of action, represented by Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and later Poland's Solidarity. This approach was 'based on a public stance taken by prominent intellectuals willing to interfere in public affairs.'¹⁴¹ The problem, Pavlovsky says, was that there was no precedent for such activism in his country, nor a unity of voice or sense of leadership amongst its high-profile representatives. As he puts it:

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p3

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p2

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* P3

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

I realized this very distinctly when Adam Michnik came to Moscow during at the time of the Round table talks in Poland to reach an agreement on Soviet non-interference. And I remember thinking at the time that it would have been impossible for us to frame our goals in these terms in our country.¹⁴²

For the most part, he says, this liberal intelligentsia turned out not to be supporters of the wider dissident movement, but rather singularly nationalist, anti-Leftist and anti-Totalitarian. Moreover, he accuses them of having lived out the years of oppression under Brezhnev's rule by retreating into their dachas and nurturing their private consciences. For Pavlovsky, his youthful disenchantment with Russia's post-Stalinist/post-Cold War so-called Liberalism was vindicated by their failure to take a stand on behalf of the imprisoned dissidents, who were 'their own people after all'.¹⁴³ He believes it not only revealed to him their blind cowardice, but also that by any assessment of their actual impact within Soviet society they had proved themselves to be 'politically impotent and sterile'.¹⁴⁴ By the beginning of the 1980s, he claims, those that remained of the movement had simply become a small sect of human rights moralists who increasingly sought to derive their legitimacy through their appeals to the international community:

The argument was that since we've failed to cultivate strong public opinion in our own country, let's use the international one. The West became "the raw material provider" of the Soviet dissident movement, Kant is dead - or he left the USSR on an Israeli visa - and Kissinger, Carter and Reagan became the new moral authorities....But who were the Soviet authorities supposed to talk to in the Moscow human rights

¹⁴² Ibid. p6

¹⁴³ Ibid. p4

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

community, and what about? We had nothing to propose and we did not pose a real challenge.¹⁴⁵

In 1993 with the failed anti-Yeltsin coup, Pavlovsky says he was forced to accept that what remained of a liberalizing form of Communist rule had clearly 'fallen apart.'¹⁴⁶ He believes Yeltsin had successfully destroyed 'not just the Soviet Union,'¹⁴⁷but an ideal arena, that had been fostered by perestroika, for free debate about the new socio-economic and political models that were being tested in his country.¹⁴⁸As an ambitious member of the emergent inner circles of power, Pavlovsky says now turned to 'political technology' which he defines as expertise in 'the politics of non political power.'¹⁴⁹ He also describes it as the strategic manipulation of electoral and grass-roots politics to ensure the consolidation of government by a reformist liberal elite. Such a regime embodies an archaic 'manorial'¹⁵⁰ form of power. In other words, although lacking in genuine democratic representation, it sees itself as governing on the people's behalf, and pays careful heed to their expressed needs and wants.¹⁵¹ Here Pavlovsky characterizes it in terms of a radical liberal conservatism that brings together:

...the platform of Liberalism on the one hand and that of mass social populism on the other. A peculiar option, something similar to the Tea Party in the US: a rightwing programme couched in leftist terms.¹⁵²

A half a lifetime later, Pavlovsky's central preoccupations remain the fragility of liberal reform in Russia; its losses and gains under Putin; the insignificance

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p8

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p7

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p10

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. pp9-10

¹⁵² Ibid. p11

of the dissident movement immediately before the fall of Communism and ever since that time; and the moral and political responsibility of his country's elite intellectuals to strive to ensure that Russia's future is better than its past. Significantly, throughout his very lengthy interview with the European Council for Foreign Relations, he consistently uses the plural pronoun 'we' in the discussions about Russia's liberals. Similarly, his scornful denial of the existence of a credible contemporary intelligentsia appear to be the attack of an insider, of some-one whose deliberate self-construction is as an exceptional, recalcitrant kind of intellectual.

Ironically, his oppositional stance and relentless monitoring of Russia's political and cultural directions thus appear to qualify him at the very least for membership of a modern-day cultural intelligentsia, however decimated its ranks may be. That is, by implication he emerges as having a great deal in common with Pipes's catch-all definition of the classic Russian intelligentsia as composed of nationalistic, aspirational, cultured individuals with critically-thinking personalities.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDING AUTHORITARIANISM IN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In France, revolutionary tyranny is an evil belonging to a state of transition; in Russia despotic tyranny is permanent.

Astolphe de Custine, 1843.

Russia is a tyranny, the vilest tyranny that ever existed. The great mass of Russian people are gripped by a gang of cosmopolitan adventurers, who have settled down on the country like vultures and are tearing it apart.

Winston Churchill, 1924.

So now you know why I shall never offer anything to the Washington Post again. The lofty gaiety of my writing is unsuited to the brisk thudding of its middle of the road clichés.

Isaiah Berlin, Collected Letters 1928-46

One of the Cold War commonplaces about Russia, notably expressed for example by George Kennan, was its abiding embrace of authoritarianism. From Catherine the Great's savage massacre of the peasants following the Pugachev rebellion in the 1770s, to the slaughter by Tsar Nicholas I of the Decembrist sons of the nobility in 1825, to Stalin's gulags, whether Tsarist or Communist, successive regimes have been characterised in terms of a highly-centralized, personalized power structure, with an intolerance of dissidence that too easily descended into barbaric brutality. Living beyond Europe's farthest edge, Russia's peoples are said to have been bypassed by

Enlightenment modernity, the rise of liberal constitutionalism in the West¹ and the gradual entrenchment of concepts of individual rights and democratic freedoms.

For many writers and scholars, from Russia's sympathisers to its severest critics, this history of authoritarian governance is at the heart of centuries of tragedy.² It has meant that generations of would-be liberals have had no homegrown political experience of the ideas and institutions that might have fostered a path to a future other than that of twentieth century totalitarianism and its aftermath. Instead its legacy is said to be a toxic mix of Slavic exceptionalism, a defensive, isolationist nationalism based on the alleged communalism of Mother Russia's children, and, paradoxically, Russians' love of strong leadership that is written into their genetic code.

For those commentators inspired by such Cold War thinking, it is a legacy that continues to inform contemporary politics. Their assumption is that Putin's reclaiming of the presidency in March 2012 is part of a decade-long reversion to the structures of authoritarianism. In consolidating a 'power vertical,' he is simply drawing on his country's traditions, in which there has been little room for liberal voices, or indeed for opposition of any kind.

The following chapter critically considers these assumptions regarding Putin's authoritarianism. It is divided into two sections. The first section considers the view that Russia's centuries-long succession of authoritarian regimes is a likely determining feature of its post-Cold War politics. It argues that the conceptual framework underpinning revelations about the descent into authoritarianism in contemporary Russia is neither clear nor conclusive. It should be emphasized that this approach is not driven by any kind of etymological pedantry about inappropriate trans-cultural terminology. Nor does the conclusion imply that this turn of events in Russian governance might not be taking place, though an evaluation of the research so far does suggest

¹ Shevtsova, Lilia, 'What's the matter with Russia?' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 21, Number 1, January 2010, p13

² For example, George Kennan, Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, Vasily Grossman, Orlando Figes, Robert Service, Lilia Shevtsova

that this is not an easy matter to be certain about. Rather the claim is that the conceptual basis for asserting it is distorted by self-serving ideological presumptions and crude comparisons of alleged civilizational trajectories. 'Unfortunately in political thought,' British political philosopher John Gray observed, 'the aim of inquiry is rarely to test basic beliefs. More commonly it is to insulate those beliefs from refutation by events.'³ The concern is that one of the lessons of the Cold War is that understanding how far and in what ways contemporary Russia might be understood to be authoritarian matters a great deal in terms of Western political, cultural, economic and security initiatives, which are based on assessments of the fragility of the current regime's grip on power and of where the country might be heading.

The second section develops this scepticism about depictions of Russian authoritarianism through a critical look at contemporary sociological perspectives. Its starting point is the shift away from Cold War academic studies that primarily were concerned with comparing the singular virtues and faults of American democracy against the multifaceted iniquities of Soviet communism. Following Fukuyama's work,⁴ the comparisons these days are internationalist, and much exercised by the complications of laying down the route map/s to the 'end of history'. The section considers a selection from the plethora of global statistical surveys that point to authoritarian attitudes and trends under the Putin regime, as well as appearing to lend empirical support to the widespread vilification of Russia as 'a potage of poverty, crime, corruption and extreme terrorism.'⁵

Section One:

Assertions of Russians' racial characteristics and cultural mindsets are often dismissed by the more tolerant citizens of the West as either trite or tainted by prejudice. Or they are seen as belonging in the kind of tub-thumping

³ Gray, John, Review of 'The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution By Francis Fukuyama,' *The Triumphalist*, *The New Republic*, online journal, November 9 2011, p3

⁴ Fukuyama, Francis, 'The End of History,' *National Interest*, no 16, summer 1989.

⁵ Rutland, Peter, 'Democracy in Russia: A Tocquevillean Perspective' in Craiutu, Aurelian & Gellar, Sheldon (Eds), *Conversations with Tocqueville The Global Democratic Revolution in the Century*, Rowan & Littlefield, 2008, p2

political rhetoric that is likely to be more revealing of the flawed biases of the speaker than providing credible insights into the world of contemporary Russia. To paraphrase Martin Malia: 'Tell me someone's domestic politics, and I will tell you his/her perception of the Soviet Union and its aftermath.'⁶

Making sense of claims about an atavistic Slavic embrace of authoritarianism embodies a tangle of daunting and long-standing philosophical and methodological challenges. Central to these challenges is the question of the interaction between ideas and actualities, between historical narratives about Russia and what is perceived to be actually happening in the country today. With what certainty can a so-called entrenched authoritarian political culture be deemed to shape and constrain the way power is structured and functions under the Putin regime? In particular, what perceptual continuities and discontinuities might be said to serve the re-creation of an understanding of Russia in a post-Cold War multi-polar world? As the LSE scholar, the late Phillip Windsor observed, the fall of communism marked "'the end of an empire" - not the Soviet one, but political science'.⁷ In its place an international academic industry has arisen devoted to trying to make comparative sense of the government that has emerged from the deluge. This includes the considerations of modernization theory, democratisation trajectories, authoritarian reversals, and transitional states. As acknowledged in recent academic research, there remains a great deal of research work yet to be done.

How persuasive then are today's Western interpretations of the ways that whatever liberal ideas may flourish among Russia's intellectuals appear to be unable to find 'a welcome among the masses and acquire the driving force of a political passion?'⁸ As suggested in the previous chapter, tacitly such an approach assumes the Hegelian notion that once a certain kind of elite

⁶ Malia, Martin, *The Soviet Tragedy A history of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, The Free Press New York, p521

⁷ Wheatcroft, Geoffrey, 'Review of *The Atlantic and its Enemies: A Personal History of the Cold War* by Norman Stone,' *The Guardian*, May 16, 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/may/16/atlantic-enemies-norman-stone-review>

⁸ De Tocqueville, Alexis, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, New York Anchor, 1955, p139

understanding comes to dominate an era, the rest of society cannot hold out for long. Thus the question becomes how to account for a political dynamic, in which the virtues of Liberalism are notable for their absence as a strong, positive theme in contemporary Russian thought.

Is Liberalism simply waiting in the wings, poised to take flight with the flowering of civil society, as many of today's fellow-travelling Westerners fondly hope? Or is it a matter of the rekindling of the older, pre-Bolshevik stream of liberal pluralist thought that was the focus of Isaiah Berlin's scholarship. Here the claim could be that the dynamic of change might best be understood through a careful study, for example, of the methods by which the Putin government has subverted dissent using its autocratic controls on the legal or electoral systems, or the media. For the new Cold War warriors in particular, this approach has ensured a ready leap to judgment about contemporary Russia's regression to despotism.

Underpinning such threads of debate is the problem of the perverse, open-ended 'cunning of contingency,'⁹ of the interplay of chance and the constraints of circumstance that also influences our narrations of the interactions of ideas and actuality, if only with hindsight. As philosopher Leszek Kolakowski writes:

There is abundant evidence that all social movements are to be explained by a variety of circumstances and that the ideological sources to which they appeal, and to which they seek to remain faithful, are only one of the factors determining the form they assume and their patterns of thought and action.¹⁰

Both historically and sociologically, the challenge is how plausibly to account for the 'variety of circumstances,' which in reality can be comprised of thick, tangled knots of complexity, or alternatively an almost inexhaustible catalogue of necessary conditions. The implication too is that though there is

⁹ Malia, Martin, *The Soviet Tragedy A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, Op.Cit. p520

¹⁰ Kolakowski, Leszek, *Main Currents of Marxism, Volume 1*, Oxford University Press, 1978 p2

a great deal about Russia to observe and reflect upon, there remains much essential information that may elude us. This is not to suggest that the current government operates within the 'poisonous atmosphere of oriental secrecy and conspiracy' which Kennan wrote characterized Stalin's Soviet Union.¹¹ Instead, to paraphrase Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, in face of the frequent blurring of the boundaries between insight, conjecture and more solid, evidence-based analysis, the choice is always between the view: 'like it or not, nothing else could have happened;' or the alternative: 'but for unavoidable errors or accidents none of this need have happened.'¹²

With regard to the issue of Russian authoritarianism, this choice tacitly represents a contentious demarcation line between the new Cold War warriors and the post-Soviet Union's more sympathetic fellow travellers. For the former, the weight of political tradition ensures that the Putin government's so-called descent into authoritarianism has a doomsayer's inevitability. For the latter, such cultural and political determinism is unjustified. As Reddaway and Glinski argue, the denial that there always exist other courses of action for both individuals and nations suggests 'a poverty of imagination - or a lack of will - in those whose interests and beliefs would favour a different path of development.'¹³ Thus for today's optimistic fellow travellers there is an abiding need for the West to recognize that Russia may well be riding a fortuitous tide into a future where they can realise their own singular vision of an inclusive and stable world.

This last view is elegantly and movingly expressed in the later writings of George Kennan. Though generally branded as the architect of America's Cold War Containment Doctrine, Kennan came to wear the epithet like a curse. For much of his post-diplomatic career as one of the United States' foremost public intellectuals, he lamented the ways the doctrine had been distorted to justify militant anti-communism and the deranged Realism of the Rand

¹¹ See introduction, p4

¹² Hobsbawm, Eric, 'Out of the Great Dark Whale,' *London Review of Books*, Vol 18. No 21, 31 October, 1996.

¹³ Reddaway, Peter & Glinski, Dmitri, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms Market Bolshevism Against Democracy*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, 2001, pp636-637

Corporation. He believed this path 'as much as any other cause, led to [the] 40 years of unnecessary, fearfully expensive and disoriented process of the Cold War.'¹⁴ In a prescient statement about the folly liable to be manifest in American foreign policy towards contemporary Russia, Kennan warned that his government should recognize that:

it is destined to move through the forest of international events like a man with some sort of muscular affliction, obliging him to perform purposeless and self-defeating movements and, recognizing this, that the government will avoid getting into games which call for the utmost coordination and control of muscular power.¹⁵

In an earlier monograph on the century Russian travelogue, 'Letters from Russia,' by the French aristocrat, the Marquis de Custine, Kennan evoked an alternative concept of Russia, which would be - 'the opposite pole to all the brutality, the callousness, the meanness of spirit,'¹⁶ evident in the country's history. Echoing Isaiah Berlin's views, he writes that the forces of Liberalism in Russia's late and early twentieth century also 'had their roots in what one would have thought was unhopeful soil:'¹⁷

...that they survived, and eventually manifested themselves, and grew was the reflection of a certain ineradicable, defiant faith in the value of the human individual and meaningfulness of human experience.¹⁸

Repeatedly during his long career, Kennan stressed the need for an informed but humane Western sensibility towards Russia, in the face of which any

¹⁴ Kennan, George, 'Kennan on the Cold War' An Interview with CNN in May and June 1996, http://www.johndclare.net/cold_war7_Kennan_interview.htm accessed 29/10/2014

¹⁵ Kennan, George, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy*, Atlantic Little Brown, 1977, as quoted in Ullman, Richard E., *Foreign Policy*, no 28, Autumn, 1977, p143

¹⁶ Kennan, George, *The Marquis de Custine and his Russia in 1839*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p132

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

assumption that its people might in some final analysis prove to be an alien and incomprehensible 'other' was a nonsense. Still, as a former professional diplomat with a firm belief in his own good judgment, he wrote that psychologically the mass of Russians appeared to be at least partly complicit in the institutionalization of authoritarianism in their country, rather than merely its wretched victims. It was a view that resonated with that of many Russian intellectuals of former eras, such as Alexander Herzen or novelist Ivan Turgenev, with whose work Kennan was familiar.

Kennan, though, was a man of his time, though an exceptionally astute one. As a member of the first United States diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union in 1933, he witnessed first-hand the unquestioning zeal of Stalin's minions during one of the Show Trials' prosecutions of doomed, terrified men.¹⁹ He believed the experience had taught him that there were no easy answers to the question of what singular elements can nurture and fashion such an authoritarian regime - Russian tradition, political and economic circumstances, or the national characteristics of a sometimes pitiless and cruel folk. Or perhaps it was a fundamental aspect of the general human condition that repeatedly in history had demonstrated that the repulsive methods used by a country's leadership are able to take advantage of and manipulate 'the helpless corner of man's psychic structure....this Achilles' heel in (our) moral composition' that makes us weak and cowardly?²⁰ It was a question, Kennan wrote, that 'is still as valid as the day it was first stated.'²¹

Admittedly, though, these observations were written in 1946 in response to the barbaric, barely-comprehensible realities of Stalinism and Nazism. Still, they serve as a reminder that we do not yet have an answer to whether authoritarianism is a universal potential anchored in flawed human nature, or a case of Russian or German extreme moral exceptionalism. For Kennan, this uncertainty meant we have no option but to defiantly embrace 'the supreme

¹⁹ Kennan Interview CNN. Op. Cit.

²⁰ Kennan, George, Letter to Isaiah Berlin in *Isaiah Berlin Enlightening Letters 1946-1960*, Op.Cit. p213

²¹ Kennan, George, 'Measures Short of War,' Lectures at the National War College(US), October 10, 1946, p37

make-believe'²²that progress would ensure 'in the long run each man can be taught to rise above himself.'²³ As a portrait of a twentieth-century lifetime as a fellow-traveller, Kennan emerges as having a cold eye for what he saw as the cultural and strategic realities of Russia versus the West, and a sympathetic benefit-of-the-doubtism regarding what the future might hold for the country.

Methodology and Mayhem in Authoritarianism:

It should be emphasized that scepticism about Western characterizations of Russian authoritarianism is not an oblique attempt to erect a cultural relativist paradigm, that is, a 'yes-but-on-the-other hand what's the in-country perspective?' in which today's Russia sympathizers can be accused of embracing the kind of naïve, simplistic notions that have invited scorn in the past. Examples of such stances might include the view that condemnation of post-Cold War corruption in Russia is misguided because at a grassroots level it is an essential element of a black economy that fosters mutual survival and support - presumably so long as you are not struggling to find a place for your child in the local school or start up a small business. Or there is the more muddled claim that the Putin regime's authoritarianism can be tolerated, if not excused, because down the long centuries Russians have always felt the need of a strong leader - a sentiment that needs to be distinguished presumably from support for an authoritarian one, such as Genghis Khan, Ivan the Terrible or Josef Vissarionovitch Dzhugaschvili.

On a more prosaic level, given the challenges and irregularities of data collection, even in the last half century, it is difficult to see how such views could be convincingly substantiated. Moreover, as the influential American sociologist Charles Tilly argued, such so-called sociological insights have little to do with even pseudo-scientific claims to objectivity. As a matter of fact, Tilly claimed, much of what has passed as academic study and expert analysis in the social sciences has proved to be spectacularly useless, especially when

²² Kennan, Letter to Isaiah Berlin, Op.Cit. p213

²³ Ibid.

it came to enhancing our understanding of the world around us or finding out what might happen next. Tilly believed that the discipline of sociology is driven largely by individuals with a passion for facilitating processes of change. The underlying sense here is the perspective prefigured by Isaiah Berlin regarding the central importance of human agency in bringing about new social and political directions. It is an approach in radical contrast to the assumption, for example, that there are abstract systemic stages of progress towards democracy, such as 'background pre-conditions, the exit from authoritarianism, transition to democracy, and democratic consolidation.'²⁴ A similar point could be made with so-called reversions to authoritarianism, interpretations of which Tilly believes are inseparable from the human interactions that create them in circumstances that are 'highly contingent.'²⁵

In a beguilingly down-to-earth book, titled 'Why', published two years before he died in 2008, Tilly locates processes of change in social transactions, that is in the multifaceted ways and the words we use to describe to each other the events around us. Investigating these interactions through well-structured, self-reflective research and historical documentation is what can constitute the kind of human intervention that promotes change. In sociological terms, above all this means clarifying step by step the specific contingencies that obscure the possibility of other ways and means of interacting. In other words, the best kind of sociology is not about the contentious struggle to encapsulate cultures such as Russia through the lens of weighty conceptual patterns, for instance such as democratization, or the progress of technological developments. 'We now have long experience,' Tilly claims, '...that the empirical accomplishments of looking for laws of large processes and structures ... are close to nil.'²⁶ Moreover, he believes that 'it is implausible that the regularities operate on that level.'²⁷ Instead he

²⁴ Keane, John, Review of 'Contention and Democracy in Europe 1650-2000 by Charles Tilly,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 4/11/2005

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Tilly, Charles, Interview with Daniel Little, University of Michigan, December 15, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&V=C152a_UaRVM&feature=endscreen

²⁷ *Ibid.*

advocates the use of inductive reasoning from the specifics of interpersonal processes. This 'methodological localism,'²⁸ he says, is potentially more informative about the 'sequences of contingencies'²⁹ that link social and political events.

Moreover, because such research is conducted through engagement and dialogue with actual participants in these events, it constitutes a dynamic intervention that can generate more enlightened, insightful narratives and thus serve to open up new perspectives and potentials. As a way of clinging to an optimistic sweet reasonableness with regard to the possibilities of positive improvements in societies, Tilly's sentiments embody a sociological approach with which perhaps the late George Kennan might have agreed.

With some measure of scorn and relief, Tilly also argues that the grip of Post-Modernism on sociological methodologies finally has been broken. He claims the result has been an enhanced awareness that the good sociologist cannot enter into arenas, such as democracy promotion, modernisation or war prevention 'without touching on contested political and moral positions.'³⁰ His belief in the role of benign interventions in human affairs and of the potential for the cultivation of shared moral sensibilities is thus underpinned by his rejection of what he believes is the outmoded and ethically abhorrent spectre of a post-modernism. Such a world, he suggests, wrongly assumes that we are incurably and fundamentally blinded by our West-centric enculturation to the complex alien realities of societies other than our own. As Italian philosopher Umberto Eco countered in an address on the theme of the philosophical incomprehensibility of Post-Modernism: 'Reality is out there, and we "kiss it" each time we fall and smash our face on the ground.'³¹ Out of the ashes of Post-Modernism, Eco recommends reviving an older Kantian concept of epistemology, where it is paradoxical nonsense to talk of the impossibility of

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Eco, Umberto, 'New Realism: Philosophy Recovers from the Post-Modern "Hangover," Italian Cultural Institute, New York, November 7, 2011, p2

an external world of humankind that we strive to analyse and reflect upon. 'If there are no facts, only interpretations,' Eco insisted, 'then what are you interpreting?'³²

In this view, which has the alluring virtue of commonsense, Russia is that sprawling, multicultural federation to the west of Europe, the meaning of whose history, culture and politics we can delve into, argue about and, just as often, also misunderstand. The country is not a mystery or an enigma, as Winston Churchill famously proclaimed. Rather, in common with all human societies, it is a complex, half-understood secret to be further explored as best we can.³³ Such a methodological approach can serve to cast light on some of our core contemporary notions about Russia, to strive to chart the contexts and limitations of our assumptions, for example, about its authoritarianism, as one aspect of an ongoing and open-ended revision of what we think we might know for certain about the Putin regime. As Kant's theory of knowledge suggests, this striving is not likely to realize a perfect understanding during my lifetime or yours, but it is nonetheless what defines us as part of an empathic common humanity.³⁴

Section Two

This section focuses on the consensus amongst a great many of the more conservative commentators on contemporary Russia that Putin's third term government has reverted to the wrong side of any continuum from democratization to authoritarianism. It argues that this consensus relies excessively on the blunt methodological tool of comparative quantitative surveys and indexes. In particular, diverse international indexes, including the US-based Freedom House, Berlin's Transparency International, the World Bank Doing Business Rankings, Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, and the British-based The Economist Democracy Index, are in agreement that today's Russia belongs in the darker regions of world rankings.

³² Ibid, p2

³³ Malia, Martin, *The Soviet Tragedy A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, Op.Cit. pix

³⁴ Kolakowski, Leszek, 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered,' The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at the Australian National University, June 22, 1982.

Primarily a product of Western think tanks and NGOs, these annual rankings employ a kind of name and shame strategy which it is believed provides leverage in diplomatic and other negotiations between governments in fostering compliance with what are believed to be the benign, democratic norms of global governance. In reality, they can equally prove to be counter-productive, as likely to provoke intransigence and resentment as the opposite. As well, they are often more informative about the vagaries of international opinion, than of any kind of accurate empirical record. Consider, for example, Putin's anointment as the world's premier politician, out-performing Pope Francis, Barack Obama and Nelson Mandela in the 2013 World Rankings.³⁵ Based on a survey of 175 news agencies and other media, it is an accolade that it is unlikely to be repeated following the eruption of Ukraine's civil war in 2014. By July of that year a poll by Pew Research indicated that the percentage of Americans who held a favourable view of Putin had declined by almost a third.³⁶ As Tilly's work suggests, at worst this profusion of rankings simply subsumes the lives of individual Russians into abstract patterns and trends that ignore their interventionist, one-dimensional, Eurocentric and sometimes offensive implications.

In this regard, the indices produced by *The Economist* magazine during the last decade have never shared the apparently short-lived enthrallment with Putin adopted by other international media in 2013. Rather it has maintained a steady path of damnation of Russia in the aftermath of the Cold War. This approach is in spite of the independent Levada Research Center's polling which concluded that since 2008 the trajectory of the President's approval rating, domestically at least, has continued upwards to reach a six-year high in August 2014 at 87percent.³⁷ The might suggest perhaps Western-style democratization and compliance with an apparent global consensus are not the most pressing issues on the minds of most Russians.

³⁵ Putin, Vladimir, 'Putin named no.1 politician in World Raking 2013,' *Pravda.ru*, 5/2/2014, http://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/05-02-2014/126771-putin_politician_world_ranking-0/#.u_QDamMUJ3s

³⁶ Skynews, 'Putin's approval rating soars to 87percent,' Thursday, 7th August, 2014 (no by-line) <http://www.skynews.com.au/news/world/europe/2014/08/07/putin-s-approval-rating-soars-to-87-html> p1

³⁷ *Ibid.* p2

Certainly this is a perspective that finds support in one of *The Economist* magazine's more recent indices which provides a statistical ranking comparing alleged rates of democratization across the world. Specifically, its Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2012 was published in the wake of what it termed Putin's 'retrograde and cynical'³⁸ announcement that he intended to reclaim the presidency in March 2012, and after the December 2011 legislative election, the outcome of which brought thousands of his country's men and women onto the streets in protest. Putin's subsequent return to the presidency, the report said, 'marked a decisive step in Russia's long-running slide towards outright authoritarianism.'

The index's conclusions were largely based on the scoring of a list of sixty indicators of democratization by a series of panels of anonymous experts. Though only the names of 73 of its regional team directors are listed on the website, the Intelligence Unit claims to have 100 fulltime country specialists spread across the globe, plus a world-wide network of 650 contributors. Australia, for instance, which is ranked sixth on the index had an allocation of four regional analysts whose ambit extends to South East Asia and the Pacific. By contrast, Russia had one regional director, London-based Serbo-Croatian Lazo Kekic, whose team members were anonymous and of an unspecified number. Kekic's area of expertise is listed as all of Europe and the Balkans, as well as the Russian Federation. With a notable absence of foresight, no dedicated analyst was listed on the magazine's website for Ukraine. In 2012 the country was still under the authoritarian, corrupt leadership of ousted president, Viktor Yanukovich. Oddly it would seem, it was nevertheless ranked by *The Economist Democracy Index* at number 80, 42 points ahead of Russia and at the top of the ranks of hybrid democracies, a mere one point below a flawed democracy.³⁹

In addition to its systematic garnering of the opinions of its regional experts, *The Economist Intelligence Unit's* 2012 report used comparative global

³⁸ Democracy Index 2012, 'Democracy at a Standstill, A report from *The Economist Intelligence Unit*,' www.eiu.com/rs/eiu2/images/Democracy-Index-2012.pdf p21 accessed 20/08/2014.

³⁹ About our analysts and media experience, *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, <http://www.eiumedial.com/> accessed 1/10/2014

surveys and in-country polling by other research institutions, especially those by the American-based Pew Research Centre. These were combined with the final scores of questionnaires completed by the Unit's network which had been aggregated according to five categories: pluralism and the functioning of a country's electoral processes; its commitment to civil liberties; the quality of its governance; its levels of political participation; and, more obscurely, how supportive was its democratic political culture. In this last category, for example, Russia scored a lowly 3.74 out of a possible 10, with only a marginally better 5 out of 10 for political participation. By contrast Ukraine scored 7.06 out of 10 for its civil liberties and 7.92 out of 10 for its electoral processes and pluralism - again a strange result, given that within a couple of years the country had fragmented into bloody conflict. The Unit's overall result ranked Russia 122 out of 167 countries, between Ethiopia and Jordan. It also re-confirmed the country's downgrading from a hybrid to an authoritarian regime, re-iterating many of the reasons given the previous year.

As both the 2011 and 2012 reports stated, the ranking primarily reflected the widely-held view in the West that Putin's managed democracy (or 'stage-managed democracy,' as the report described it⁴⁰) has made a mockery of 'the institution of the presidency and the electoral process.'⁴¹ Beyond an uncompromising anti-Putinism and perhaps some unstated geostrategic considerations with regard to the West's divergent relations with Russia and Ukraine, the reports did not address the question of the need for any further investigation. Such research might include the questions: by exactly what processes, and in response to what specific contingencies, was the nature of Russian democracy allegedly continuing to be undermined by its current governance?

As suggested above, a self-congratulatory consensus which maintains a steady stream of denigration of post-Cold War Russia has emerged in many of these global surveys and rankings. In addition to the above index, for example, the

⁴⁰ Democracy Index 2012, Op.Cit. p21

⁴¹ Ibid.

IMF's 2011 Russia report, though continuing to be moderately embellished by the more hopeful economic neo-Liberalism of the Yeltsin years, qualified its judgment that 'some progress had been made'⁴² in what it indicated was the country's road to institutionalizing democracy. The report warned that weak governance and increasing moral hazard in Russia's financial sector are persistently undermining the prospects for the kind of regulatory economic framework that not surprisingly foreign investors find reassuring. Significantly, it is a conclusion that reflects the repeated public acknowledgement by Putin/Medvedev government of the exceptionally expansive scale of the country's costly corruption. Commissioned by the Ministries of Economic Development and of the Interior, the Indem Foundation in Moscow has surveyed the varieties and cases of corruption since the mid-1990s. In its periodic reports to government, it describes everyday corruption as continuing to be endemic to all levels of Russian society.

In particular, the Foundation has focused on revealing the routine bribery of medical professionals in the health services, officials in army recruitment centres, bureaucrats dealing with licensing and the establishment of small to medium businesses, and of school directors by families to secure places for their children.⁴³ On a much larger scale, others have added to the culture of corruption the multi-billion dollar embezzlement of funds from state-funded projects, such as the redevelopment of the Vladivostok region in preparation for the 2012 APEC summit, or the installation of Russia's Glonass (GPS) system.⁴⁴ In addition, there are the allegations by whistle-blower Sergei Magnitsky of a \$US230 million tax scam, the largest in the country's history, in which members of Moscow's police force, together with federal government officials and the Klyuev Organized Crime Group are said to have

⁴² Report on Russia 2011, *The International Monetary Fund*, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2011/041211.htm> p2 accessed 2/10/2014

⁴³ Indem Foundation, 'Everyday corruption in Russia,' June 14, 2011, <http://www.indem.ru/en/Projects/EverydayCorru2010.htm>

⁴⁴ Hahn, Gordon M., 'Russia's Stepped Up Anti-Corruption Fight And Its Implications,' *Russia: Other Points of View*, November 19, 2012, <http://www.russiaotherpointsofview.com/2012/11/russias-stepped-up-corruption-fight-and-its-implications.html>

colluded.⁴⁵ The latter group has also been accused by Western human rights organisations of the murder in 2009 of thirty-seven-year-old Magnitsky while he was in pre-trial detention.⁴⁶

In 2008 Medvedev launched a National Anti-Corruption Plan whose aim was to strengthen criminal prosecution, while at the same time improving the pay and conditions of Russian workers in hope of reducing the temptation to accept bribes. Though the plan has gone forward with Putin's return to the Presidency in 2012, for example, in the move to regulate capital outflows from the country, in part as a means of curtailing money laundering by criminal gangs, neither leader has indicated that it has reaped significant successes. Speaking after a report to the government's Anti-Corruption Council by its Investigative Committee pointed out that '34 percent of all corruption crimes in 2010 were committed by law enforcement officials,'⁴⁷ Medvedev described the ongoing situation as not only 'sad and dangerous,'⁴⁸ but also clearly indicated the laws had 'failed to reach their objectives.'⁴⁹ Contrary to any easy assumption of the consolidation of authoritarianism under Putin, the failure of these recurrent initiatives to constrain corruption, or indeed to have had any significant effect at all, might suggest his government's weakness and potential vulnerability. If corruption is so pervasive across both the public and private sectors, including the gigantic resource corporations such as Gazprom and Rosneft, stronger action to the point of an uncompromising 'crack down' by the government could constitute little more than a form of regime self-destruction.

An alternative analysis, writes Russian Academy of Sciences sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya, sees more positive possibilities in the changing composition

⁴⁵ 'Amnesty International Urges Russia to Close Magnitsky's Case,' Amnesty International Russia report 4/4/2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/russia?page=5>

⁴⁶ Impunity Watch, 'Call for New Sanctions Against Russia,' Syracuse University College of Law Press Release, June 26th 2012 www.impunitywatch.org/en

⁴⁷ Xinhua News, 'Russian president admits failure in fighting corruption,' 13.01.2011, English.china.com/2h_cn/news/11020308/20110114/16344007.html

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

and educational attainments of those close to Putin, both in the bureaucracy and among elected officials. Her research indicates that in recent years there has been an acceleration in the process of replacement of the Soviet Union's 'corrupt, narrow-minded militocracy,' (the siloviki)⁵⁰ often demonised in the Western media. Despite Putin's KGB and FSB background, this dominant Kremlin faction has declined in number in favour of a younger, tertiary-educated, business-orientated elite appointed directly to his team. Over time, Kryshtanovskaya says, the continuation of such substantial changes are likely to cause 'corruption to subside.'⁵¹

Not so, according to the anti-Putin, Indem Foundation president, Georgy Satarov, at least not without fundamental reform in other arenas of Russia's governance. 'Fighting corruption without having competitive elections,' he says, 'and free media with authorized access to government information is like taking expensive pills without quitting drinking and smoking...Any doctor will tell you it won't work.'⁵²

The issue of an unreformed culture of impunity towards corruption that is intermeshed with a general subversion of democratic processes and institutions is central as well to the neo-liberal economics and democracy promotion evident in *The Economist Democracy Index* 2012 rankings and the observations of the IMF. According to these analyses, entrenched electoral fraud and the disregard of the civil rights of its citizens, as exemplified by reports of police brutality during Gay Rights and opposition movement demonstrations, are especially emblematic of Putin's presidential third term. As noted above, this downward slide is believed to be encapsulated by the March 2012 presidential elections - the one in which a tearful Putin on a dais in Moscow's Red Square proclaimed his victory as embodying the glory of

⁵⁰ Babich, Dimitry, 'Medvedev's Anti-Corruption Crusade,' *Russia Profile.org*, 08/07/2008, <http://www.russiaprofile.org/politics/a1218127698.html> p2 accessed 10/10/2014

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p1

⁵² *Ibid.* p2

Russia before several thousand flag-waving members of the nationalist youth movement, Nashi.⁵³

As with previous Russian elections, condemnation of this result was almost entirely dependent on anecdotal evidence and the judgments of Western-sponsored election monitoring teams. Notably, the reports from both the OSCE and from the well-respected Dutch and American funded Golos deducted ten per cent from the Central Election Commission's official pro Putin election tally of more than sixty three per cent. In fact, a dissenting report from a member of the Golos team claimed the figure was more likely a whopping fifteen per cent, which if acknowledged by the government would have denied Putin a first round victory.⁵⁴ These alternative, independent tallies largely resulted from estimates by informal community groups of ballot stuffing and carousel voting. The implication was that when it comes to the descent into authoritarianism in Russia, stealing an election was no more than business-as-usual. And, according to current statistical estimates of a downward trend, there is every chance that it will continue to worsen.

Or will it? And, if so, why exactly?

Beyond a catalogue of sharp-ended statistical charting of an alleged two decade decline into a 'democracy recession',⁵⁵ there remain questions of what possible wider presumptions and counter-assumptions about the alleged nature of today's Russian authoritarianism underpin these sociological judgments. In short, how does one understand a regime that runs an election that is said to be clearly fraudulent, but nonetheless generates an unprecedentedly high vote against its incoming president?

Such a sceptical querying is not directed at the quality of at least some of this empirically-based research, although, for instance, there was much to criticize in the OSCE's March, 2012 election monitoring report. The

⁵³ Personal witness,

⁵⁴ Golos Press Conference, March 5th, 2012 Moscow, personal witness

⁵⁵ Diamond, Larry, 'The Democratic Rollback The Resurgence of the Predatory State,' *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2008, p1.

organisation is an ad hoc grouping of fifty six affiliated states ranging from Vancouver to Vladivostok that emerged almost 40 years ago during the beginnings of the thaw in the Cold War confrontation between East and West. Its aim has been to foster détente between Russia and Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. Though primarily committed to intergovernmental forums, report writing, and the airing of admonishing memos between participating countries, it works closely with the European Union, from whom it receives partial funding. ⁵⁶These days it describes itself as 'the world largest security organisation'⁵⁷ and focuses on conflict prevention, crisis management, human rights issues and democratization/election monitoring.

With regard to this last initiative, Russia has proved to be a troublesome member of the organization. In violation of the OSCE guidelines for the conduct and monitoring of free and fair elections, during the 2004 presidential campaign the government placed restrictions on the number, length of stay in the country and permissible regional deployments of OSCE observers.⁵⁸ Though no mention was made of them in the OSCE's report on the 2012 presidential election, these restrictions appear to have continued. The organisation's conclusions on this election were based on the feedback from a mere 262 monitors deployed in only 1106 out of the Russian Federation's more than 94,000 polling stations, scattered across nine time zones from Siberia to Moscow and beyond. In only approximately ten percent of these stations was the actual counting of the vote monitored.⁵⁹ Moreover, there were no teams dispatched to the region of Chechnya, notably brutalized in recent times by Russian army forces, but nevertheless where both the voter turnout and pro Putin support were claimed by the Russian Electoral Commission to have approached 100 percent. In other words, with regard to the coverage and competency of the OSCE election findings, what appears to be at stake is the

⁵⁶ European Commission External Relations, 'The EU's relations with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe,' http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/organisations/osce/index_en.htm

⁵⁷ OSCE Home Page, <http://www.osce.org/who> accessed 5/10/2014

⁵⁸ Ibid. 'Elections.'

⁵⁹ OSCE International Election Observation Russian Federation, Presidential Election - 4 March 2012, Statement Of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, www.osce.org/odihr/elections/Russia/87410, p11

distinction between second-rate research and that which, from certain perspectives at least, could be seen to be considerably more credible.

Which brings us back to the challenge of pinning down these 'certain perspectives,' of elucidating those presumptions and assumptions on which Western think tanks and polling organisations strive to build an understanding of Russia. Consider, for example, political sociologist Larry Diamond's cosmopolitan reflections on the entrenchment of authoritarianism in Russia, quoted in *The Economist Unit's Democracy Index 2011* in support of its analysis.⁶⁰ Diamond's starting point is not events within the country itself, but rather international political comparisons framed by the relatively short-lived optimism of Huntington's 'Third Wave' of democratic globalization.

Beginning in 1974 with Portugal's Carnation Revolution, then spilling into Latin America and Eastern Europe, this latest wave has surged across the planet for scarcely longer than a quarter a century. Diamond's concern is what will now follow its apparently quickening ebb tide. In our new century 'a powerful authoritarian undertow,⁶¹ has meant a dire list of democratic reversals, especially during the past decade of global financial crises and intensifying doubt about the exemplary quality of American-style democracy following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition there are the years of Eurozone instability, exacerbated by the European Central Bank's insistence on further austerity measures to assuage the impact of the greed and economic incompetence of Old Europe's democracies.

Yet to be reckoned with is the longer term influence of the economic miracle in the authoritarian state of China, as an alternative model of development. Whether such undemocratic countries, Gray observes, are able to successfully devise their own forms of modernization may well prove to be 'the great

⁶⁰ The Democracy Index 2011, 'Democracy under stress A Report from the Economist Intelligence Unit,' www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2011_Updated.pdf&mode=wp&campaign=DemocracyIndex2011 p3 accessed 5/10/2014

⁶¹ Diamond, Larry, 'The Democratic Rollback,' Op.Cit.

experiment of our time.⁶² It is a view that resonates with Huntington's own subsequent reflections on the future of the recent democratic surge almost two decades after it began. In answer to the question of whether we are about to see a world inevitably progressing towards democracy, he argues that economic development is clearly not a sufficient condition. Of equal importance is cultural receptivity in a post-Soviet world where it should be understood that 'modernization is distinct from Westernization and is producing neither a universal civilization in any meaningful sense nor the Westernization of non-Western societies.'⁶³ In a succinct statement that prefigures his contentious 'clash of civilizations' thesis, Huntington writes:

Modern democracy is a product of Western civilization. Its roots lie in the social pluralism, the class system, the civil society, the belief in the rule of law, the experience with representative bodies, the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, and the commitment to individualism that began to develop in Western Europe a millennium ago.⁶⁴

More provocatively, in face of what he sees as contemporary Russian society's rekindling of a cultural heritage steeped in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and a slavish, Eurasian-oriented sense of identity, Huntington argues that the Cold War divergences between East and West are likely to prevail. In other words, both culturally and politically, Russia is likely to remain on the unenlightened side of a civilisational divide.

Nonetheless, a central problem with Huntington's figurative description of democratization as a 'wave', ebbing and flowing, and now with an alarming and unforeseen undertow, is the obscurity of the temporal and causal links, if

⁶² Gray John, Review of 'The Origins of the Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution,' Op.Cit.

⁶³ Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Chapter One: The New Era in World Politics, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/lomgterm/books/chap1/clashofcivilizations.htm p2 accessed 29/10/2014

⁶⁴ Huntington, Samuel P., 'After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave,' *Journal of Democracy* 8.4(1997) 3-12, p2

any, from country to country. The answer appears to be that they should be understood as a kind of watery ideological, political, economic or cultural diffusion, which is anchored in a comparative politics much dependent on quantitative research and statistical-based analyses, especially those rankings in the indices referred to above. For instance, the widely-cited *Democracy Index 2011* reported a lower democracy score in 47 countries across most regions of the world including Russia, and more than half of the 167 states surveyed remain either hybrid or authoritarian regimes.⁶⁵ Indeed only with regard to those countries of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was there reported to be any kind of marginal upgrading, a conclusion that reflects the positive assessment of their commitment to democratic processes and institutions, although a very tentative one

In an earlier Country Report, *The Economist* cautiously suggested these events have provided 'some encouragement to the small and beleaguered liberal opposition in Russia,'⁶⁶ (as has also briefly the global Occupy Movement inspired by the 2007/08 debacle on Wall Street).⁶⁷ However, it is by no means clear that this report of some encouragement is not merely conjectural, particularly as the mechanism of diffusion could involve a diffuse list of possibilities. These might range from a half-random and somewhat incoherent scattering of concepts of Liberalism and democracy amongst different groups in various times and places, to a deliberately targeted use of soft power, propaganda or coercive militaristic, diplomatic or economic strategies by Western countries in the hope of ensuring a relatively small and short-lived movement of anti-Putin protesters will ensure Russia's embrace of global democratization. In sum, there is an enduring difficulty of assessing exactly what, why or who are the agents of this diffusion. On balance, the primary catalyst for popular demands for political change may be a complex web of domestic happenstance, economic decline and regime incompetence,

⁶⁵ Democracy Index, Op.Cit. p10

⁶⁶ The Economist Country Report 2011, <http://investors.afi.development.ru/presentations/EIU.Feb.11.pdf>
p6 accessed 26/04/2012

⁶⁷ Personal Witness

rather than a transcendent vision of liberal freedom and democracy fostered by external intervention or influence. In other words, the ideological justifications for the overthrow of a government could be either post hoc and a matter of hollow rhetoric to the point of non-existence.

The Economist Country Report 2011 concluded that there was little likelihood of 'any contagion effect taking root in Russia'⁶⁸ and leading to a MENA-inspired, anti-authoritarian springtime. The explanation of this conclusion relies more on the report's unreferenced consensus about domestic contingencies than of the generalities of comparative politics. Russia's ageing population is deemed to be predominantly apathetic and disenchanting with democracy. Its rich, resource-based revenues have meant lower levels of absolute poverty and an overall rise in living standards, but with a newly-emergent middle class still only comprising around twenty percent of the population, so that:

Despite its authoritarian drift over the past decade, Russia is still a much less repressive and socially stagnant society than the authoritarian regimes of MENA.'⁶⁹

As a socio-political profile, the report is sketchy, by definition a quick summary. In common with other indices and statistical surveys, it reads as the first draft of an analysis, whose interest and significance lies in the more complex questions it generates about Russia. Is Huntington correct in suggesting that, lacking the long accumulation of the civil and political ideals of the West, democracy really has little chance there? Is Liberalism the lost cause of a small and fitful middle-class intelligentsia? Why apparently might most Russians be so apathetic?

As suggested above, sifting through commentaries, especially from Western scholars, for the necessarily complicated answers to these questions is a challenging undertaking. McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, for example, amplify the conclusions of *The Economist's* report with the claim that the explanation of

⁶⁸ The Economist Country Report 2011, Op.Cit. p7

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Russians' alleged disaffection with democracy is that most of them have been duped by a narrative of 'powerful simplicity.'⁷⁰ So their story goes, Putin 'has forged a model of successful market authoritarianism,' after the desperate, chaotic years of the 1990s under the Yeltsin presidency. Whatever political freedoms and other democratic sentiments have been lost during the last two decades are seen by the majority of Russians as 'necessary sacrifices on the altar of stability and growth'.⁷¹

Admittedly this analysis predates the temporary slide of Putin's popularity rating from around 80 percent in 2008 to approximately 50 percent during the 2012 presidential elections. Nevertheless, as the more recent opinions of *The Economist's* groups of mostly anonymous experts suggest, their presumption is that a more or less exclusive focus on individual security and material wellbeing, combined with a compliant, apolitical attitude to the current government's 'series of repressive measure'⁷² is what generally characterises most Russian voters. As presumptions go, it seems a very reductionist one that, for example, ignores the possibility that, like the majority of the world's citizens, ordinary Russians might aspire to having both a secure economic future and a better government that protects their rights and freedoms. And, perhaps, given the perceived realities of their lives and recent history, they might be understandably sceptical that a path to a different kind of future replete with Western-style democracy and prosperity has any potential.

The Economist's conclusion that, compared to the upheavals in traditional regimes of the MENA, Russia is more drifting than authoritarian, is given a stronger resonance in the harsh, first-hand observations of the liberal scholar, Muscovite Lilia Shevtsova. The Putin restoration has not taken Russia 'entirely back to the Soviet days,' Shevtsova writes.⁷³ Instead it represents an advance on those times into a new historical context, in which the regime 'is leaving

⁷⁰ McFaul, Michael & Stoner-Weiss, Kathryn, 'The Myth of the Authoritarian Model How Putin's Crackdown Holds Russia Back,' *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2008, p69

⁷¹ *Ibid* p69

⁷² *The Economist Democracy Index 2012*, Op.Cit. p21

⁷³ Shevtsova, 'What's the Matter with Russia?' Op. Cit. p18

society alone, giving it the right to seek its own salvation...just don't try to seize power.⁷⁴ But though the present can never be a re-run of the past, the weakness of the voices of liberal opposition is not so very different from the early years of the twentieth century, or, more recently, the mixture of 'naivety, neurosis, brashness and insensitivity'⁷⁵ displayed by liberals during the Yeltsin years.

Shevtsova's judgment is an angry and depressing one, evoking a kind of emptying out of optimism in the wake of the Cold War. In other words, the average Russian is not necessarily either authoritarianism's naïve spear-carrier or an apathetic materialist. As scholar Martin Malia puts it more poignantly, the experience of almost three quarters of a century of Communist rule has created a population inoculated 'against all ideological politics and (has) removed the temptation of further totalitarian adventures.'⁷⁶ Such reflections point to a more singular kind of quasi authoritarian regime in post-Cold War Russia, one that has taken flight above the disillusion of its citizens. For the most part, it seems to conjure a parallel world inhabited by a powerful, self-interested, pragmatic elite, who has no need of full-scale Stalinist murder and mayhem to maintain its grip on power. Nor, it seems, of tear gas and tanks, or a tractable military that shoots down recalcitrant protesters, as in the city squares and alleyways of Cairo or Beijing.

Still, the problem remains of how is it possible to test and confirm the existence and veracity of such a bleak perspective? For Diamond, assumptions about the Russian path to authoritarianism that has been facilitated by the end of a state-driven ideology are potentially revealing of the obstacles and setbacks to global democratic diffusion, or at least the extent to which sociological analyses have been self-limiting and backward-looking. Triumphantist claims about transitional stages in the inevitable global consolidation of democracy, can no longer said to be very convincing.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p15

⁷⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Op.Cit. p513

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* px

Instead today's sociologists have a great deal yet to learn by rethinking the conceptual framework that has underpinned assumptions about emerging political systems, the sinister creep of authoritarianism, stalemated regimes and positive trajectories of democratization. His concern is not so much with the updating of an arena of academic research, but with rallying the pro-democracy global mission in the United States and among 'its many democratic allies' in order to bolster 'at risk' countries⁷⁸:

Now, as democratic setbacks multiply, is the moment for a new strategy. Without a clear understanding of the fundamental problem - bad governance...more democratic breakdowns are likely. Without a resolute and relentless international campaign...the current democratic recession could lead to a global democratic depression.⁷⁹

Not only is 'the empirical reality'⁸⁰ inside fragile newly democratic or so-called authoritarian countries such as Russia 'a lot messier than it was two decades ago'⁸¹ but also the 'classificatory schemes impose an uneasy order on an untidy empirical world.'⁸² In particular, the 'unfriendly'⁸³ and probably irredeemable Putin regime is one of a number of 'unmistakable cases of regression,'⁸⁴ following its years as a hybrid 'in a strange kind of intermediate zone between authoritarianism and democracy.'⁸⁵ In other words, as Risse has

⁷⁸ Diamond, 'The Democratic Rollback,' Op.Cit. p41

⁷⁹ Ibid. p48

⁸⁰ Diamond, Larry & Plattner, Marc F., '*Democracy A Reader*,' The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp229-241

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Diamond, 'The Democratic Rollback,' Op.Cit. p38

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

pointed out, a term such as ‘hybrid’ implies little more than that ‘we don’t really know what we’re talking about.’⁸⁶

At the same time, the Russian experience indicates that in common with ‘democracy’, the term ‘authoritarianism’ encompasses a broad church. Applying it to the political systems of different countries might suggest therefore the need for an array of qualifying adjectives. Thus the question for Diamond’s cohorts of sociologists and political theorists has become: exactly what kind of more nuanced terminology most accurately characterises Putin’s government? Examples might include crypto, electoral or competitive authoritarianism, or more simply the Freedom House Index’s Partly Free?⁸⁷

As Diamond acknowledges, such terminological challenges have significant implications for the links between the kinds of generalizations apparently shaped by comparisons between countries and the accounts of events and trends within countries. Of central importance is whether it is possible to pinpoint common tipping points, at which newly-democratic regimes such as Russia could be said to backslide into authoritarianism. And then there is the issue of precisely what external incentives might ameliorate such a deterioration? As indicated above, the explicit agenda is to unveil what promotes the world’s most desirable known form of government, namely democracy. The downgrading of Russia by *The Economist Democracy Index 2012* from a hybrid to an authoritarian regime certainly implies little more than that in some loosely-definable combination of democratic and authoritarian elements, the balance has clearly tilted in the wrong direction, and perhaps requires a back-strengthening alignment in the foreign policies of democratic states to lure it back into the fold. In other words, the downgrading does not reveal much useful, generalizable, predictive information about the common ways and means internal political structures and processes can be subverted by authoritarian governance.

⁸⁶ Risse, Thomas, Comment during a Amitav Acharya seminar at the Otto Suhr Institute, Freie Universitaet, Berlin, June, 2012

⁸⁷, Levitsky, Steven & Way, Lucan A. *The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*, Op.Cit. p244

By contrast, Wilson provides a more colourful characterization of Russia as a fake democracy, whose government is given to a cunning and morally bankrupt form of virtual politics.⁸⁸ His writing evokes a regime analogous to a nasty online computer game in which the web of democracy is gossamer thin and quick to disintegrate under various forms of unscrupulous, populist manipulation. Supreme power is attained only by the most accomplished liars about what is the actual state of affairs along the corridors of government. Points might be awarded, for example, for Putin's speech on Russia Day, 2012, in which he proclaimed that '...the people of Russia have had an enormous input into the progress of global civilisation,' and that '...heated discussions are commonplace in a free democratic nation, and that is precisely the course that our people have chosen,' after which he concluded, '.. it is important to respect and listen to one another, to strive for mutual understanding and find compromises, to unite society around a positive constructive agenda.'⁸⁹

According to this interpretation, the notion of 'virtual democracy' means 'real existing authoritarianism', with Putin at its apex. His assertion of Russia's embrace of democratic norms mixed with the kind of paternalistic nationalism exemplified by the above speech is simply his way of fooling half the people most of the time. But the problem here is that beyond a focus on Putin's alleged duplicity, a term such as virtual democracy suggests a world of all-encompassing, multifaceted authoritarianism, buttressed by elite games of smoke and mirrors. It also implies the processes and institutions that ensure representative government, including an independent judicial system, an unfettered media, a credible opposition, and free and fair elections have been hollowed out by the current power-mongers to the extent that they are now largely non-existent. Again by reference to the March 2012 presidential election, the public commentaries might equally have arrived at a more confusing and open-ended conclusion, and one with very little prognostic value.

⁸⁸ Wilson, Andrew, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*, Yale University Press, 2005

⁸⁹ Putin, Vladimir, Speech at Russia Day Reception, June 12 2012, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/4006>

Two perspectives suggest such a conclusion. The first concerns what has been heralded as an outbreak of freedom by Russia's growing civil society. Notwithstanding Shevtsova's and Pavlovsky's pessimism about Liberalism's sorry history and prospects, ever since the eruption of street protests following the December, 2011 Duma (parliamentary) elections there has been recurrent focus in the international media on Russia's liberal wind of change - or at least its occasionally gusting breeze. In the immediate aftermath, the BBC's Moscow correspondent, Daniel Sandford, for instance, reported that the protests were 'certainly the most severe wake-up call' for Putin since the fall of the Soviet Union,⁹⁰ a sentiment echoed by Moscow's Kommersant FM radio commentator Konstantin von Eggert who described them as 'a return of live politics to Russia, a politics that everyone thought was comatose.'⁹¹ Moreover, there was an increasing hope in the commentaries that this Opposition Movement would sustain its momentum .

'Their Vigor Unflagging, Russians Protest' ran a *Washington Post* headline at the beginning of February, 2012.⁹² By the end of the month, a week before the presidential elections, Putin biographer Masha Gessen, wrote in an opinion editorial in the *International Herald Tribune* of the joy and camaraderie as thousands of Muscovites stood shoulder to shoulder along the sixteen kilometer Garden Ring Road that encircles the city, in what should be understood as the beginning of a campaign of mass civil disobedience .⁹³

Still, the more sceptical viewpoint that faced with a real possibility of political upheaval and crisis, Russia's liberals appeared to have little to contribute to the shaping of a future Russia was endorsed by eyewitness reports of the aftermath of the election, primarily those based on the writer's own research. Consider, for example, the accounts of the protest in Moscow's

⁹⁰ Sandford, Daniel, *BBC News* 10/12/2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16122524_ accessed 3/3/2012

⁹¹ *BBC News* 7/10/2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16060870>

⁹² Putin/ Vladimir, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/Europe/Russians.give-putin-the-cold-shoulder/2012/02/04/gIQA47DpQ_story.html

⁹³ Gessen, Masha, 'Running White Circles Around Moscow,' *International Herald Tribune*, February 27th, 2012

iconic Pushkin Square the day after the Putin victory was announced. The crowd numbers were suddenly dramatically smaller than in previous months, perhaps seven or eight thousand people. The mood was reportedly low key and resigned. No doubt the fact that it was painfully cold - minus 15 degrees - had something to do with it. As well the square was grid-locked by hundreds of riot police, and there had been talk of a post-election Putin crackdown. But there was said to be little sense of a liberal Opposition Movement out on the streets and not to be denied by the ruling powers. In the late evening winter darkness, under police direction the crowd for the most part quietly dispersed.

By the following weekend, the demonstration scheduled on Arbat Street in the iconic century bohemian quarter gathered scarcely sufficient protesters for the police to close the road to traffic.⁹⁴ Moreover, the emphasis in the commentaries had begun to shift to an acknowledgement that the movement was not notably liberal in its demand for change, but in fact was a comparatively small, fragmented, leaderless grouping across a political spectrum that also included the extreme Nationalist Right and the increasingly irrelevant Communist Left.⁹⁵ And despite the reportedly larger numbers at the few subsequent demonstrations since the election, it is yet to be seen how far the legislation passed in June 2012, will help to contain the potential for an alternative public voice of Liberalism. The new law increased fines for so-called public order violations from around \$US30 to \$US9000, or twelve months wages for the average Russian worker.

Nevertheless, the eruption of protests has been seen as having unsettled the government whose response appeared to waver between the resort to prohibitive legislation, conciliatory rhetoric and some policy initiatives that seemed to constitute an attempt to appease the demonstrators. During the electioneering, this was interpreted by the more hopeful or provocative

⁹⁴ Horsfield, Dorothy, 'Russia's Liberal Wind of Change' Eureka Street, April 03, 2012; Saradzhyan, Simon & Abdulaev, Nabil, 'Putin, the protest Movement and Political Change in Russia, 17th February, 2012, European Union Institute for Security Studies, www.iss.europa.eu ; Vinogradov, Yegor, 'Has Russia's Protest Movement Lost its Steam?' *Deutsche Welle*, December 3, 2012, <http://www.dw.de/has-Russias-protest-movement-lost-its-steam/a16425009>

⁹⁵ Eg cf demonstrations in Burma or even London

Opposition Movement sympathizers, as an indication that fractures were emerging in the Kremlin's legendary spin-doctoring.⁹⁶ The government's use of 'administrative resources' to ensure the electoral outcome, including the front-page allegations of an assassination conspiracy against Putin by Chechen separatists, were deemed to have been especially lacking in credibility. Though unlikely to win any awards for balanced coverage of the campaigning, the State-owned broadcast and print media appeared to be a little more open, with half the free airtime dedicated to debates and some reporting on the protests.⁹⁷ At an estimated cost of \$US300 million, Putin responded to the movement's repeated complaints of electoral fraud in the December 2011 Duma election by accelerating the installation of CC TV cameras in all of the more than ninety-four thousand polling stations across the country; and the local media estimated that more than a million civil volunteers were mobilized to monitor the voting. Furthermore, though the first round margin of more than 13 percent was treated with considerable scepticism, few commentators suggested that Putin had not won an undeniable victory. In other words, whatever the inventory of the alleged iniquities of his government that according to the commentaries constituted a democratic reversal, Putin clearly had the support of approximately fifty per cent of Russian voters, a figure that few Western governments have achieved. Moreover, in the weeks after the March 4 presidential election this support appeared to strengthen considerably.

Politics, Polls and the People:

Polling by the Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Project and by the Levada Centre could be said to add to the sense of interpretative uncertainty about Russian authoritarianism. Both sets of results supported an electoral outcome that pointed to considerable popular endorsement of an allegedly undemocratic regime, especially outside the large metropolitan centers of Moscow and St Petersburg. The Pew Centre has been conducting polls in Russia for a decade, with the aim of tracking changing attitudes towards

⁹⁶ Horsfield, Op.Cit.

⁹⁷ OSCE Preliminary Report, Op.Cit. p7

governance and democracy amongst ordinary citizens. Its face-to-face interviews with one thousand adults, carried out from March 19 to April 4, 2012 following the presidential election, produced the conclusion that the majority of the population held apparently paradoxical opinions. Interestingly, almost three quarters voiced a favourable opinion of Putin, while almost as many similarly endorsed his long-term political partner, Dmitry Medvedev (67 percent). At the same time, more than half approved of the demonstrations that erupted after the December 2011 Duma (parliamentary) vote amidst the accusations of electoral fraud. The Pew pollsters interpreted this second result as 'consistent with the value placed on core democratic principles'⁹⁸ by a significant number of Russians. As well, only approximately 20 percent said that a fair judiciary, honest elections, uncensored media, and a civilian-controlled military⁹⁹ were appropriate descriptions of their country.

As suggested above, it is difficult to know what conclusions about Russia's alleged authoritarianism to draw from these statistics. To the Pew pollsters they reflect the widening gap amongst the mass of the people between their political ideals and their perceptions of the country's social realities. They also interpret the figures as reason for optimism: at last Russians are beginning to articulate a homegrown, bottom-up democratic ideology. Significantly, the pollsters claim that by comparison with a few years ago attitudes have changed so that more people are openly critical of the government and see 'freedom of the press and honest elections as very important.'¹⁰⁰ And despite the findings that indicate 'democracy' remains a tainted term in Russia, there is an increasing ideological embrace of 'civic freedoms and institutions'.¹⁰¹

So how then to account for the Pew Centre's apparently contrary statistics, according to which Putin's popularity rocketed in the months after the

⁹⁸ Pew Research Centre, 'Russians Back Protests, Political Freedoms and Putin, Too.' <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/05/23/russians-back-protests-political-freedom-and-Putin-too> accessed 13/3/2012

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* P3

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p1

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

presidential election? Though unclear, at least from the Pew polls, the answer seems to be that the broad support is based on a mix of viewpoints. It should be emphasized that outright enthusiasm for an authoritarian leader (as distinct from a strong one) was not among them. One explanation could be that a solid majority support Putin for fear of someone or something worse? Or in the hope that he will deliver on his promises of a modern, prosperous, stable Russia? Or because of his articulation of their overriding sense of disaffection with the West, especially with the US? Interestingly, the polls suggest that domestic opinions are nearly evenly divided between those who are confident the country is 'headed in the right direction'¹⁰² and the less hopeful who are apprehensive that current economic conditions, on which their wellbeing depends, cannot last. In other words, in common with the rest of humankind, ordinary Russians hold opinions about the state of their nation that are uncertain, changeable, inconsistent and on occasions downright contradictory.

Which brings us back to the second perspective on the reasons for concluding that conceptualizations of Putin's regime remain unclear and contentious. For Levitsky and Way, part of the problem is this democracy promotion bias in studies during the last decade or so. This has meant a scholarly focus on what sustains or undermines democracies, with 'remarkably little research...on the emergence or persistence of nondemocratic regimes.'¹⁰³ They argue that Russia is clearly a diminished form of authoritarianism, which they describe as 'competitive authoritarianism', rather than the increasingly diminished form of democracy assumed by the international indices. The distinction is important because they believe that, unlike the narrowly-focused, procedural term 'electoral authoritarianism', it helps to elucidate the specific ways the Putin regime strives with varying success to manipulate the structures of power, in the electoral system, the judiciary, the legislature and the media. In line with the findings of the Pew polls, each of these arenas are seen as having the potential to become focal points for an opposition movement, at

¹⁰² Ibid. P7

¹⁰³ Levitsky, Steven & Way, Lucan A. 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,' in Diamond Larry & Plattner F., *A Democracy A Reader*, Op.Cit. p256.

least at the level of public opinion and street protests. At the same time, because the country is not a full-scale authoritarian regime, the challenge for the government is to constantly manage the tensions and contradictions resulting from 'the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods aimed at keeping incumbents in power.'¹⁰⁴ This co-existence represents a kind of fault line that serves to undermine any further consolidation of authoritarianism, at least in the present time and circumstances.

It's the Economy, Comrade!

The phrase is an adaption of US President Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign caption, 'It's the economy, stupid,' which was said to have been pinned on his office door as a reminder that hammering on about the economic failures of the previous republican government would do much to swing the vote in his direction. Such a viewpoint is frequently applied in the analyses of the fallibility of Putin's so-called authoritarianism. The belief is that over-dependence on its gigantic energy sector, insufficient funding of research and development, corrupt business practices, and slowness to modernize and diversify its industrial base means is that if/when Russia's resources boom seriously falters under the impact of a prolonged GFC, the regime is likely to topple like a house of cards.

The post-Cold War empirical record evokes a more unpredictable course of events. For instance, Malia's review of findings indicates a market recession or depression is by no means a necessary harbinger of the imminent collapse of so-called authoritarian governance in countries such as Russia. Rather it may simply result in a government's tightening of centralized political controls and a multi-billion dollar IMF bail-out, as was the case under the undemocratic regimes in Nigeria and Jordan. The question here is to what extent what are believed to be the basic structural problems in the economy combined with bad government ensure such a solution will be short-lived. As Hayek argues, the two-hundred-year history of the links between the consolidation of Western-style capitalism and the evolution of regime type

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. P251

indicates that the success of Russia's market-driven economy is 'a temporary condition,'¹⁰⁵ which will indeed be undermined by its authoritarianism. In other words, whatever its current apparent success, the kind of command economy that is seen to be a mark of authoritarian governments is anathema to the long-term growth of a vibrant market. The trajectory towards the wealth accumulation that generates improved living standards throughout all levels of society demands individual citizens are able to pursue creative economic goals in a political climate firmly committed to minimal government interference. With prosperity comes the urbanization and embourgeoisement of the citizenry, along with the increasing demand for political rights and freedoms that challenge and ultimately corrode the power of the elite. So the story goes, the stronger the tentacles of capitalist development within a country, the weaker the authoritarian rule.

An alternative view might suggest that this analysis adds up to little more than wishful thinking. For some critics in the West, it is simply an account of the march of history that should be dismissed as the folly and pretension of 'minds befogged by fashionable nonsense about globalization.'¹⁰⁶As Gray writes: 'Russia - rich, nationalist and authoritarian - doesn't fit this progressive fairytale'.¹⁰⁷In the aftermath of the Cold War, the reality is a continuing array of prosperous authoritarian regimes,¹⁰⁸including that allegedly established by Vladimir Putin. For example, the enviable performance of East Asian countries such as China, Singapore or Vietnam, as well as the recent positive report card on the Russian economy, suggests that the market can continue to be very successful under a command.

In part, much appears to depend on the political agility of Russia's power elite in smoothing the path of change and development amongst the mass of the population. This includes its flexibility in accommodating and defusing the

¹⁰⁵ Malia, Op.Cit. p508

¹⁰⁶ Gray, John, 'Folly of the Progressive Fairytale,' *The Guardian*, 9/8/2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/sep/09/russia.p1>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

dissent that periodically crystallises around human rights issues, such as the protests against the Pussy Riot prosecutions, electoral fraud or corruption. In part too, it can also involve a calculated effort by the government to decouple the alleged interactive links between the leadership's top-down imposition of a neo-liberal economic agenda and its advocacy of a homegrown, grass roots democracy or the uniqueness of the country's cultural identity. As Craig Calhoun puts it, any apparent contradiction between globalization in the economic arena and the politics of a democratizing nationalism may be avoided 'by assigning these to separate spheres.'¹⁰⁹ 'The Chinese phrase *ti-yong*,' he argues, 'has long signaled this, a condensation of Western learning for material advancement, Eastern learning for spiritual essence.'¹¹⁰ Arguably the sometime catch-phrase of the Putin regime, 'Sovereign or Managed Democracy,' echoes a similar strategy.

In this context, it should be emphasized that the top-down market reforms that were initiated in Russia by the Yeltsin government at no stage appear to have been driven by a grassroots movement with any clear vision of the roadmap to democratic riches for all. As Reddaway and Glinski claim, the program of reforms emerged from an opportunistic cohort of power-brokers in the Kremlin, who were beguiled by the evangelical economic neo-Liberalism of the flawed Washington Consensus. Reddaway and Glinski argue further that the Yeltsinites' 'shock therapy' not only impoverished and decimated the ranks of the small embryonic middle-class democrats.¹¹¹ It has also allegedly given rise to an increasingly globalised economic regime, in which the IMF clearly continues to play 'a definitive role' and which they characterise as 'an essentially undemocratic' form of 'Market Bolshevism'.¹¹² In Russian historical parlance dating back to at least Peter the Great, the term 'Bolshevism' denotes:

¹⁰⁹ Calhoun, Craig, 'Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere.' *Public Culture*, 14.1 (2002) p1

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Reddaway & Glinski, *Op.Cit.* p630

¹¹² *Ibid.* pp629-633

the self-confident, almost vanguard mentality of a self-anointed elite that sees itself as entitled to impose “progress” and “development”- according to its own understanding of these terms - on the “backward” majority by wiping away traditional ways of life...¹¹³

As a description of a significant aspect of the kind of authoritarianism which Reddaway and Glinski argue has continued under Putin, ‘Market Bolshevism’ should perhaps be added to the list of the more nuanced terms for the country’s governance outlined above. On the one hand, it connotes a singular Russian etymology evoking hubris and an unreflective, self-destructive commitment to progressivism. On the other, it summons the sometimes messianic, destructive rigidity of the IMF’s globalised economic neo-Liberalism. Above all, as a meta-narrative of an economy in the service of an historical, culturally-determined pattern of thought, it strongly suggests the need for considerably more evidence and contextual information.

Still, the use of the term ‘competitive authoritarianism’ to indicate a limited form of authoritarianism in Russia also tacitly suggests that during the last two decades the West’s evolving neo-liberal mission of promoting democracy through economic development might not have been entirely malign. The claim is that the influence of Western institutions such as the IMF or the World Trade Organization (WTO) appear to have ‘inhibited the Kremlin from destroying some formal elements of democracy, such as comparatively free elections and a parliament...’¹¹⁴ In addition, the indications are that today’s Russia is generally a more open, wealthier society, especially compared to the years of Soviet communism or the financial implosion endured by ordinary Russians under the Yeltsin’s regime’s greed and incompetence. For instance, according to the figures from the United Nations World Tourism Authority (UNWTO), these days Russians have an increasingly cosmopolitan curiosity about the West. After passing most of the century under tight controls on travel, the country has been ranked seventh in the world for the number of its

¹¹³ Ibid. p629

¹¹⁴ Ibid. P633

citizens holidaying abroad. In 2011 Russians spent \$US32.5 billion visiting foreign cities and resorts, most of them in Europe.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, one of the fundamental problems with any quasi-religious faith in the inevitable long-term line dance of the free market and democratisation is how to interpret the phrase, 'the long-term.' For instance, compared to the lifespan of a Galapagos turtle, Russia's two decades or more of successful so-called competitive authoritarianism looks relatively short. As suggested above, like any big idea, it is difficult to see what kind of evidence might decisively refute such a claim. It seems equally possible that it may simply be an article of faith, rather than being illuminated by any aura of empirical certainty.

As Tilly argues too, the growth towards modern democracy even in those countries with a strong market economy had seldom involved a seamless trajectory. As an ideal of government, democracy is believed to outperform all other possible forms according to most measures of material, physical and psychological well-being. At the same time, its consolidation continues to be largely aspirational, not least because it has always proved vulnerable to subversion by powerful political figures and interest groups. For Tilly, the historical image is of a continuum from authoritarianism to democracy with likely gains or reversals from one period of government to the next.

Tilly's conceptual framework again evokes the question of the uncertainties surrounding the direction in which Russia might be deemed to be travelling and whether it is likely or able to sustain the momentum in either direction. Despite *The Economist Index's* downgrading of Russia from a hybrid to an authoritarian regime, the promoters of global capitalism such as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank still appear to insist on the more benign view. In their ongoing reporting of the state of Russia, neither institution has much to reveal about Putin's alleged backsliding into authoritarianism.

The World Bank, especially, is less concerned with a head-on attack on his government's so-called economic over-centralism and corruption. Its

¹¹⁵ United Nations World Tourism Organisation, <http://untwo.org> accessed 12/9/2014

approach is more one of relentlessly prodding Russia's financial managers and bureaucrats through reviews of the country's recent progress on such micro-economic issues as the regulatory obstacles to establishing small to medium businesses, quality of regional infrastructure, shortages of skilled labour, effective drought management or weather monitoring. That is, its focus is on stimulating piecemeal, localised improvements that over time it believes can become the pillars of an energetic free market. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether this approach will at the same time foster the development of a bottom-up, independent, agonistic public sphere to challenge any manifestation of corrupt authoritarian governance in Russia. Again, it could equally prove to be a triumph of hope over inexperience.

For the time being at least, when measured in terms of wealth creation and overall prosperity, it appears that the Russian version of economic neo-Liberalism has been vindicated. During the last ten years or so the country has very ably shielded itself from the more extreme reaches of the Europe's sovereign debt crisis and Wall Street's avaricious bankers. According to the 2012 snapshot provided by the World Bank Report, the previous financial year had seen the country return to levels of growth before the onslaught of the 2007/08 GFC, an attainment that had yet to be reached in the majority of economies in the democratic West. It also had achieved a large trade surplus, healthy foreign reserves, and inflation at its lowest for two decades. As well, its rate of unemployment was declining. In 2012 it had fallen to below six percent compared to around eight percent in the United States and Britain; and wages were increasing at 'at a solid pace.'¹¹⁶This has meant that its economy was expected to reach the rank of the sixth biggest in the world in 2012, compared to the eleventh biggest in 2007. Meanwhile its ratio of average public debt to gross domestic product (GDP) is an enviable ten percent. The ratio measures the amount a country owes as a percentage of its total earnings and is generally considered to be a measure of its economic vitality. By contrast to Russia, Australia's debt-to-GDP ratio in 2011 was around thirty percent, in the United States it was around sixty nine percent,

¹¹⁶ World Bank Report 2012

and in Greece it was a staggering one hundred and sixty-five percent.¹¹⁷ The 2012 annual report of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) gave a similarly glowing account of Russia's economic prospects. The report evaluated the pattern of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia, taking into account perceived political risks, bureaucratic impediments and levels of corruption. FDI is the direct investment by a private company in the physical infrastructure of an enterprise in a foreign country. UNCTAD's findings indicated that with the pervasive anxiety that the economies of the West were in terminal disarray, the big players in the global marketplace have been shifting significant amounts of capital east into Russia. The organisation reported that Russia saw FDI flows, mainly from European Union member states, increase by twenty two percent during 2011/12, the third highest level of private investment in the country ever recorded.¹¹⁸

Among the participants in the FDI boom are the world's second largest consumer goods company, Unilever, with a US\$20 billion investment and the American company, Boeing, which plans to invest around one billion per year for the next thirty years, including five billion in design and engineering services. And one of the largest foreign banks in Russia, Germany's Deutsche Bank, which for decades has been the bank of choice for many Russian companies and leading businessmen, is expanding its operations. Finally, international car manufacturers including Ford, Volkswagen, General Motors and Renault-Nissan have recently signed agreements estimated to be worth around five billion dollars for the building of car assembly plants.¹¹⁹ The Association of European Businesses in the Russian Federation whose membership is drawn from approximately 600 enterprises in EU member states, estimated that car sales in Russia increased by around twenty percent

¹¹⁷ CIA World Factbook, Australia, United States, Greece

¹¹⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Investment Report 2012: 'Towards a New Generation of Investment Policies,' www.unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/WorldInvestment accessed 30/10/2014

¹¹⁹ Investing in Russia. 'Foreign car makers investing in Russia' 14/08/2012 <http://biz-russia.com/russia-news/business-news/42-foreign-car-makers-investing-in-russia/> p3 accessed 31/10/2014

in 2011.¹²⁰ The new agreements are expected to generate 'at least 300,000 cars a year per production unit by 2015.'¹²¹ On a more pragmatic level, for anyone who has been gridlocked in a traffic jam in downtown Moscow this may not be entirely good news.

Apart from following the money trail out of the ailing economies of Europe and the United States into an apparently more lucrative arena, these gigantic investments by some of the world's foremost global enterprises appeared to be emblematic of a resurgence of confidence in the wealth-generating potential of Putin's Russia, in spite of the authoritarian labels that may be attached to it. In July 2012 the newly-re-instated President Putin finally signed into law legislation bringing the country's trading regulations into compliance with the international standards set by the WTO, as a precursor to the country's accession to full membership the following month.¹²² The UNCTAD report concluded optimistically that the prospect of reduced restrictions on foreign investment in industries, such as banking, insurance, business services, manufacturing and telecommunications, has been a strong catalyst for the surge in FDI.

It remains to be seen, though, whether such a buoyant outlook will persist. By late 2014, the mood among commentators in the West prognosticating about the likely fortunes of international capitalism had become considerably more gloomy. Interrelated factors shaping their perceptions included the apparent fragility of the recovery from the GFC, especially in the US and Europe, the predicted significant slow-down of China's economic growth, the volatility of share markets, and the intensification of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) wars in Syria and Iraq. Specifically with regard to Russia, in addition there was the likely repercussions on its primarily resource-based economy of the tumble in crude-oil prices to a five-year-low

¹²⁰ Association of European Businesses in the Russian Federation, 'Press Releases car sales. <http://www.aebus.ru/media/>

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 'Car sales in Russia Goes[sic] Up,' p1

¹²² WTO Press Release 23rd July 2012, 'Lamy Hails Russia's WTO accession ratification,' http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres12_e/pr668_e.htm

during 2014.¹²³ As well, there were negative effects on its balance of trade, especially with the European Union countries such as Germany, of the economic sanctions imposed by the West in response to the crisis in Ukraine. In sum, the question is the extent to which the combination of declining revenue from exporting its energy resources and its ascendancy to fully-fledged membership of the WTO, may have reduced the country's immunity to the vagaries of the global market place.

Conclusion:

It is difficult to predict how such a mixed, short-term progress report on Russia's unsteady transition to a free market economy might impact on the Federation's so-called regression into authoritarianism. One possibility is that its current constrained embrace of the world of opportunistic globalising capitalism under the rubric of 'Managed Democracy' could simply be a case of back-to-the-future. In other words, it could simply be a re-vitalisation and further consolidation of the 'Market Bolshevism' that is said to have characterized the early Post-Soviet years. Equally, as Levitsky and Way tentatively maintain, Russia's competitive authoritarianism may be inherently unstable. In particular, they obliquely suggest that that the Putin government's skill in maintaining elite cohesion, especially through its circumscription of the aspirations of an opposition movement, will be the likely determinant of his regime's endurance. Here the domination by the current regime is seen as dependent on its balancing and controlling 'an ongoing, if submerged, struggle for influence among actors within the security services, the military-industrial complex, large state-owned companies, and possibly between the president and the prime minister.'¹²⁴

As Levitsky and Way acknowledge, such speculations could equally suggest that the Putin regime might fragment and disintegrate. In its wake could be either 'a chaosocracy' or the kind of liberalising reforms out of which a more consolidated democracy could possibly emerge. These hesitant generalities

¹²³ Richards, Charles, 'Oil prices tumble to five-year low,' *The Independent*, 11 November, 2014

¹²⁴ Mankoff, Jeffrey, *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics*, Council of Foreign Relations, Rowan & Littlefield, 2009, p6

are based on their wide-ranging comparative overview of authoritarian countries and they insist there is more work to be done.

As for what the research so far illuminates about the future prospects with regard to the complex shifting inter-relationships that are said to constitute Russian authoritarianism, it seems to be a case of on the one hand, on the other hand, and only time will tell.

Or as Malcolm Tucker, the British Prime Minister's vile spin doctor in the BBC political satire, 'The Thick of It,' puts it: 'It's the everything, stupid.'

CHAPTER FOUR

RUSSIAN CONSERVATISM AND ITS ADJECTIVES

Who could grasp Russia with the mind?

For her no yardstick was created.

Her soul is of a special kind.

By faith alone appreciated.

Fyodor Tyutchev (translated by John Dewey)

The student of politics who looks only at patterns of behaviour but leaves out the meaning that actors give to their own and to each other's conduct turns into a specialist of shadows.

Robert Legvold

One of the more recent memes in commentary on the Russian Federation is that Putin's third presidential term has been characterized by an increasingly entrenched conservatism. Among the prominent elements of this conservatism is said to be an ultra-nationalism based on the re-assertion of Russian exceptionalism, in which primacy is given to the sense of national pride and the reclaiming of the motherland's alleged unique values and history. Enmeshed in this conservatism is also believed to be a Schmittian friend-versus-foe syndrome, which is evident in the Putin regime's deep-seated distrust of and opposition to America's geopolitics. This is said to be particularly manifested in Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East, towards NATO, and in the securing of its near abroad, for example in the Ukraine and Georgia. Domestically, the conservatism of the Putin era generally has been seen as deliberately focused on re-conjuring the traditional bonds of Russian Orthodox Christianity, Eurasianism and anti-Westernism, resonant of the Cold War or of earlier pre-Bolshevik times, especially the Slavophile debates of the later years of the century.

This chapter explores this issue of contemporary Russian conservatism. It begins with Putin's open endorsement of a conservative doctrine, but one

which he believes mirrors similar Right Wing political trends in the West. In his December 2013 annual Presidential Address, he encapsulated his conservative position as in opposition to the many nations that 'are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures.'¹ He believes the result has been a destructive, anti-democratic process which is based on a top-down imposition of 'abstract speculative ideas'² that have demanded the people accept without question the liberal freedom to reject the difference between good and evil. Thus the rise of Liberalism has meant widespread anomie and 'a kind of Amoral International.'³ As he puts it:

Of course, this is a conservative position. But speaking in the words of Nikolai Berdyaev, the point of conservatism is not that it prevents movement forward and upward, but that it prevents movement backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state.⁴

The Russian Federation, he says, is part of the conservative global reaction against 'the regression, barbarity and extensive bloodshed' that has been the consequence of attempts to push supposedly more progressive models onto other nations,⁵ by implication most recently in the MENA countries including Syria:

We know there are more and more peoplewho support our position on defending traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundations of civilization in every nation for thousands of years; the values of traditional families, real human life, including

¹ Putin, Vladimir, 'Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,' December 12, 2013, <http://eng.Kremlin.ru/transcripts/6402> p10

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. p3

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity.⁶

Still, despite Putin's assertion of his country's embrace of what he sees as the solid ethical and religious comforts of conservatism, the question remains exactly what beyond the generalities this universalist ideology entails in the Russian context. For instance, is it a messianic, self-aggrandising form of conservatism, one that is underpinned by the threat of militant action against its perceived enemies? In other words, is it the kind that became familiar through the rhetoric of America's neo-conservatives under the presidency of George W. Bush? Or is it primarily an inward-looking, defensive, aspirational, often pragmatic doctrine, which is concerned 'to put its own house in order', while allying itself to what it regards as an Atlanticist conservative resurgence?' And is it still shadowed by the legacy of what Putin has described in an earlier Presidential Address were those genuinely tragic years for the Russian people in the catastrophic aftermath of the Soviet collapse?⁷

Defining Conservatism: Where East Meets West

As with the majority of political abstractions, the question here is on what conceptual foundations any contemporary characterization of conservative ideology, including that of the Russian president, might depend? This section explores what has served to define conservatism in the pan European and American history of ideas. It begins with the somewhat literal-minded assumption that such an ideology constitutes an attempt 'to provide an explicit and coherent theory of man, society and the world,'⁸ which at the same time fosters a sense of nationality and nationhood. Since, in any given era, conceptualizations of conservatism have been prey to internal division and debate, the emphasis is on a messy effort at philosophical convergence,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Putin, Vladimir, 'State of the Nation Address,' *Associated Press*, 25/4/2005, www.nbcnews.com/id/7632057/ns/world_news/t/putin-soviet-collapse-genuine-tragedy/#.VFnbccKUV3t p1

accessed 3/11/2014

⁸ O'Sullivan, Noel, *Conservatism*, St Martin's Press, 1976, p9

that is, on the clusters of ideas and attitudes that are integral to any contextualized understanding of conservative doctrine.

Broadly, these debates within conservatism are framed by: a rejection of the possibility of sudden, total, radical social progress of the kind envisioned by the French or Bolshevik revolutions; and by implication that experience should teach us that there are severe limits to what humankind can reasonably do to realize the ideal of the best of all possible societies. For many conservatives, the world is everywhere bedeviled by 'illusion and calamity';⁹ and evil and suffering are plainly perennial aspects of life that no amount of rational, enlightened endeavour can completely eliminate.

In an even less rigorous way, conservatism has also been characterized as reactively pessimistic, not only as a realistic response to the travails of living, but also in its insistence, for example, on the inevitability of the Russian Revolution's failure to create a society even remotely connected to dreams of happiness for everyone. This is not to suggest that conservatism necessarily implies an unqualified commitment 'to preserving all existing institutions'.¹ Nor is it necessarily a simplistic belief in the need to reclaim a lost past out of the ruins of misguided utopian social experiments. Often, though, it is infused with nostalgia for what is believed to have been the uncomplicated, bucolic life of former times, and for small government, which it deems to have preserved an old-fashioned sense of the bonds of family and community. Centrally too, it has often been associated with assertions of the need to restrain the rise of the rampant, opportunistic, amoral, military-industrial complex that constitutes late twentieth century capitalism.¹¹

According to this very general conceptualization, conservatism is thus 'a philosophy of imperfection'¹² in which the world is largely inhabited by the fallen, hubristic mob of humanity, whose inherent willfulness must be

⁹ Voltaire, *Candide*, Dover Thrift, 1991, Chapter 24 p112

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp10-11

¹¹ Eisenhower, Dwight, 'The Military Industrial Complex,' Farewell Speech, 17 January 1961. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRTY>

¹² O'Sullivan, *Op.Cit.* p9

constrained by wiser souls, such as teachers, community leaders and politicians, especially in matters of governance and unfounded confidence in unfettered progress. Across the twentieth century the advocates of conservatism have seen its enemy as not only the sinister tentacles of Soviet communism reaching around the globe, but also its extreme opposite, the West's subsidence into post-modern nihilism, with its ideological embrace of cultural emptiness and hedonism, of an interpretation of life as without ethics or meaning.

Putin's Conservatism:

Much, though not all, of the above cluster of conservative ideas is integral to Putin's world view as set out in his 2013 Presidential Address. Specifically, these include the central importance of the ties of traditional family life and community; a rejection of unbridled global capitalism as driven by the hubris and moral decay of the West; and a call for the further devolution of regional government through the strengthening of resources, financial sustainability and independent decision-making in local municipalities. This last initiative, Putin says, is modelled on Alexander II's successful Zemstvo Reform of 1864,¹³ in which '...local authority - because it is the closest power to the people - should be organized so that any citizen could reach out to it, figuratively speaking.'¹⁴ As well, his Address elucidates what he believes is the need for the improvement of civic education in the Russian Federation's schools, with an emphasis on fostering patriotism and individuals 'with a strong, internalized knowledge'¹⁵ of traditional values, history and language in order 'to help our nation's citizens form their identity.'¹⁶

It should be emphasized that Putin's conservative, patriotic rhetoric on the aims and challenges of civic education differs very little from similar mission statements in the West in which schooling, maintaining social stability and

¹³ Putin, Presidential Address, 2013 Op.Cit. p2

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. p4

¹⁶ Ibid.

nationalism are interlinked. In fact, such statements are a banal commonplace in most countries' articulation of their national goals. For example, the 2012 report of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority is far from being a radically liberal conservative or communitarian document. Rather, like Putin, it refers to the importance of ideals of citizenship in promoting a sense of belonging through identification with Australian values, and by ensuring a tolerant understanding of the country's history, culture, languages and religions.¹⁷ Putin makes explicit in his Address that he believes such ideals constitute a third way which undermines the Liberalism versus communalism ideological divisions between Russia and the West fostered by the Cold War. As suggested above, his claim is that he has given voice to an international, grassroots phenomenon that shares his belief in the need to re-consolidate the building blocks of traditional conservatism.

Following the publication of his Address, one of the most prominent voices among America's Old Conservatives, Pat Buchanan, was quick to endorse Putin's views, with the claim that he was 'one of us.' A former advisor to three American Republican presidents, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, Buchanan has long argued that successive US governments, the Neo-Conservatives, ideologues of both the Right and the Left, the unelected judicial system, the media and 'the whole panoply of Hollywood values'¹⁸ have destroyed the cultural fabric of his country. Buchanan is also one of the founding members of the American Conservative Movement, whose online journal describes its mission as: 'To solve the country's seemingly intractable - and in the long-term, lethal strategic, economic, and socio-cultural problems...[through] a rediscovery of traditional conservatism.'¹⁹

¹⁷ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 'The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship,' October 2012, www.acara.edu.au, pp2-3

¹⁸ Buchanan, Pat, 'Is Putin One of Us,' Blog December 17, 2013, Buchanan.org/blog/putin-one-us-6071

¹⁹The American Conservative, 'Who We Are,' Website <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/who-we-are/> p1

Taking a considerable and misleading liberty of interpretation of Putin's Address, Buchanan states that the Russian president has in fact an 'ambitious, even audacious'²⁰ agenda:

He is seeking to redefine the "Us vs Them" world conflict of the future as one in which conservatives, traditionalists and nationalists of all continents and countries stand up against the cultural and ideological imperialism of what he sees as the decadent west.²¹

In fact, by comparison to Buchanan's rousing call to battle, Putin's speech appears considerably more restrained:

We have always been proud of our nation. But we do not claim to be any sort of superpower with a claim to global or regional hegemony; we do not encroach on anyone's interests, impose our patronage onto anyone, or teach others how to live their lives.²²

The debates surrounding the credibility of such a statement with regard to the Russian Federation's foreign policy stance, particularly on the Syrian issue, is a focus of a later section of this chapter. As regards Putin's declaration of a conservative domestic political agenda, Buchanan, among others, has also seized upon Putin's alleged rejection in his Address of 'so-called tolerance'²³ as 'genderless and infertile.'²⁴ For Buchanan, this clearly alludes to the evil of homosexuality and is a further indication that the Russian President is the kindred soul of America's Old Conservatives. Maybe so, but the official Kremlin English transcript of Putin's Address makes no mention of homosexuality nor of the phrase 'genderless and infertile.'

²⁰ Buchanan, Pat, 'Is Putin One of Us?', *Townhall Magazine*, 17/12/2013 <http://townhall.com/columnists/patbuchanan/2013/12/17/is-putin-one-of-us-n1764094/page/full/p3>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Putin, Presidential Address 2013, *Op.Cit.* p9

²³ Buchanan, *Op.Cit.* p3

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Instead it refers to the abstract notion of tolerance as 'neutered and barren'²⁵ unless it is an integral part of the common, lived experience of different peoples. The Russian Federation, Putin says in the next sentence of the transcript, 'with its great history and culture, with centuries of experience'²⁶ strives 'for respect and national sovereignty and people's independence and identity...within the framework of a single state.'²⁷ An alternative to Buchanan's interpretation thus might suggest Putin is asserting what he believes are his country's exceptional credentials for a leadership role in the further consolidation of a multi-ethnic Russian Federation or of a Eurasian Union. Contrary to Buchanan's easy assumption, what seems highly unlikely is that the Address is an explicit attempt to attract the support of the world's homophobic conservatives, or to place Russia as a front-runner in a century 'Conservative International'²⁸.

Russian Conservatism:

This section focuses on the claims that Putin's conservatism has become the dominant and pervasive ideology along the corridors of power in the Kremlin and among the elite groupings close to the government. It argues that the central problem with such an analysis is that there is not uniform agreement amongst the commentariat, both inside the country and in the West, about what exactly in practical terms is entailed by his conservatism and therefore how influential it really has become. Moreover, as suggested above, like 'democracy,' a contextualized understanding of conservatism indicates that it encompasses a diversity of opinion.

What follows looks at the fundamentally different perspectives evident in the work of two Russian conservatives, both of whom have been seen as key figures in determining the ideological directions of the Kremlin. Neither man

²⁵ Putin, Presidential Address 2013, Op.Cit. p9

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Whitmore, Brian, 'Vladimir Putin, Conservative Icon,' *The Atlantic*, December 2013
www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/vladimir-putin-conservative-icon/282572/ p1

appears to be hampered by self-doubt in asserting his opinions about how Russia is and should be governed. The first is the former Putin-government spin-doctor, Gleb Pavlovsky, discussed in Chapter Two. It suggests that Pavlovsky's liberal conservatism has evolved into a somewhat world-weary doctrine. Consider, for instance, his answer to the question of why more and more Russians might have become indifferent to politics. His views echo those of Malia that the end of the Soviet Union saw a widespread disengagement with ideological politics:

Throughout the last hundred years Russia...lived with great political projects. Every time...the nation steadily diminished. Nowadays we are passing through a period of silence, outer peace (most probably not for long) and reconciliation with a quiet, not rich existence without great risky perspectives. Pray to drag this out for 4-8 years more.²⁹

Pavlovsky's conservatism appears to be tempered by a liberal, cosmopolitan sense of individualism, reformism and the right to independent judgment. As always, his transcultural commentaries are peppered with tropes from Western popular and literary culture. They are specifically targeted too at an international as well as a domestic audience, and are often reactively oppositional rather than programmatic. The result is that he is clearly the derisive critic rather than the convert to Putin-style conservatism. 'Putin did not face his challenge,' Pavlovsky says, ' - he didn't set the country he had created free. He didn't have the courage to have the final fight...'³⁰ Not surprisingly perhaps, since his ejection from the Kremlin's inner circles, Pavlovsky seems to have been relegated to the role of relentlessly sniping from the sidelines.

A second manifestation of what has been seen by some commentators in the West as a highly-influential conservative stream of ideas is the alternative

²⁹ Pavlovsky, Gleb, Online interview with Russian magazine *Expert*, 28 March 2007.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p3

New Right radical conservatism of Alexander Dugin. In common with Pavlovsky and with Putin's Presidential Address, he too draws heavily (though selectively) on the pan-European history of ideas and conservative politics to substantiate his ideology. Unlike Putin, though, his world view is labyrinthine and sometimes impossibly elliptical in its struggle with complexity. Most of the later parts of the chapter are an attempt to explain and evaluate Dugin's work, particularly with regard to the claims that it has been the prime determinant of Putin's conservatism.

The Liberal Conservatism of Gleb Pavlovsky.

This section revisits the conclusion at the end of Chapter Two that according to the broad criteria of at least three eminent Western scholars, Berlin, Pipes and Bauman, Pavlovsky is clearly an advocate of a practical, non-extremist, pan-European liberal conservatism amongst the Putin era stratum of the intelligentsia. His Russian language Facebook page indicates he has approximately 11,500 online friends, at least some of whom regularly comment on his daily sneer at the foibles of the rich and powerful, and which certainly suggests the use of social media is a strong feature of his promotion of civil debate. A fascinating though formidable research project would be to survey the demographics and nationalities of those on his very long list of friends, in pursuit of an answer to the question of who is Pavlovsky talking with these days.

In common with one of his most notable century liberal forebears, Alexander Herzen, Pavlovsky is concerned with an effective politics that forges paths out of his country's benighted recent past to achievable reforms that will benefit the ordinary Russian. Like Herzen, he too has a savage satirical eye for the ways the foolishness and venality of Moscow's elite have undermined his aspirational agenda. In recent years, much of what he says in his Bloomberg.com comments, interviews and Facebook blog constitutes a mocking, ironic attack on Putin's inner circles of power. 'My specialization,' he says, 'is the construction and protection of the government.'³¹ Given the

³¹Masyuk, Elena, 'What Putin is most afraid of it to be left out,' Interview with Gleb Pavlovsky, *Novaya Gazeta*, <http://en.novayagazeta.ru/politics/55288.html>

Kremlin has become 'a coalition of offices and Swiss chalets, where they go on Fridays,'³² the unfortunate reality is that his profession no longer has anything to offer:

Who needs any consultants, apart from financial ones?
The opposition doesn't have a thinking organ. And now
not in the Kremlin either.³³

More a polemicist than a political philosopher, he emerges as embodying a critical and self-critical liberal brand of conservatism. A somewhat tarnished liberal, he has admitted to marching in the street protests, 'out of some residual self-respect.'³⁴ One of his central concerns appears to be the cultivation amongst post-Soviet generations of Russians of a sophisticated understanding of the duplicitous language of power politics, which his commentaries indicate requires a finely-tuned bulldust detector. For instance, attempts to implant political orthodoxy in his country, including Putin's new conservatism, are no more than dangerous improvisations:

... Someone said: what do we lack? No base. Mr Putin let's restore the base. Look, we have the Orthodox church...Look, people are going all by themselves... "Well do try." [Putin sighs] I think that's more or less how it goes.³⁵

No consideration was given, Pavlovsky says, to the effect of this orthodoxy on the 10-20% of the population of the Russian Federation who are practising Moslems.³⁶ Similarly, the government's 'insane actions'³⁷ include the judicial persecution of the Pussy Riot pranksters when there was every chance they

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. p7

³⁶ CIA The World Factbook, Russia: People and Society, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

³⁷ Masyuk interview, Op.Cit.

would be quickly forgotten out of the spotlight of the national and international media. As he puts it:

How can you be afraid of Pussy Riot to the extent of actually creating an opportunity for the expansion of the Islamic lobby. This is a significant problem. Now they have to bring troops into Dagestan.³⁸

Other recent examples the government's idiocy, he says, include the threat in 2008 that 'If needs be, we'll disconnect Google and YouTube'³⁹ by Minister of Communications and Mass Media Nikolai Nikiforov, as part of his attempt to tighten controls on internet usage in Russia. 'What am I supposed to think of a person,' Pavlovsky says, 'who's ready to unplug civilisation's infrastructure at first whistle?'⁴⁰

In other words, in the context of what he believes is a dysfunctional government that is simply making policy on the run, Putin's embrace of conservatism is directionless, empty rhetoric. Asked about the exact nature of Putin's mistakes, Pavlovsky quipped: 'Beg your pardon, has he done anything at all?' Instead he claims that there is stagnation in the establishment and in the mechanisms of national control, with a pervasive sense of self-interest, of fear for what might come next, and of nihilism.⁴¹ All of which, Pavlovsky suggests, makes a nonsense out of the conservative programs and ideology outlined in Putin's 2013 Presidential Address. For instance, Pavlovsky's comment in the midst of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics mockingly hinted that Putin's conservatism evoked neo-fascism and the Hitler Youth movement:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Athletic Russia is his new ideology, a part of his program of re- education of Russia that should become traditional, disciplined and athletic.⁴²

In common with many Cold War liberals and organisations, such as *The Economist Intelligence Unit* and the IMF, for Pavlovsky the downward slide of his country's governance accelerated with Putin's decision in September 2011 to reclaim the presidency. The result has been that within Russia, Putin has become 'our zero, a void, a screen where we project our desires, hate love.'⁴³ Admittedly this assertion was made before his country's entanglement in the Crimean crisis and the civil war in Ukraine. Still, although these events generated a strong surge in Putin's popularity, Pavlovsky insists that Russia's meddling was yet another example of Putin's policy improvisation with its enhanced risk of unanticipated consequences.⁴⁴

In fact, Pavlovsky says, the Putin majority, that is those who were true believers in his charismatic leadership, has almost ceased to exist:

...if we talk about real emotional trust in him, in the precise meaning of this word - and not as an answer to sociologists' favourite idiotic question, 'Who would you vote for if the elections were this Saturday?...I think only 15 percent still really trust him.'⁴⁵

For the ordinary Russian, Pavlovsky says, this sense of security and emotional connection with Putin has been replaced by a disappointed pragmatism. As he puts it, what those who voted for him in March, 2012 were saying was: if not him then who else?⁴⁶ It should be noted, though, that Pavlovsky provides no evidence, either quantitative or qualitative, to support his very low

⁴² Pavlovsky, Gleb, Bloomberg quote, February 14 2014, www.topics.bloomberg.com/gleb-pavlovsky/

⁴³ Masyuk, Op.Cit.

⁴⁴ Pavlovsky, Gleb, I/V with David Remnick, 'After the Crash,' *The New Yorker*, July 17, 2014.

⁴⁵ Masyuk, Op.Cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

statistical estimate of Putin as a failed populist, nor his view of the mood of disappointment and disengagement from politics among Russian voters.

Like those in the West who have followed a familiar Road-to-Damascus conversion from student dissidence to a late middle age embrace of the Right, Pavlovsky's views are infused with disillusionment with the regime he helped to shape, mixed with a fatalistic sense of loftier understanding. His conservative precepts appear to be a cautious approach to change; the centrality of strong, humane leadership and effective governance in ensuring social and political stability; and a profound scepticism about what he sees as an inflated commitment to transplanting a neo-liberal model of fast-tracked democratization into the Russian Federation. A passionate patriot, he laments that in America and Europe since the end of the Cold War there has not developed any deeper understanding of the complexities of 'the real modern Russia.'⁴⁷ In part these attitudes stem from his distrust of what he sees as the self-serving lawlessness of American-dominated economic and political globalization. In contrast to his own country's approach to international relations, he believes this has led to the United States repeatedly subverting the norms of true legal cosmopolitanism on which the stability of the global order depends. On this issue at least he is in agreement with official government foreign policy, which Putin describes in his Presidential Address as a 'values-based'⁴⁸ defence of international law.

Also in common with many Western conservatives, Pavlovsky appears especially dubious about notions of representative democracy, as obviously leading to governance by the ignorant, the corrupt and the incompetent. His writings are thus underpinned by a concern for a sophisticated commitment to the art of the possible amongst the Kremlin's elite. That is, his country's need is for an enduring, cautiously reformist, well-managed regime that governs on behalf of what it deems to be the people's best interests and keeps the potentially restive masses off the streets. In these respects, there

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p7

⁴⁸ Putin, 2013 Presidential Address, *Op.Cit.* p9

appears very little to distinguish his nationalist sentiments from those of many of the liberal-minded, conservative citizens of Western countries.

Still, one of the apparent contradictions in characterizing Pavlovsky as a kind of belated voice of loyal opposition to the liberal cause in Putin's Russian Federation is that he continues to pour scorn on any suggestion that there exists a meaningful intelligentsia in his country. In common with his views on the role of the 1960's generation during the Brezhnev years, he insists that the scant number of contemporary activists against the Putin government, especially against its ongoing violation of the human rights of its citizens, are ineffectual and marginalized. As he put it in a Valdai Forum interview in 2013:

There is no liberal movement in Russian politics today. No-one is offering this kind of alternative....[and] there are no prospects of a legitimate liberal force taking shape in Russia.⁴⁹

Instead, he claims there are simply bit players, a passing parade exemplified, for example, by the social democratic pro-Western Yabloko party which 'in fact play the role of spoilers in the existing system...[and] imitate a liberal position rather than embodying it,'⁵⁰ or like Mikhail Prokhorov's Civic Platform are 'extremely ghettoized and cannot really operate as a political party.'⁵¹

Nonetheless, given one of the foundational assumptions of Liberalism is the fostering of a civil society in which there may be vigorous, sometime acrimonious, argument about the existence and limitations of Liberalism, paradoxically Pavlovsky's scornful dismissal of any such phenomenon in the Russian Federation does not necessarily disqualify him from membership within the conservative spectrum of a contemporary liberal intelligentsia. The complex question here is the real extent to which he is on the sidelines charting the rise of an uncivil, modernizing society in his country, one whose

⁴⁹ Pavlovsky, Gleb, Valdai Club Interview, 25/06/2013, <http://valdaiclub/politics/59600.html> p2

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

intellectuals mostly belong to a less high-minded middle-class. In other words, whether the meaning and social context of such a resonant traditional term as 'intelligentsia' is now in a process of terminal corrosion.

Aleksander Dugin's Radical Conservatism.

On a prosaic level, Dugin is in agreement with Pavlovsky that that there has never been a liberal movement of any meaning or consequence, either in Putin's Russian Federation or during the decades of the Soviet Union. 'There are liberals,' Dugin writes, 'but no Liberalism'⁵² because:

they were severely persecuted by the ideological organs in the USSR...[and]...the principles of Liberalism were foreign to the instinctive foundations Russian society.⁵³

Instead, he argues there was an ideological vacuum after the fall of communism that was filled by 'an uncritical, ignorant and parodic imitation'⁵⁴ of Western Liberalism. In reality, he says, Russia's liberals after the fall of communism were a confused, dishonest, unscrupulous sham:

Practically none of the post-Soviet elite selected Liberalism consciously or deliberately; until the last moment of the fall of the USSR, the leaders of of Russian Liberalism eulogized the Communist Party, the ideas of Marx, the Plan and socialism, while the oligarchs made a living in the Committee of the Komosols or served in the KGB...such a cheap and crooked Liberalism was maintained in the 1990s as an ersatz ideology...[whose] supporters and preachers engaged in careerism, privatization and setting up their own little deals.⁵⁵

⁵² Dugin, Alexander, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Arktos, 2012, p152

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The result, Dugin adds, is that Putin has faced no real ideological opposition, but only the power-mongering of the 'economic clans'⁵⁶ and 'the more active agency of influence, deeply entrenched in espionage in the service of the West.'⁵⁷ Moreover, like Pavlovsky, he claims the very few would-be liberals turned out to be posturers, that is 'liberals only when Liberalism is permitted.'⁵⁸ With the rise of Putin, they simply adapted themselves to the new leadership. In particular, Dugin writes, such 'iconic figures of Russian Liberalism' as the free market economists, Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais, ...behaved like banal opportunists: they could not care less about the ideological content of Putin's reforms.'⁵⁹ By Dugin's reckoning, many of the country's key powerbrokers and business elite thus have passed from communism to a post-modernist Age of the Anti-Christ without having to endure the travails of Liberalism.

Still, whatever Pavlovsky's very private, or even perhaps non-existent, religious views, his public statements show no indication he has followed Dugin into his unpleasant world of arcane, oracular metaphysics implied by the last sentence. What follows provides a contrasting perspective to Pavlovsky's liberal conservatism through a considered look at Dugin's ultra-conservative, radical Traditionalism. As stated above, it takes a critical look at both the content of his ideas and the claims that he has become one of the most significant voices in post-Cold War Russian nationalist ideology. Specifically, it considers more closely Dugin's geopolitics, as well as his New Right anti-Liberalism, the most recent comprehensive formulation of which is in his book, *The Fourth Political Theory*.

Born in Moscow in 1962, Dugin is the son of a former general in Russian military intelligence (the GRU), Geliy Aleksandrovich, and his grandfather and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p153

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp152-3

great-grandfather were both Russian military officers.⁶⁰ Though the details of his childhood and early adolescence are difficult to verify conclusively, it is said that he did not receive a formal education,⁶¹ but that he had a gift for foreign languages, learning around nine of them.⁶² With the help of his family connections, he became an autodidact, spending many hours from his early teens reading books, especially about mysticism, paganism, geopolitics and radical German conservatism, in 'special collections' (spetskhrary) that were forbidden to the ordinary Russian.⁶³ Like Pavlovsky, he became a dissident during the Brezhnev era, describing himself as acutely disaffected with the 'repulsing and entirely vacuous world'⁶⁴ of the decaying Soviet Union, in which he had grown up. 'In the late 1970s,' he says, 'I came to reject the paradigm that served as a basis of that world and embarked on a search for alternatives to the paradigm.'⁶⁵

By eighteen he had become a member of the Yuzhinsky Circle, an unconventional group whose youthful rebellion took the form of a devotion to black magic, mysticism, and what Dugin later acknowledged was 'excess in all forms'⁶⁶ including drugs, alcohol and orgies. The circle met in the Moscow apartment of prominent émigré poet and novelist Yuri Mamleev, who had earlier emigrated to America⁶⁷ and who is described by critic Caryl Emerson as the 'master of the sexual and necrophiliac grotesque.'⁶⁸ On a slightly more elevated level, its members systematically read and discussed notables of the

⁶⁰ Dunlop, John B., 'Aleksandr Dugin's Foundation of Geopolitics,' *Demokratizatsiya*; Winter 2004 Vol 12 Issue 1 p41

⁶¹ Shlapentokh, Dimitry, 'Russian Federation Elite Image of Iran: From the late Soviet Era to the Present,' US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, September 2009, <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army/mil/pdffiles/pub936.pdf>, p13

⁶² Dunlop, Op.Cit.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Dugin, Aleksandr, Online interview with pravaya.ru, February 22, 2006, <http://www.pravaya.ru/ludi/451/6742>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Sedgwick, Op. Cit. p223

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Emerson, Caryl, 'The Russian Federation reclaims Bakhtin,' *Comparative Literature* 44, Fall 1992, Note9, p415 (mistakenly referenced in Sedgwick, Op Cit. p223.)

non-Russian extreme rightwing ideology, many of whom puzzlingly could be found in the open collection of Moscow's Russian State Library (formerly the Lenin Library).⁶⁹ For Dugin, the group provided an intellectual milieu, out of which crystallised many of his radical ideas about his country's place in the world which fundamentally have remained unchanged during the last quarter century. Not surprisingly, in his 1993 history of Russian Extreme Rightwing movements, the American scholar, Walter Laqueur, scornfully relegated him to the rat-bag fringe of the country's post-Cold War subculture, referring to his 'rehash of geopolitics and Eurasianism, of Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theories recycled as "mondialism," and of German metaphysical philosophy with an admixture of neo-paganism' as 'the parlor games of a handful of intellectuals.'⁷⁰ Though the Yuhinsky group has long since dispersed, its founder, poet Yevgeny Golovin, has remained a close associate of Dugin.⁷¹

More recently, in the gossipy, occasionally flippant prologue to his history of anti-modernity movements in the twentieth century, published in 2004, British scholar Mark Sedgwick refers to the warning of an unnamed fellow academic on the eve of his research trip to Moscow that: '...The main thing to remember is that all these people are 100 percent insane.'⁷² As it happened, in contrast to many of his scholarly colleagues, Sedgwick proffers the minority view after interviewing Dugin that he found him to be 'erudite, and charming too.'⁷³ He adds that Dugin's engaging ways were apparent despite his beleaguered awareness that Western journalists and academics invariably characterised him (and his sometime Yuzhinsky circle associate, Eduard Limonov) as 'personifications of the nightmare of a reborn Third Reich armed with nuclear weapons.'⁷⁴ Sedgwick also notes that Limonov wrote a semi-autobiographical, international bestselling novel, which was published in the West in 1979 under

⁶⁹ Sedgwick, Op.Cit. p221

⁷⁰ Laqueur, Walter, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russian Federation*, HarperCollins, 1993, p291.

⁷¹ Leverant Yigal, 'The Prophet of the New Russian Federation Empire,' Azure no. 35, Winter 5769, 2009, p5

⁷² Sedgwick, Op.Cit. p3

⁷³ Ibid. p4

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the catchy title of *It's Me, Eddie*. He came to be very publicly loathed by Solzhenitsyn who described him as 'a little insect who writes pornography.'⁷⁵ For several years around the early 1990s, Limonov and Dugin worked closely together to promote their ultra conservative ideas in Russia.

In 1983 Dugin was briefly detained by the KGB for singing what he described in an interview with Sedgwick as 'mystical anti-communist songs.'⁷⁶ Like Pavlovsky, he was also found to be in possession of samizdat copies of Solzhenitsyn's books, which led to his expulsion from the Moscow Aviation Institute before he completed his studies.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the following two decades saw his gradual emergence out of a colourful and dissolute early adulthood into a wider community of anti Gorbachev, anti-Western, Rightwing so-called defenders of 'the true Russia.'⁷⁸ In 1987, on the eve of the fall of the Soviet Union, he joined the organization, Pamyat (Memory), which had become 'the focus for popular opposition to Perestroika.'⁷⁹ It has since been accused of having been sponsored by the KGB 'as a safety valve to let off the steam that dissidents were generating.'⁸⁰ Still, Dugin's involvement was a short-lived one. In 1989 he left the organisation, subsequently describing its members as 'hysterics, KGB collaborators , schizophrenics.'⁸¹ Instead, as suggested above, during the 1990s he became directly involved in extremist Rightwing politics by helping to establish the National Bolshevik Party, (NBP) under the leadership of his friend and colleague, Limonov.

The ideology of National Bolshevism, which combines ancient esoteric Traditionalist doctrine with a contemporary politics of anti-globalisation, has since acquired devotees across eastern Europe, in the UK and in America. According to its current non-Russian website, the term National Bolshevism

⁷⁵ Sedgwick, Op.Cit. p4

⁷⁶ Sedgwick, Op.Cit. p223

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p224

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

was first coined in Germany at the end of World War I to denote a movement that was nationalist and Leftwing, and very definitely opposed to Hitler's National Socialists. These days it describes its position as 'where the far right meets the communist left.' Inspired by communism, especially by Stalin's 1924 anti-internationalist declaration of 'socialism in one country,' it claims its communalist doctrine to be 'the essence of true nationalism.'⁸² The spiritual health and sense of belonging of *das Volk* of every nation must be vigorously defended through a crusade against international finance capitalism, the revelation of the multifaceted evils of which it argues are an integral feature of Marxist thought.⁸³ Dugin himself has described his National Bolshevism as 'a fusion of Europeanism and Sovietism.'⁸⁴ In terms of a timely and appropriate political platform, his doctrine evidently had almost no appeal for Russian voters in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism. In 1995, he was singularly unsuccessful in his campaign for a seat representing St Petersburg in the Duma. The result was an official vote count of less than one percent.⁸⁵ Though it has continued to be a small presence in the Russian Federation's urban street politics, the NBP is unregistered. Following an acrimonious falling out with Limonov in 1998, Dugin resigned from the party.

The period from the late 1990s saw a more positive turn in Dugin's career trajectory, and one in which his radical, occultist ideas seemed temporarily more muted. In 1997 he published *Foundations of Geopolitics: Russia's Geopolitical Future, Thinking Spatially*. The book was written under the patronage of members of the GRU and of the Russian General Staff Academy, whose interest in Eurasianist geopolitics is said to have reached back to the 1950s.⁸⁶ Since the late 1990s evidently the book has become the standard

⁸² National Bolshevism website, www.nationalbolshevism.blogspot.com.au

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Dugin, Aleksandr, 'Existential Geopolitics of Carlo Terracciano,' *Open Revolt!* <http://openrevolt.info/2012/09/19/existential-geopolitics-of-carlo-terracciano-by-alexander-dugin/> P4

⁸⁵ Leverant, *Op.Cit.* p9

⁸⁶ Dunlop, *Op.Cit.* p2

textbook in military training institutions.⁸⁷In 2001, Dugin launched the International Neo-Eurasian Movement whose geopolitical ideology had been described in his book. The movement drew further on an eclectic mix of European, British and American literary and philosophical sources, which he has since frequently claimed have appealed to and proved to be intellectually digestible to the Russian Federation's power elite under the Putin regime.

Prominent among these seminal non-Russian influences on his ideas were the discipline of geopolitics from the beginning of the twentieth century; the Conservative Movement in Germany between World Wars I and II; and the pan-European extreme Right Wing school of thought, especially the works of Italian academic Julius Evola and of Dugin's longtime friend, French philosopher Alain de Benoist. In 2008, again allegedly because of his links to some of his country's politicians, sympathetic academics and senior military figures, Dugin was appointed professor in the Department of Sociology at Russia's oldest and most high-profile university, Moscow State University, and the inaugural director of its new Centre for the Study of Conservatism.⁸⁸ Since March 2012, he has been a member of the Council of Experts advising the Chairman of the State Duma, Sergei Naryshkin.⁸⁹

A former diplomat and possibly a KGB employee in the Russian Embassy in Brussels from 1988-1992, Naryshkin subsequently worked under Putin in the office of the former Mayor of St Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak. Before taking up his current role, he has held a variety of corporate and administrative/political positions, including head of foreign investment with the St Petersburg's Industry and Construction bank, Promstroibank; Chairman of the Board of Directors of United Shipping Corporation, and Deputy Prime Minister for External Economic Activity, especially in the Commonwealth of Independent States(CIS). Not surprisingly, he is sometimes said to be

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Umland, Andreas, 'Fascist Tendencies in Russian Federation Higher Education The Rise of Aleksandr Dugin and the Faculty of Sociology of Moscow State University,' *OpEd News* 24/8/2014, www.opednews.com/articles/Fascist-Tendencies-Russ-by-Andreas-Umland-110823-348.html accessed 3/11/2014

⁸⁹ Russian Federation Analytical Digest No135, 5 August 2013 www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-135-6-9.pdf.

one of Putin's high-level insiders.⁹⁰ As an expert advisor to Naryshkin, Dugin has promoted his Neo-Eurasian conservatism in part by cultivating links between various Duma parliamentarians and the European New Right organisations, for example, in Austria, France and Hungary. In particular, this has involved his organizing public fora in these countries, as well as invitations to the elite of the extremist Rightwing to visit Moscow.⁹¹

These days, though only occasionally featured in the non-Russian mainstream print or broadcast media, Dugin has continued to be an indisputable front-runner among the contemporary Russian intelligentsia as Western scholars' most relentlessly vilified ideologue. Echoing with Laqueur's scornful judgment, much of the analysis focuses on his alleged fascist extremism and neo-imperialist geopolitics. Since the late 2000s, he has been variously described by his critics as a neo-Nazi anti-semitic,⁹² 'a carrying agent of fascist *Weltanschauung*,'⁹³ a palingenetic ultranationalist⁹⁴ and finally a significant and alarming voice in the formulating of the so-called 'Turn to the East'⁹⁵ in the Putin government's domestic and foreign policy stances.

Such a catalogue of denigration is no doubt understandable as Dugin's world view does indeed appear to have incorporated all the elements of the West's worst nightmares about a resurgent Russian Federation. In his prolific writings on his numerous personal websites, in his books, conference papers and in YouTube lectures about what he calls his post-post-modernist new political theory and its associated geo-strategic and geo-civilisational

⁹⁰ Moscow Times profile (no byline), 'Sergei Naryshkin,' Apr. 01 2011 www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/sergei_naryshkin/434258

⁹¹ Stroble, Natascha, 'In Austria Right Wing Extremism is having a ball,' 25 March 2014, www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/austria-right-wing-ball/; Ambiance report, 'Jobbik President Gabor Vona delivered a lecture at Lomonosov Moscow State University,' Tues May 21, 2013, www.hungarianambiance.com/2013/05/jobbik-president-gabor-vona-delivered.html

⁹² Horsfield, Dorothy, 'Mind the Gap: The Significance to Europe of a Resurgent Eurasianist Nationalism under the Putin/Medvedev Government,' MSc thesis currently held at LSE library. For permission to read please contact me directly on Dorothy.Horsfield@anu.edu.au

⁹³ Shekhovtsov, Anton, 'The Palingenetic Thrust of Russian Federation Neo-Eurasianism: Ideas of Rebirth in Aleksandr Dugin's Worldview,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion*, Vol9, No4, 491-506, December 2008, p2

⁹⁴ Griffin, Roger, *The Nature of Fascism*, Printers Publishers Limited, 1991.

⁹⁵ Shlapentokh, Dmitry, *Russian Federation between East and West*, Leiden, 2007, p6

dimensions, he is obdurately anti-Liberalism, anti-American and a true believer in the imminent and inevitable apocalyptic Third World War between the West and the East. The US is the centre of 'world evil, death, dissolving[sic], division and loss of organic wholeness,' Dugin writes, in his Neo-Eurasia Movement manifesto. Its liberals are:

confused, vain, individualist, oligarchic, deprived of any moral, spiritual and traditional orienting points... understanding their technological and economic superiority as a mandate for a privately-owned hegemony on a planetary scale.⁹⁶

Echoing his earlier National Bolshevism, he thus accuses America's liberals, who he appears to assume are the majority of the country's population, as constituting the shallow, dehumanized force for neo-liberal globalized capitalism that should be resolutely resisted by Putin's Russian Federation.

As evident, for example, in his appointment to Naryshkin's Council of Experts, Dugin's views obviously appear to have had some resonance in Moscow's networks of the rich and powerful. In this context though, a later section of the chapter counters that the insistence, for example, from scholars such as Andreas Umland⁹⁷ or Marlene Laruelle⁹⁸ that he represents the ugly face of a neo-fascist, occultist, xenophobic vision increasingly insinuating itself into the Kremlin as a kind of covert, unofficially-endorsed ideology, appears to be over-stated.⁹⁹

Dugin's Anti-Liberalism:

Interestingly, as especially evident in his most recent book, *The Fourth Political Theory*, during the last decade Dugin's views have become even

⁹⁶ Dugin, A.G. 'Eurasia Above All,' <http://arctogaia.com/public/eng/Manifesto.html>, p1

⁹⁷ Umland, Andreas, 'Post-Soviet Uncivil Society and the Rise of Aleksandr Dugin: A Case Study of the extra-parliamentary radical Right in Contemporary Russian Federation,' Unpublished thesis, University of Cambridge library, 2007.

⁹⁸ Laruelle, Marlene, 'A Russian Federation Version of the European Radical Right,' Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2008

⁹⁹ Horsfield, Dorothy, 'Mind the Gap,' Op.Cit.

more eclectically derivative in their unsystematic reliance on Western scholarship. For instance, the first English edition of the book, published in 2012, contains yet another vituperative condemnation of Liberalism and America's so-called militant hegemonic foreign policy stance, much of which continues to be based on his interpretation of traditional geopolitics, and more explicitly on the radical conservatism of the European extreme Rightwing movements. But unlike much of his earlier work, the 200 page book eulogises the writings of the German philosopher and ongoing favourite of the Far Right, Martin Heidegger, as providing answers to the challenges of saving the planet from nihilism, Liberalism and the United States. Heidegger, Dugin writes, has constructed 'the most profound - ontological! - foundation for the Fourth Political Theory...the most all-encompassing, paradoxical, profound, and penetrating study of Being.'¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately for the earnest scholar, neither in this work nor in any other writings available in translation has Dugin elucidated Heidegger's phenomenological approach to ontology with sufficient clarity or sophistication to support this claim. For instance, he makes his own fundamental and obtuse amendment to Heidegger's concept of Dasein with the suggestion that it provides a basic 'existential anthropology'¹⁰¹ on which to map his highly original Fourth Political Theory. So far, he says, this map describes fourteen different directions for the development of Dasein. His list includes Dasein and the state; Dasein and power (the will to power); The horizons of political temporality; The Prince and nothing; Revolution and the flight of the gods; and Urbanisation and the house of being. It is however a completely open, apparently perilous work-in-progress:

It summons us to live dangerously...to liberate... all those things that cannot be driven back inside only then will the stakes be truly great, when the danger is infinite.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Dugin, Aleksander, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Arktos Media Limited, 2012, p28

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p41

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p54

In order to be truly authentic, Dugin writes, his Fourth Political Theory should avoid becoming 'a set of basic axioms.' Rather, it is more important 'to leave some things unsaid, to be discovered, in expectations and insinuations, in allegations and premonitions.' For Dugin, choosing the path to this half-understood, uncertain future is thus replete with a messianic fantasy that appears to be born of a raging desire to bury all conflicting, superseded ideologies. It also appears perhaps to be more than a little touched by Lear's tormented, howling threat:

I will do such things
 What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be
 The terrors of the earth.¹⁰³

As suggested above, it is difficult to assess how Heidegger might have responded to Dugin's expansive use of his philosophy.

Though claiming Heidegger as its primary source of inspiration, *The Fourth Political Theory* includes a whistle stop intellectual tour through European and American thought since the eighteenth century, a short index of which includes Hume, Bentham, Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Weber, Huntington and Fukuyama out of dozens of other influential thinkers at an average rate of two or three per page. Thematically it seizes upon the continuing great debates of the post-Enlightenment about the meaning and possibility of progress; the disenchantment of the world¹⁰⁴ without the comforts of religious certainties; the meaning of liberty; and the dark Nietzschean pessimism that particularly from the late century has been a feature of interpretations of modernity. Such streams of ideas and argument invariably serve as a miscellaneous confirmation of Dugin's trenchant views about the decadence of the West.

¹⁰³ Shakespeare, William, *King Lear*, 'The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Act 2, Scene 4, lines 280-282, Shakespeare.mit.edu

¹⁰⁴ Weber, Max, as cited in Koshui, Basat Bilal, *The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber's Legacy: disenchanting disenchantment*, Macmillan, 2005, p11

Specifically, for Dugin, Liberalism is a political and economic philosophy and ideology that ‘...is a disgusting, human-hating, mean doctrine. It is loathsome in theory and practice.’¹⁰⁵ By way of explanation, Chapter Nine of *The Fourth Political Theory* provides what he calls ‘a stricter definition’¹⁰⁶ of ‘the principles which lie at the base of historic Liberalism.’¹⁰⁷ There are nine of them, and together they condemn Liberalism as selfish, greedy, excessively egalitarian, a leveler of the distinctions between ‘races, peoples and religions,’¹⁰⁸ and the destroyer of governmental and religious institutions. Drawing on conceptualizations of positive and negative liberty by John Stuart Mill and Benjamin Constant (whom he mistakenly refers to as ‘Constance’¹⁰⁹), Dugin adds that in practice liberals, such as Locke, Adam Smith, Kant, and Bentham, then ‘right up to the neo-liberal school of the Twentieth century, such as Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper,’¹¹⁰ dogmatically propose we should be free from:

Government and its control over the economy, politics and civil society society; Churches and their dogmas; Any form of common areas of responsibility for the economy; Ethnic attachments; Any collective identity whatsoever;

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More obscurely, though presumably in reference to what he believes is Liberalism’s fundamentalist antipathy to socialist and communist ideologies, they apparently oppose:

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in Umland Andreas, Op.Cit. p1

¹⁰⁶ Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Op.Cit. p 140

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. pp140-141

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p141

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Any attempt to redistribute, with one or another government or social institutions, the results of material or non-material labour...¹¹²

With the apparent conviction of an Old Testament hell-raiser, Dugin concludes:

‘Freedom from’ is the most disgusting formula of slavery, inasmuch as it tempts man to an insurrection against God, against traditional values, against the moral and spiritual foundations of his people and his culture.¹¹³

It looks a redoubtable undertaking to unravel Dugin’s deeper reasoning and terminological confusions in compiling such a list. A more immediate reaction might suggest that his crude, distorted compression of more than 300 years of philosophical discussion and contextualization of interpretations of Liberalism makes almost no sense. Perhaps, a highly recommended response could be to take around the hat and enrol him in Western Political Theory 1.01.

Nonetheless, Dugin writes, the triumph of Liberalism during the twentieth century over the competing ideologies of communism and fascism has indeed meant the realization of the Hegelian prediction of The End of History. This is clearly evident in the arrival of the nihilist, post-modernist ‘kingdom of the Antichrist’¹¹⁴ which he says ‘is not simply a metaphor capable of mobilising the masses, but a religious fact - the fact of the Apocalypse.’¹¹⁵ It is a reality, he says, that has been long-predicted by occultists in diverse cultures across the globe. Oddly, he insists this pre-determined march of history does not preclude the invention of a new world, but only if we so choose. The sense here appears to be that, goaded by the cattle prod of fate, humankind is scrabbling like crazed sheep into an Armageddon at the end of time. It will be up to the recruits to the radical conservative rescue team to fashion a

¹¹² Ibid. p142

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p27

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Golden Dawn, in which Heidegger's pure being-in-the-world will find its spiritual home.

To initiate this turn of events, Dugin writes, it will be both possible and necessary to bypass the abominations of the Age of Enlightenment and the downward path it has created to postmodernity, whose heroes are now 'the world's clowns... "freaks" and "monsters," "transvestites" and "degenerates."' ¹¹⁶ Specifically, his *Fourth Political Theory* calls for a modern-day crusade by the defenders of The Tradition's ¹¹⁷ values of family, community and spirituality against the US, the West and globalization. This means tearing the evil of Liberalism 'out by its roots.' ¹¹⁸ He acknowledges that the Russian Federation could only pursue such a mighty undertaking 'together with all the world powers, who, in one way or another, oppose "the American century."' ¹¹⁹

Dugin's Fascism:

Though Dugin's unearthly invocations raise questions about the lifetime effects of his youthful drug-taking, two important points perhaps should be emphasized. The first is that millenarianism, in both Christian and non-Christian eschatology, and from which Dugin uncritically derives many of his anti-liberal beliefs, has had a long and rich cultural history across the countries of East and West. As Gray argues, it has frequently involved a destructive utopian project, in which 'there are no circumstances under which it can be realized.'¹²⁰ Immediate examples from modern secular utopianism, he says, include the impossibility of establishing a western-style market economy in the post-Soviet Russian Federation, or liberal democracy in post-Saddam Iraq.¹²¹ The likely success of Dugin's global militant crusade to

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p26

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p155

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Gray, John, *Black Mass Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, Penguin Books, 2007, p28

¹²¹ Ibid.

destroy Liberalism could also be said to fall into this category. With typically pessimistic, though more moderate conservatism, Gray implies too that contrary to Dugin's fantastical imaginings, history may well be a nightmare from which we will never awaken.¹²²

The second point is that, despite the claims of his critics such as Umland and Laruelle, it is difficult to sustain the argument that Dugin is a categorical fascist. For a start, fascism has a long-standing problem of adequate definition. Unlike Liberalism or Marxism, in particular, it does not have a body of substantial foundational texts on which to build a legacy of contentious theoretical understanding. Nor have scholarly attempts to erect a notion of generic fascism been accepted as particularly persuasive. For instance, 'palingenetic ultra nationalism,' a definitional term put forward by Roger Griffin¹²³ to denote the common root of all manifestations of fascism, and much used by Umland in his descriptions of Dugin's views, has been strongly challenged as failing to capture a sense of the ideology's unique conceptual core. As Gregor argues, the problem here is that 'palingenesis,' (or national rebirth) is 'a universal archetypal human myth'¹²⁴ and therefore not necessarily fascist; and the concept of 'ultra nationalism' is 'felicitously vague'.¹²⁵

In their extended public debate about interpreting Dugin's work,¹²⁶ Gregor also rejects what he sees as Umland's commonplace and inaccurate conflation of Right Wing extremism with fascism. It ignores fundamental differences, Gregor says, between the history of real existing fascism in Italy and Nazi Germany and the ideas of notable twentieth century Far Right, non-fascist ideologues. These include Alain de Benoist and more importantly the Italian

¹²² Ibid. p29

¹²³ Griffin, Roger, Op.Cit.

¹²⁴ Umland, Andreas, 'Dugin Not a Fascist? A Debate with A James Gregor,' *Erwaegen Wissen Ethik* 16 (2005) 4 www.academia.edu/174269/Dugin_Not_a_Fascist_A_Debate_With_A_James_Gregor_6_texts p595

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

aristocrat, Julius Evola, whom Gregor claims in fact has been the central influence on Dugin's writings.

Gregor's perspective is that fascism can only really be meaningful if it is understood to have been anchored in events before, during and after the second World War. It is a view shared by the historian, Eric Hobsbawm. He characterises the actual relationship between Right Wing intellectuals and activists and fascism's various manifestations across most of Europe during the first half of the twentieth century as only sometimes to have been mutually supportive. They had in common, he writes, nationalist sentiments, anti-communism, anti-Liberalism, and 'a preference for politics as street violence.'¹²⁷ At the same time, Hobsbawm argues, given that theory was not 'a strong point'¹²⁸ of fascist movements who were 'devoted to the inadequacies of reason and rationalism and the superiority of instinct and will'¹²⁹ the relationship was often non-existent. Rather, he writes, at times a preoccupation with fascism was merely a temporary, 'decorative'¹³⁰ feature of conservative intellectual life, especially in Germany:

Mussolini could have readily dispensed with his house philosopher, Giovanni Gentile, and Hitler probably neither knew nor cared about the support of the philosopher Heidegger.¹³¹

Hobsbawm adds that, with the defeat of the Axis powers, 'fascism dissolved like a clump of earth thrown into a river,'¹³² disappearing with the interwar world crisis of social and economic Liberalism 'that had allowed it to

¹²⁷ Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes*, Vintage Books 1996, p117

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.* p175

¹³³ *Ibid.* p176

emerge.¹³³ 'It had never been, even in theory,' he says, 'a universal programme or political project.'¹³⁴

Almost seventy years later, scholars such as Gregor argue that 'fascist' now appears to function mainly as a pejorative term, which intentionally evokes Nazism and the genocidal murder of innocents. As Umland's way of portraying Dugin, he says, it has very little cognitive substance. Moreover, the diversity and content of Dugin's work suggest he has no 'special attraction to the core ideas of Nazism and Fascism.'¹³⁵

Together with polar myths, gnostic wisdom, alchemy, evil demiurges, 'eschatological pathos', and 'mystic materialism,' Dugin's ideas 'run the gauntlet from the occult to the absurd... He seems to have an indiscriminate taste for any bizarre notion that crosses his path.'¹³⁶

Given the frequency with which Dugin is reviled as a latter-day fascist, it is worth emphasising that in the *Fourth Political Theory*, he indicates that he does not regard himself as any kind of a fascist. In fact, he dismisses fascism as the short-lived 'third political theory,'¹³⁷ which is currently being superseded by his own fourth and final theory. Fascism has disappeared, he writes, expiring before the alliance of Liberalism and communism, and because of 'Hitler's suicidal geopolitical miscalculations.'¹³⁸ But its spectral presence lingers, he says, not merely as a term of abuse, but more luridly as a 'bloody vampiric ghost tinged with an aura of "absolute evil" ...attractive to

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Umland, 'Dugin Not a Fascist?' *Op.Cit.* p538

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, *Op.Cit.* p17

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

the decadent tastes of postmodernity, and...still used as a bogey-man to frighten humanity.¹³⁹

Dugin's Sphere of Influence:

As with all Dugin's philosophical writings, one of the central problem with *The Fourth Political Theory* is that it is a long way from being a dazzling display of erudition. Unlike the work of many of his Russian academic colleagues, including those who are currently employed in prestigious universities in the UK and America, the book has not been taken up by mainstream Western publishers. Nor has his writing generally stimulated respectful or substantial critical scholarly review. Instead its English translation was published and distributed by the UK-based Arktos Press, which since 2010 has devoted itself exclusively to the ideas of European and American ultra-conservatives, mixed with those of some of the wackier esotericists of earlier times. These include the more academic books of French New Right ideologue, Alain de Benoist; American Old Conservative Paul Gottfried; and Oswald Spengler, author of the classic, *The Decline of the West*, first published in 1918. They include too some of the works of the self-designated magician and alleged employee of British intelligence, Aleister Crowley; American horror novelist H.P Lovecraft; as well as a new edition of Louis Pauwel's and Jacques Bergier's bestselling 1960's Counter Culture and New Ager's handbook, *The Morning of the Magicians*. Described by Sedgwick as 'a phenomenally successful mixture of esotericism, scientific popularization, and science fiction',¹⁴⁰ this last book claims to unveil the hidden history of Europe as a tale of occult conspiracies and the machinations of aliens during their secret visits to planet earth. The book was reputedly influential amongst members of the young Dugin's Yuzhinsky Circle.¹⁴¹

In what appears to be a case of Dugin's unilateral self-promotion, he describes himself on the Arktos website as 'the prominent Russian geopolitical

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Sedgwick, Op.Cit. pp207-8

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p221-22

thinker...who has served as an advisor to Vladimir Putin.’¹⁴² Beyond membership of the Naryshkins’s Council of Experts, as well as anecdotes about Dugin’s alleged friendship with Putin’s close associate, Igor Sechin, and others among ‘a hawkish, security-oriented clique of insiders,’¹⁴³ there is scant available evidence to suggest that Dugin has ever really occupied such an exalted position.

Perhaps the best clarification of his actual role in government policy and ideology is the testimony by Dugin himself in an interview in 2007. In it he brags about his shaping of Kremlin ideology, even though those in the higher echelons of power are not necessarily cognizant of his overweening influence:

My thought prevails; my discourse reigns. Yes, the government does not disclose its sources....Yes, there are whole circles that stand between me and the government...that add to the concentrated idea of Eurasian geopolitics, conservative Traditionalism, and other ideologies...and create a watered-down version. But, in the end, this version reaches the government which incorporates it as if it were something obvious. Putin is becoming more and more like Dugin, ... implementing the program I have been building my entire life.¹⁴⁴

There seems to be no public record of Putin’s response to such assertions by Dugin. Nor is it clear, given Dugin’s admission that he is remote from many of the inner circles of government, and without direct access to its highest levels, how ‘a watered-down version’ of his views might have suffused outwards and upwards through a highly-factionalised Kremlin to become the dominant mode of understanding his country’s place in the world. Beyond the anecdotes culled from Moscow’s kitchen cabinets or media snippets about who

¹⁴² Arktos Publishing, ‘About,’ www.arktos.com

¹⁴³ Liverant, Op.Cit. p13

¹⁴⁴ Excerpts from an interview in ‘The Secrets of Russian Politics’ on *russia.ru* online television channel, November 1, 2007, as cited in Liverant, Yigal, Op. Cit. n45, p23

is an insider or an outsider in the Kremlin, how is it possible to track and measure such an apparent convergence of opinion? For example, one focal question here is the extent to which the Kremlin's 2013 re-commitment to fostering a Eurasian Union reflects Dugin's anti-liberal, militant Neo-Eurasianist ideology, as he appears to fondly imagine; and similarly with regard to the government's commitment to securing its spheres of influence, for example in Iran, Syria and Ukraine?

Interestingly, much to Dugin's chagrin, in June 2014 he was dismissed from his position as professor of sociology at Moscow State University, where Putin was appointed Chair of the Board of Trustees in July, 2013. At the same time as Dugin's sacking the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Vladimir Dobrenkov, who recruited him, also left the university. According to the online journal, *The Interpreter*, Dugin's sacking followed the submission of a petition to the University's rector which was 'the last straw for the university leadership.'¹⁴⁵ The journal was established in 2013 with seed funding from the London-based Herzen Foundation. It describes itself as primarily dedicated to dismantling the language barrier by translating media reports from the Russian press and blogosphere into English.¹⁴⁶ In its translation of an article from the Russian online news agency, newsru.com, it reported that the petition contained 10,000 signatures from both Russian citizens and Ukrainians, protesting against Dugin's murderous rhetoric in an interview with the pro-separatist ANNA news service in Ukraine. It also reported that his Moscow university department has served 'as a launching pad to recruit direct support for the Russian fighters in Ukraine.'¹⁴⁷ Dugin's lengthy, somewhat paranoid response to his dismissal, excerpts of which were transcribed by the journal, insisted that it was the result of a conspiracy against him by the liberals and anti-Putin forces, adding:

¹⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick, Catherine A. 'Russia This Week: Dugin Dismissed from Moscow State University? (23-29 June)', *The Interpreter*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag/russia-this-week-what-will-be-twitthers-fate-in-russia> accessed 27/9/2014

¹⁴⁶ *The Interpreter*, www.interpretermag.com

¹⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, Catherine A., Op.Cit. p2

I am convinced that the idea of firing me simply could not emerge from the chairman of the Supervisory Council of Lomonosov Moscow State University, RF President V.Putin and he could not give approval for such a move.¹⁴⁸

The Influence of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism on the Putin Government's Policies:

As suggested above, beginning with the 1997 publication of his book, *Geopolitical Foundations. The Geopolitical Future of Russia. Thinking Spatially*, Dugin has been regarded as significantly, though certainly not uniquely, instrumental within post-Soviet Russia in popularizing the views of the founder of the discipline of geopolitics, Britisher Halford Mackinder about the indomitable Eurasian heartland. Dugin's book encompasses his Russian perspective on the threat to his country posed by the West's foreign and security policies that are driven by geopolitical rivalry over control of the 'rimlands.' As a result, identifying the alleged voice of Dugin's anti-liberal Neo-Eurasianism in Putin's public statements and policy directions has become an increasing preoccupation of many Russia watchers. Leverant, for instance, describes Dugin's influence as 'immense.'¹⁴⁹ Umland warns that his doctrine has moved beyond the subculture of 'lunatic fringe politics and occultism with a taste for the bizarre'¹⁵⁰ into the mainstream ideological market place. Laruelle writes of his ubiquity, of his having assumed a position 'simultaneously on the fringe and at the centre of the Russian nationalist phenomenon.'¹⁵¹ This last statement is particularly challenging. Where is the centre of this nationalist phenomenon located? Amongst the divided, argumentative intellectuals of the cities, with their cloistered scholars, their neo-socialist collectives such as Chto Delat, their nihilistic post-modernist artists, the five dozen or so anarchists of the Pussy Riot collective, Voyna,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p6

¹⁴⁹ Leverant, Op.Cit. p15

¹⁵⁰ Umland, Op.Cit. p93

¹⁵¹ Laruelle, Op.Cit. p1

(War); or in the muted street protests of the professional, urban middle class, many of whom are the children and grandchildren of Pavlovsky's 1960s' lost generation? Or is it regional, homegrown, grassroots, an atavistic tide spreading across the expanses from Moscow to Vladivostok and beyond, as is apparently wishfully conjured by Dugin's contemporary Neo-Eurasianists and conservative extremists?

Equally, perhaps it is possible to speculate that Dugin's role might be to serve as a kind of ideological stalking horse, a latter-day unholy fool in the midst of the Russian regime, whose role is to amplify Western suspicions about Putin's motives and intentions and invoke a spectral sense of 'Watch out! If not us, then there is worse waiting in the wings.' It is no doubt a risky strategy that could simply exacerbate perceptions that Russians embody an inherently alien and intractable culture. On the other hand, perhaps it could prove to be a useful stimulus to the West in its diplomatic negotiations to minimise tactics that further estrange the Kremlin. At best it could be an incentive to intensify the kind of post-Cold War fellow-travelling, in which it is hoped informed insight and appropriately respectful strategies of political and socio-economic engagement that take a careful measure of Dugin's limited significance will ensure Putin's Russian Federation will remain receptive to the West. This latter approach is implicit, for example, in Kissinger's condemnation of America's strategic posturing during the Ukrainian crisis as a case of the danger of inept diplomacy leading to unintended consequences:

Putin is a serious strategist - on the premises of Russian history. Understanding U.S. values and psychology are not his strong suits. Nor has understanding Russian history and psychology been a strong point of U.S. policymakers...For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Kissinger, Henry, 'Henry Kissinger: To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end,' March 5, 2014, *The Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a49b-11e3-8466-d34c45170b9_story.html P2 accessed 3/11/2014

In fact, there appears to be no available evidence, at least in official speeches and interviews published on the Kremlin Archives website or in English editions of the Russian media that the more abstruse, apocalyptic and neo-pagan aspects of Dugin's ideas have made even a marginal contribution to the Putin government's foreign and domestic policies. One of the possible explanations for this, Leverant suggests, is that: 'His positions are too complex, his style too abrasive and his character too rebellious and independent.' As suggested above, the same claim has not always been made with regard to the Realist geopolitical elements of his Neo-Eurasianism.

Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism.

This section explores the separate issue of the ultra-conservative geopolitics of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism, especially its relationship to the Russian Federation's contemporary foreign policy. Enmeshed in his anti-Liberalism doctrine, his radical views are again strongly derivative of Western thought. As indicated above, the fundamental geo-strategic conceptual framework of his Neo-Eurasianism is derived from the work of the British geographer and stalwart of King, Country and Empire, Halford Mackinder, who founded the discipline of geopolitics in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As Sedgwick points out, extracts from Mackinder's writings are a prominent feature of Dugin's 1997 book, *Geopolitical Foundations: The Geopolitical Future of Russia. Thinking Spatially*.¹⁵³

Ostensibly, at least, there appears to be much about Mackinder's deterministic worldview that is relevant to Dugin's New Age absolutist mysticism about the central importance of the continent of Eurasia. At the heart of what Mackinder believed at the time was an overlooked scholarly arena was his holistic belief that human history was 'part of the life of the world organism.'¹⁵⁴It should be emphasized, though, that unlike Dugin, Mackinder was distinctly uninterested in Neo Eurasianism's evocations of

¹⁵³ Sedgwick, Mark, Op.Cit. p230

¹⁵⁴ Mackinder, Halford, 'The Geographical Pivot of History,' Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, London, 25th January, 1904, p30

cosmic mysteries, paganism, the ancient Nordic/Aryan folk from the Arctic Circle, Gaia, or of humankind's lost spiritual centre. Instead he insisted that the study of geopolitics was 'an empirical inquiry about the determinants of settlement and growth' within the world organism, the essential and pressing focus of which should be our planet's massive island landmass of Eurasia. From ancient times, Mackinder argued, war and invasion were intrinsic features of the historical dramas that formed the nations of this landmass:

For a thousand years a series of horse-riding peoples emerged from Asia rode through the open spaces of southern Russia ...shaping by the necessity of opposing them the history of each of the great peoples around - the Russians, the Germans, the French the Italians and the Byzantine Greeks.¹⁵⁵

In a seminal paper, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, presented to his Edwardian upper class colleagues of the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, Mackinder warned of the threat to Great Britain posed by the exceptional strategic advantages of a Eurasian continental heartland under Russian domination. Its unrivalled geographical features, he argued '...ice girt in the north, water girt elsewhere,¹⁵⁶ with vast steppe-lands 'wholly unpenetrated by waterways from the ocean'¹⁵⁷ meant that it was the world's greatest natural fortress. With a touch of poetry, he also described the heartland thus: 'At mid-winter, as seen from the moon, a vast white shield would reveal the Heartland in its largest meaning.'¹⁵⁸

In addition, Eurasia's immense natural resources, including the world's biggest gas fields, in combination with the region's coming industrialization and modernization meant that Russia was likely to emerge as not only an impregnable but also an immensely wealthy global power. Mackinder's firm

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p35

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p37

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Mackinder, Halford, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* Constable, 1919, p142

belief in the potentially calamitous effects on the seafaring British Empire of a militant fortress Russia, buttressed by its domination of Eastern Europe and especially if it were allied with Germany, is summarized in his oft-quoted trilogy of propositions:

Who Rules East Europe Commands the Heartland,
 Who Rules the Heartland Commands the World Island,
 Who Rules the World Island Controls the World. ¹⁵⁹

For Mackinder, heeding his dire warning meant securing control of the heartland using economic, diplomatic and militaristic policies that ensured its containment through strategic encirclement. In this context, he divided the World Island between its geographically shielded core and the surrounding inner crescent or rimlands. The latter he distinguished from the rich, westernised, capitalist outer crescent arcing across the globe. The inner crescent was composed of those countries which directly bordered the heartland, such as Germany, Austria, India and China. The outer crescent included the sea powers of Britain, Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and Japan.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Mackinder's influence has been traced across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by scholars and strategic thinkers, including in Nazi Germany where geopolitics was popularized by strategic theorist Karl Haushofer and by Carl Schmitt. In his expanded and updated online summary of *Geopolitical Foundations*, Dugin claims to cover this historical terrain with chapters ranging from 'The Fathers-founders of Geopolitics' [sic] to the internal geopolitics of post-Soviet Russia.¹⁶⁰ As well, writing in 2004 on the centenary of Mackinder's paper to the Royal Geographical Society, eminent American scholar and security strategist Paul Kennedy was fulsome in his praise for the geopolitical wisdom of Mackinder's concept of the pivot of history. He argued that: 'The two world wars were struggles for control of what the author called the "rimlands," that swathe of

¹⁵⁹ Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History,' Op.Cit. p36

¹⁶⁰ Dugin, Alexander, 'Foundations of Geopolitics,' Summary <http://arctogaia.com/public/geopeng.htm> pp1-8

territories running from eastern Europe to the Himalayas and beyond, just outside the Asian “heartland” itself.¹⁶¹ Moreover:

Soviet domination of that region....caused many a US geopolitician (Nikolas Spykman, for example) to recall Mackinder’s theories. And the recent projection of US military power into Afghanistan and various central Asian republics has rekindled interest in the hypothesis.¹⁶²

Mackinder’s influence is also manifested in the exclusionist approach of the Allies to Russia in the post-World War II implementation of the Marshall Plan, and in America’s enthusiasm for the consolidation of the European Union; in the Cold War containment doctrine inspired by George Kennan; and in the further expansion of NATO and the EU into Eastern Europe following the fall of communism. Similarly, one of the principal architects of America’s post-Soviet *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy, Henry Kissinger, acknowledged his debt to Mackinder when he issued this warning in 1994:

Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia’s two principal spheres - Europe or Asia - remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War.¹⁶³

Thus Mackinderism has been integral to both the old and new Great Game for economic leverage and strategic influence in the MENA countries, as well as in Central Asia including Afghanistan. In particular, it is implicit in the contemporary analyses by the Realist school in international relations of countries’ internal meddling in the ongoing horrific civil war in Syria in terms

¹⁶¹ Kennedy, Paul, ‘The pivot of history,’ *The Guardian*, 19 June, 2004, www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jun/19/usa.comment.p2

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, 1994, p812

of perceived threats to what Mackinder had declared more than a century ago to be their imperative spheres of influence. Here the essential Realist focus is on the ways that, driven by self-interest, diplomatically, as well as through the provision of weaponry and financial support, America has consistently helped and encouraged the rebel fighters in opposition to the Russian Federation's similar unwavering support for the Assad regime.

Fundamentally though Dugin's philosophical cogitations challenge the reductionism of the prevalent Realist interpretations of international affairs, in which Mackinderism is assumed simply to provide specific geo-strategic and geo-economic dimensions to the US and the Russian Federation's divergent pursuit of their countries' national interests. As Solovyev puts it, the bedrock of this approach is: 'The concept of controlled or mastered space...as the inevitable and ultimate foundation of world order.'¹⁶⁴ In Dugin's more esoteric view, Eurasia is the heartland of a unique sacred geography. This means that from the dawn of earthly time there has been an unbridgeable divide between the peoples of the land or the Tellurocracy of Eurasia and the sea power civilization or thalassocracy of the West.¹⁶⁵ This has created a perennial, often bloody conflict, 'between the ancient secret orders of Eurasianists and Atlanticists ...emanating from two of the four elements of alchemy- namely fire and water.'¹⁶⁶ The conflict intensified from late antiquity with the schism between the Western and Eastern Holy Roman empires. For Dugin, the Roman Catholicism and Protestantism that developed in the West are apostasies. By contrast, following the fall of Constantinople, the holy 'Rus,' together with Genghis Khan's Tartars, safeguarded the religious and cultural mysteries of the East and Moscow thus became a Third Rome.

As a civilisational typology, Thalassocracy implies the liberal individualism of a nomadic or seafaring folk, and is strongly associated with the seaboard countries of the West. It also embodies the concept of manifest destiny,

¹⁶⁴ Solovyev, Eduard G., 'Geopolitics in Russian Federation - science or vocation?' *Communist and Post Communist Studies* 37 (2004) p88

¹⁶⁵ The following two paragraphs draw on and update my LSE Master of Science dissertation.

¹⁶⁶ Umland, Op.Cit. p177

according to which a nation deems itself to be the ideal human community and apotheosis of world history.¹⁶⁷ Out of this hubris emerges universalism which presupposes that Thalassocratic political, cultural and economic norms and institutions should dominate the entire planet. The British imperialist H. Mackinder, Dugin writes, ‘...was a brilliant representative of the thalassocracy and ensured the transfer of the tradition of thalassocratic strategy, the procedure of geopolitical apperception from Great Britain to the United States.’[sic]¹⁶⁸

In radical contrast, the peoples of the Eurasian Tellurocracy have a deep-seated attachment to the earth, to open spaces, and are conservative, hierarchical and authoritarian in their structures of government. Dugin emphasises repeatedly that as a hegemonic, Atlanticist sea power, the United States is now the prime focus of their ancient enmity. In the twentieth century, he says, ‘the civilization of Land was incarnated in the most complete form in the USSR,’¹⁶⁹ and ‘the historic logic’¹⁷⁰ underpinning Mackinderism found its paradigm in the Cold War. In the post-Soviet world, Dugin says, ‘End of history in geopolitical terms means end of land, end of East.’¹⁷¹ Thus he endorses the Huntington thesis of the coming great clash of civilisations, but in his view there will be only two titanic opponents - the thallosocracy of the West and the tellurocracy of the East.

In common with his anti-Liberalism doctrine, Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism is thus unconstrained by Mackinder’s predilection for empirical evidence or doctrinal coherence. Rather it is a syncretic, all-encompassing world view embedded in traditional values that Dugin claims are at heart spiritual, communitarian, multi-ethnic and transcend any need for Enlightenment models of rational thought. As he puts it:

¹⁶⁷ Dugin, ‘Eurasia Above All Manifest of the Eurasian Movement,’ 1st January, 2001, my.arcto.ru/public/eng/Manifesto.html p10

¹⁶⁸ Dugin, ‘Existential Geopolitics of Carlo Terracciano,’ *Op.Cit.* pp1-2

¹⁶⁹ Dugin, Aleksander, ‘The Geo-Political Paradigm of History,’ in *The Paradigm of the End*, www.gnosticliberationfront/TheParadigmoftheEnd.htm accessed 3/11/2014

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p13

The Eurasianism is a very large set of ideas, attitudes, approaches concepts, which represent a complete model of world outlook, applicable different levels. Eurasianism also contains, along with the political component, the purely philosophical, historic-cultural, historical, sociological and geopolitical ones.¹⁷²

In other words, it is an exceedingly complicated, often cryptic, melting pot of ideas, that are much dependent on rickety, speculative mythological foundations. Moreover, given Dugin's occasionally strained command of English, it is not always possible to decipher what aspects have been lost in translation and what were never there in the first place. Consider, for example, his Eurasianist explanation of the need for multipolarity in contemporary international affairs:

At this level, Eurasianism proceeds from the principle that the unipolar models, where dominate the Western values, claiming also the title of universal models, are totally one-sided and unacceptable and require a radical revision. A multipolar world represents the idea that the world must have...a series of poles in mutual equipoise... the American, European and Far East poles ...Particularly this Eurasian world-view has given birth to the idea of the necessity to integrate the post-Soviet space: in order to be a pole of a multipolar world, Russia alone is not enough.¹⁷³

For his critics, arguably there is much that is immediately mystifying in the above statement. For instance, is there more than one universalist, and presumably thalassocratic unipolar model, as he seems to be claiming? If so, are they actually, or potentially, conflictual or in agreement? What distinguishes them? Which actual countries embody one or another model of

¹⁷² Samoshkin, Vyacheslav, 'Eurasian keys to the future,' Interview with Alexandr Dugin, *Ziaristi Online*, 18 December 2012, p2

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

unipolarity and, at the same time, embrace Dugin's apparently universalist notion of Western values? And why should multipolarity necessarily improve relations between countries, or result in the creation of a mutual equipoise between polarities that is any more or less harmonious than what has happened so far in human history? Finally, what is the relationship between a Eurasian Tellurocracy and the rest of the new multipolar world?

Elsewhere in his work, Dugin has sought to provide answers to at least some of these questions in his apocalyptic philosophising about his country's exceptional credentials for transforming the world. The folk of the Russian Federation have become a unique synthesis of the Germanic, Slavic, Turkic, Ugric and Iranian nations of the East, he says, and therefore constitute a Chosen People, heir to the pure spirituality of the ancient Nordic /Aryan race from the Arctic Circle. Here Dugin appears to embrace the alternative pre-Christian literature of mighty conflagrations and arcane legends in which the enchantment of the world has never been lost.

Still, given more than a century has passed since Mackinder launched his geopolitical theory, it should be emphasized that Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism is but one version in scholarly discussions, especially in the political and intellectual circles of today's Moscow. Significantly, unlike the work of other high-profile Russian geopoliticians, such as Eduard Solovyev, Vladimir Kolosov or D.N. Zamyatin, his geopolitics have not become an integral part of transnational scholarship and collaborations centred on relations between geography, spatiality and patterns of human settlement and nation-building. In fact, his writings have been largely dismissed by many of his academic colleagues, with a research focus on re-examining the links between Russian historical manifestations of Eurasianism and Mackinder's geopolitical thought. As Shakleyina and Boguturov put it, Dugin's work is 'an oversimplified interpretation of the role of natural and geographical factors in international relations, an approach that is degrading to the study.'¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Shakleyina, Tatyana & Boguturov, Aleksei, 'The Russian Realist School of international relations,' *Journal of Communist and Post Communist Studies*, Volume 37, Issue 1, March 2004, p3

Similarly, in a polite but more obliquely condemnatory article about Dugin in the international *Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Solovyev argues that geopolitical analysis in his country is 'yet to turn into a fully-fledged academic discipline.'¹⁷⁵ Rather it remains a vocation. Dugin, in particular, he writes, has offered himself to the Kremlin as an authority on the art of ruling promoting a philosophy of international relations 'which is either overloaded with normative judgments or suffers from some "naïve Machiavellianism."¹⁷⁶ Solovyev suggests too that Dugin's retrogressive Mackinderism fails to recognise that since the end of the Cold War a new world order is emerging:

What we are witnessing is how the mutual relations of power centres, regions, and individual states achieve a new complex and multi-dimensional quality and how previously clear boundaries are disappearing¹⁷⁷

The Syrian Conflict and Dugin's Vocational Geopolitics.

In an interview with controversial Far Rightwing German journalist Manuel Ochseneiter in September, 2012, and re-published by *ALTERNATIVE RIGHT*, an online magazine devoted to radical Traditionalism, Dugin described the ongoing war in Syria as the third and perhaps final 'moment of revelation' for the Russian Federation's geopolitical future. The first of such moments was during the second Chechen war (1999-2009) when his country 'was under pressure by Chechen terrorist attacks and the possible separatism [sic] of the northern Caucasus.'¹⁷⁸ It was a turning point, Dugin claims, when Putin was forced to accept that 'all the West, including the U.S.A. and the European Union, had taken sides with the Chechen separatists and Islamic terrorists fighting against the Russian army.'¹⁷⁹ Putin's second revelation was 'when the

¹⁷⁵ Solovyev, Op.Cit. p85

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p94

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p89

¹⁷⁸ Ochseneiter, Manuel, "What Will Russia Do?," Interview with Alexander Dugin, September 18, 2013, manuelochseneiter.com/blog/2013/9/6/what-will-russia-do accessed 2/11/2014

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Georgian pro-Western Saakashvili regime attacked Zchinwali in South Ossetia in August 2008.¹⁸⁰ Again the response of the West to the Russian Federation's subsequent counter-attack against Georgia made clear that the Putin regime had few international friends, despite what should be understood as its humanitarian effort to protect its traditional ethnic minorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As Dugin puts it, these same proxy wars and conspiracies against his country by the West are now being repeated in Syria.

Thus he believes that the third revelation with which Putin must resolutely contend is that the Syrian war is not merely about the fight against Bashir al Assad's regime by 'extremist, terrorist, hyper-fundamentalist pockets'¹⁸¹ and 'hireling Sunni radicals supported by the West.'¹⁸² Like the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in 1914, it has the potential to be a trigger, he says, 'for a fully-fledged World War III,'¹⁸³ with the Russian Federation, Iran and China pitted against America and its European lackeys. As with his anti-Liberalism views, Dugin's geopolitical language is deliberately portentous. Armageddon is already upon us. At the same time, his analysis veers between biblical evocations of impending doom and hardline, militant Realism. The latter approach also seems more than a little driven by a propagandistic anti-American zeal, carried forward by Dugin's conviction that 'you're either with us or agin us.'

On the one hand, he asserts what he sees as the geopolitical reality that without the West's interference, the Assad regime's victory is inevitable and only then will the country begin to stabilise and reform. The alternative strategy of a US or NATO-led intervention would lead to further chaos and the continuation of the savage civil war. Claiming first-hand knowledge from his consultations with Syrians during a recent visit to the country, he maintains that despite their justified grievances against the Assad government, the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Dugin, Alexander, 'Will the conflict in Syria lead to World War III?' Online interview, Nov 1, 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAvpmlChn0E accessed 2/11/2014

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

majority of the people 'will stand until the end and will fight to the last drop of blood against the pro-American salafi rebel groups.'¹⁸⁴ In other words, as with the Georgia conflict, both morally and geo-strategically the Russian Federation has no other option but to make a stand on behalf of the Syrian people. For if Putin's Russian Federation and its allies, China and Iran, succumb to the threat of US-led military intervention and allow the overthrow of Assad, then 'we will sign our own death warrant:

And then it will be better to hand over power to Alexei Navalny now, because Western puppets and the representatives of the colonial administration will gain power in all these countries sooner or later.¹⁸⁵

On the other hand, Dugin reiterates his long-standing belief that because of the fundamental global division between those countries that support the unipolarity signified by US hegemony, and those that support post Cold War multipolarity, 'a war of the worlds, a war for the future,'¹⁸⁶ has an horrific inevitability. The Atlanticist powers, that is 'the Americans, their satellites, and their mercenaries,'¹⁸⁷ have determined on a geo-strategic road to a truly apocalyptic final battle with the Eurasian land powers, foremost among which is the Russian Federation. His analysis leaves open the question of whether the Syrian conflict will ensure the final tipping point has been reached.

Among Dugin's critics in the West, Dunlop suggests scathingly that such militant geopolitics, 'will presumably strike most Western readers as both mad and crude...'¹⁸⁸ He adds that Dugin's 'ideas and prescriptions are indeed extreme, dangerous and repellent...'¹⁸⁹ Fortunately, with regard to the real world of ideologically-driven foreign policy, with its combination of high level

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Dunlop, John B., Op.Cit. p1

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

diplomacy and strategic posturing about the wars in Syria and Ukraine, Dugin does indeed appear to be naive and ill-informed, not least about his own government's policies and intentions. In particular, the Putin/Lavrov conciliatory initiative in the first weeks of September, 2013, which gained both UN approval and Assad's cooperation for the destruction of his country's arsenal of chemical weapons, has emerged as embodying what the President Emeritus of The International Crisis Group, Gareth Evans, described as 'good international citizenship.'¹⁹⁰ It also directly contributed to Putin's inclusion in the list of 278 nominees for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize 'for his role in averting an air strike in Syria after the chemical gas attack in August 2013.'¹⁹¹ As a matter of fact, it did indeed embody a timely and imaginative compromise between the Western powers, the Russian Federation and China. It not only forestalled any likelihood of US congressional endorsement of even a limited punitive military intervention in Syria as a result of the country's the large-scale deployment of a highly toxic airborne poison. As well, it represented a proactive humane hope that at least during the Syrian war Obama's red line could not again be crossed and small children murdered in this way in the suburbs of Damascus during the silent pre-dawn hours.

Moreover, the initiative also appeared to demonstrate a convergence of opinion between the Russian government, the US's more moderate left-of-centre Democrats, the anti-Obama Republicans and the majority of ordinary Americans. Together it seems they shared an ideological fatigue with regard to the cost in blood and treasure of sustaining an interventionist global war on terror, especially in the face of BBC reports that the pro-Assad men, women and children of Damascus were preparing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder on the hills surrounding the city as human shields against a Western attack.¹⁹² It is also reflected a strong memory of the Bush administration's delusional

¹⁹⁰ Evans, Gareth, Introductory comment at the Forum on Disarming Syria, Common Room, University House, Australian National University, October 2nd, 2013

¹⁹¹ Nicks, Denver, 'Putin Reportedly Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize,' *Time Magazine*, March 5 2014 www.time.com/13194/putin-reportedly-nominated-for-nobel-peace-prize/ p1

¹⁹² Bowen, Jeremy, 'The Human Shields of Assad,' *BBC News*, 4/09/2013 www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23941269

intelligence-gathering on Saddam Hussein's mythical stockpile of weapons of mass destruction before the 2003 Iraq War.

Conclusion:

Writing in early 2013 in an opinion piece for Britain's *Financial Times*, Dugin strongly defended Putin's new conservatism as pragmatic and not transgressive of 'the limits of moderate Western-style nation-building.'¹⁹³ He is, Dugin wrote, a conservative moderniser at home and a realist abroad and will continue to insist on 'state sovereignty, distrust globalisation, limit liberalisation, and keep democracy strictly within a sovereign national framework.'¹⁹⁴ In foreign affairs, he added, "'balance of power" is the key to understanding Mr Putin's conservatism...He will pursue the national interest, regional and global power, protectionism and mercantilism.'¹⁹⁵

It should be noted that, like other aspects of Dugin's self-styled explanation of Putin's 'art of ruling,' his characterisation of Russia's economic policies as 'protectionist' seems oddly ill-informed. In 2012 his country ascended to the anti-protectionist World Trade Organisation. Still, on the surface at least, his article suggests that he finds very little in conservatism, Putin-style, with which to disagree. At the same time, most of what he has written elsewhere about his own personal ideology amplifies the conservatism outlined in Putin's Presidential Address into a doctrine of perennial enmity between Russia and America, ultra nationalism, authoritarian government and the need for an uncompromising, militant foreign policy stance. By contrast, in his public rhetoric Putin has consistently maintained more mainstream conservative views. Thus, while Dugin has become part of the conversation in today's Russia about geopolitics and the irrelevance of Liberalism, it seems safe to conclude his millenarian, Far Right grab-bag of ideas about the imminent Armageddon involving East and West are proving to be marginal to Putin's

¹⁹³ Dugin, Aleksandr, 'The World Needs To Understand Putin,' *Financial Times*, March 12, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/671a00d2-874b-11e2-9dd7-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Hs8YDKQo> P1

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

policies. Perhaps too Dugin is among the people around the corridors of the Kremlin whom Pavlovsky insists airily 'have completely gone off the bend.'¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Masyuk, Op.Cit. p5

CHAPTER FIVE

LIES, DAMN LIES AND DIPLOMACY: JOHN LE CARRE, EDWARD SNOWDEN AND
THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD OF ESPIONAGE.

Oh what a tangled web we weave
 When first we practise to deceive
 But when you've practised quite a lot
 You really get quite good at it.

Nicholas Elliot, Director MI6

I, for one, have always regarded espionage as the vilest
 human pursuit...One loathes spies not so much because of
 their low rung on the evolutionary ladder as because
 betrayal invites you to descend.

Joseph Brodsky, Of Grief and Reason.

I believe there is something out there watching over us -
 unfortunately it's the government.

Woody Allen

This final chapter considers some of the developments in the world of espionage as a core aspect of the adversarial contemporary perspectives on Russia. As suggested in the introduction, broadly the intensely polarised conflicts are between commentaries based on broad-sweeping civilizational comparisons, in which Putin's government is characterised by an increasingly militant reversion to the autocracy and neo-imperialism of his country's past; and those by analysts more sympathetic to Russia, who view the country as much misjudged, a place not yet fully understood by the West, one that might be evolving its own highly contingent path through modernity. Within this second group, there is an underlying distrust of the alleged evidence-based insights of scholars and journalists antipathetic to Russia, a deep-seated suspicion born of what they dismiss as clearly manifestations of American or European ideologically-charged agendas. For their critics, such attitudes are

redolent of the naivety of those fellow travellers of the first decades of Bolshevism.

Nowhere perhaps is unravelling this tangle of ideology, distrust and scepticism more challenging than in the attempts to write truth to the history of espionage during the Cold War and afterwards. Admittedly, to the extent that any account of the past invites interpretation and counter-interpretation, the challenges of elucidating its role during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade and a half of the twenty-first is doubtlessly no different from any other historical scholarship. But as is evident in the thriving industry in Cold War and post-Cold War academic research, documentaries, feature films, novels, biographies, confessional literature and exposes by whistle-blowers, especially of the iniquitous conspiracies allegedly committed by the CIA and Britain's MI5 and MI6, this arena of research is marked by the particularly enduring exploration of the elusive subterranean role of spying in determining the interplay of international events. From double agent Kim Philby's defection to the Soviet Union, to the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Iran Contra Scandal, the destruction of New York's Twin Towers and Edward Snowden's monumental theft of his country's secrets, it is also a role which was famously characterised by the Cold War CIA Director, James Jesus Angleton, as a striving to navigate through 'a wilderness of mirrors.' Angleton could well have added a few more lines from the T.S. Eliot poem, 'Gerontion,' from which he drew the phrase and which reviles the spiritual emptiness that is legacy of war, whether covert or on bloodstained battlefields:

After such knowledge what forgiveness?

Think now History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities.¹

Here espionage inhabits a world where almost by definition facts and fictions are not easily distinguished, where our moral compass has been fractured and

¹ Eliot, T.S. 'Gerontion,' www.bartleby.com/199/13.html

'neither fear nor courage saves us...'² Such de facto disabling of our intellectual and ethical certainties by the secret agencies of government has invited cynicism about the realities of life under democratic governance. It has challenged fundamentally too notions of a deliberative, evidence-based inquiry generating much more than tall tales, biographical ruminations and probable interpretations, pieced together through incomplete or leaked documentation. Often the result is a labyrinthine, confusing narrative, in which open source material that depends on alleged expert commentary, scholarly research, and reported diplomatic and military initiatives might be either undermined or enhanced by inaccessible secret intelligence. In attempting to prise open the world of espionage, with its noble lies by governments to foster nationalist sentiment, plausible deniability, the declaration of states of emergency which bend the laws protecting liberal freedoms, and the manipulation of intelligence gathering for pragmatic political ends, there always remain questions of what do we not yet know, or have not been told? Central to this is the difficulty of evaluating the extent to which wittingly or unwittingly the combination of news aggregation across global media outlets, including online news organisations, social media and blog sites, and selective reporting of propaganda from government and non-government sources distorts any tenable account of what actually could be said to have happened yesterday, last week or last year.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section considers the interrelated perspectives of two highly significant figures in any explication of contemporary espionage. The first is the renegade American security analyst, Edward Snowden, who most commentators agree has accomplished the largest single theft of covert information in the history of intelligence organisations. The second is spy novelist and public intellectual, John le Carre, whose books have been on international bestseller lists consistently throughout the two generations that span the transition from the Cold War to the entrenchment of the new Russia. The second section explores in more detail the implications of contemporary intelligence gathering in the aftermath of the

² Ibid.

Cold War, including its capabilities, limitations and implications for Russia-US relations. Section Three constructs a story of Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own people as emblematic of the difficulties of separating the apparent certainties asserted in public disclosures, for example by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the UN and by the Obama Administration, from the messy claims about contradictory underlying realities. In particular, it provides a unique assemblage of the alleged revelations of the significant role of covert intervention by Western intelligence agencies in the Syrian war, which have been a central stimulus in determining Russian foreign policy towards the conflict. The story primarily draws on the flood of intelligence leaked in 2013 by Snowden; the open correspondence from a disaffected group of retired American analysts formerly employed by the CIA and other US security organisations; and information from Syrians themselves which is freely available on the internet.

Section One: Watching the Watchers.

Since the launch of one of his most successful novels, *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold*, more than 50 years ago, Britain's John le Carré has been an influential figure in framing common perceptions of the unconscionable nature of modern espionage. A significant number of his 23 books published in the last half century take inspiration from the relations between Cold War and post-Cold war Russia and the West, much of it drawing on his insider's experience as an employee of his country's intelligence services. In the 1950s, while he was still in his early twenties, he worked in Austria, 'trolling through the displaced persons camps'³ searching for fake refugees and potential recruits who could be induced to return to their homelands in Eastern Europe to spy for England. As he later discovered, he was one of the many intelligence operatives whose name was passed by the leader of the Cambridge Five espionage circle, Kim Philby, to his Russian KGB controller.⁴ In 1960, after graduating from Oxford University and a string of odd jobs,

³ le Carré, 'The Art of Fiction No. 149,' Interview by George Plimpton, the *PARIS REVIEW*, <http://theparisreview.org/interview/1250/the-art-of-fiction-no-149-john-le-carr> p1

⁴ *Ibid.* p7

including a year teaching at Eton, he joined the foreign intelligence service, MI6. He became part of what he calls, 'the cold-war set-up properly,' serving for a time in the British diplomatic mission in Bonn, until he resigned from the service when he was aged 33, 'having made a negligible contribution.'⁵ As he puts it, '...I don't suppose I spooked around for more than seven or eight years...but that was my little university for the purposes I needed later to write.'⁶

The result of these years has been that, as a novelist and an outspoken political commentator, le Carre rails against the mendacity and occasional stupidity of this secret world of double agents, honey-traps, strategic lying, the peddling by governments of convenient untruths, pervasive covert surveillance, rendition and torture, terminations with extreme prejudice (otherwise known as extra-judicial murders), or the funding of proxy wars, for example, in Afghanistan, the MENA countries including Syria, and in Russia's spheres of influence in its near abroad and in Central Asia. Unlike the glamorous, womanising members of an upper class, well-funded gentleman's club conjured by Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, le Carre's spies are marginal, rootless men. Love affairs and friendships are domains of mistrust, or romantic causes that expose hidden, often fatal vulnerabilities. The conviction that they are fighting the good fight for their country has become a half-corroded memory of lost ideals. In a fatalistic way, their acts of subversion against their own spymasters are no more than an inadequate atonement for all the damage done by their kind. As le Carre's fictional honourable schoolboy, Jerry Westerby, reflects, '...trouble is, sport, the paying is actually done by other poor sods.'⁷ One day, Westerby adds, he would make a point of telling his Circus controller, George Smiley, what he now understood 'about the selfless and devoted way in which we sacrifice

⁵ le Carre, Afterword in Macintyre, Ben *A Spy Among Friends Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal*, Bloomsbury, 2014, p288

⁶ le Carre, 'The Art of Fiction No. 149,' Op.Cit. p288

⁷ le Carre, *The Honourable Schoolboy* ' Pan Books Ltd, 1978, p499

other people...'⁸ Most of all, le Carre says, his books are about 'the peculiar tension between institutional loyalty and loyalty to oneself; the mystery of patriotism...what it's worth and what a corrupting force it can be when misapplied.'⁹ In the words of Alec Leamas in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, espionage's dark, sometimes morally repugnant world is inhabited by:

a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes:
pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play Cowboys
and Indians to brighten their rotten lives.¹⁰

Moreover, during the past 30 years, the sophistication of satellite and other forms of computerised surveillance has meant that le Carre has also added a new generation of tractable technocratic functionaries, as well as high-minded whistle-blowers, to his definitional list.

In critical reviews of his novels, le Carre is sometimes acclaimed as displaying an authoritative prescience in revealing the habits of public dishonesty of those in power, encapsulated by the satirical dictum 'All power corrupts, but some of us have to rule.' As the critic, Mark Lawson, writes, le Carre has charted, 'pitilessly for politicians the public and secret histories of his time, from the second world war to the "war on terror".'¹¹ Consider, for example, the prodigious revelations about the contemporary world of espionage on the USB sticks obtained by *The Washington Post* and Britain's *The Guardian* newspapers in June 2013. They had been meticulously compiled and indexed by Edward Snowden, a former employee of the CIA and of the one of America's biggest private security company, Booz Allen Hamilton, which was under contract to the National Security Agency (NSA).¹² Former senior executives of the \$AUD6 billion company include the Clinton Administration's

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ le Carre, 'The Art of Fiction,' Op.Cit. p91

¹⁰ le Carre, 'The Spy That Came in from the Cold,' Pan Books 1964, p231

¹¹ Lawson, Mark, 'A Delicate Truth by John le Carre - review,' *The Guardian* <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/19/delicate-truth-le-carre-review>. PP3-4

¹² Borger, Julian, 'Booz, Allen, Hamilton: Edward Snowden's US contracting firm,' *The Guardian* 10 June 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/09/booz-allen-hamilton-edward-snowden p1

Director of the CIA, R. James Woolsey, and President Obama's current Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper. In an uncanny collision of fiction and fact, Snowden's leaks emerged less than a month after the publication of le Carre's *A Delicate Truth*. The novel's plot involves the determination of a conscience-stricken senior civil servant to bring to account the perpetrators of a botched joint operation between British intelligence and a US private defence contractor called Ethical Outcomes.

After extensive consultations with US and British intelligence agencies, both *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* newspapers published only a small quantity of Snowden's leaked information because sensitive details on current operations were 'so pervasive.'¹³ Still, the reports did contain a twenty-page summary of the \$AUD57 billion 'black budget' for fiscal year 2013 for the funding of an American 'espionage empire'.¹⁴ Among the notable revelations was that the largest share of the proposed budget went to a resurgent CIA, whose various initiatives included an energetic engagement in renewed efforts to sabotage or steal information from foreign and domestic computer, mobile phone and landline networks. It was also revealed that there has been extensive collaboration between the US and Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) to ensure the further development of these sophisticated satellite and electronic surveillance systems which daily sweep the planet vacuuming up information indiscriminately on both private citizens and public figures. Not surprisingly perhaps, in the wake of Snowden's leaks, Putin has described the internet as a long-term CIA controlled project which was still developing and from which Russia needed to be protected.¹⁵ Although confirming the existence of surveillance of criminals and potential terrorists in his own country, Putin has also denied that his government engages in US-style mass-scale spying on Russian citizens. 'We

¹³ Gellman, Barton and Miller, Greg, "'Black budget summary details U.S. spy network's successes, failures and objectives,' 'Budget' summary," *Washington Post*, August 30, 2013, P2

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.3

¹⁵ MacAskill, Ewan, 'Putin calls internet a "CIA Project" renewing fears of web breakup,' *The Guardian* 25 April, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/vladimir-putin-web-breakup-internet-cia>

don't have as much money as they do in the US,' he said, adding, 'Our special services, thank God, are controlled by society and the law...'¹⁶

The American reality, Snowden said, was that the nature of his work as an employee contracted to the NSA meant that he was in clear violation of the US Constitution. Under the programme, 'Boundless Informant,' he was able to access the mapping of 'incidents of NSA interception, collection, storage and analysis of events around the world.'¹⁷ These indicated that the Agency was collecting more information about its own citizens than about Russians in Russia. Whenever one of his fellow Americans picked up the phone, made a call, a purchase, bought a book, Snowden said, he could sit at his desk and see it crossing his screen.¹⁸

Still, despite the extensive global surveillance, the Black Budget's explanatory notes also outlined the existence of 'critical blind spots'.¹⁹ Not surprisingly perhaps, at the top of a very short list was North Korea. But significantly, Russia was firmly among those countries whose government had been proving to be 'difficult to penetrate.'²⁰ In particular, it had not been possible for the US to assess 'how Russia's government leaders are likely to respond to "potentially destabilizing events in Moscow, such as large protests or terrorist attacks."' ²¹ Beyond high level diplomatic exchanges and electronic and satellite surveillance that yields information, for example about military deployments, economic initiatives or infrastructure development, the question remains of the extent to which uncertainty about the motives behind the Kremlin's policy directions might continue to be added to the NSA's list of known unknowns. If so, it would be interesting to speculate why there appear

¹⁶ Bloom, Dan, 'Does Russia spy on its citizens? Edward Snowden puts surprise question to Putin in televised Q&A as leader denies mass surveillance in clear dig at the West,' *The Daily Mail*, 17 April 2014 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2606846/From-one-spy-Putin-says-Russia-not-carrying-mass-surveillance-citizens-response-question-Edward-Snowden-live-televised-Q-A.html>

¹⁷ Snowden, Edward and Poitras, Laura, 'Nation Exclusive: Edward Snowden and Laura Poitras Take on America's Runaway Surveillance State.' *The Nation*, May 26, 2014, www.thenation.com/issue/may-26-2014

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p4

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p5

²⁰ *Ibid.* p3

²¹ *Ibid.* pp5-6

to be no secret briefings and back channels between the West and Russia of the kind that have been well-documented as having taken place during the later decades of the Cold War.

Snowden's leaked information that America's spy agencies admitted to having comparatively negligible intelligence on the motives and intentions of the Kremlin's powerbrokers provides a mystifying contrast to their public response to his leaks. In May 2014, *The Wall Street Journal* carried a damning report on Snowden by journalist Edward Jay Epstein, headlined 'Was Snowden's Heist a Foreign Espionage Operation?' Four days later the conclusions of Epstein's article were partially challenged by the *Washington Post*,²² which nine months earlier had been one of the first to publish the selections from the NSA's Black Budget papers. Nevertheless, Epstein's allegations were swiftly repeated or summarised across dozens of international online websites and blogs. His report had aimed to make nonsense of what it argued were ill-informed assumptions about Snowden's motives. There had been an ingenuous and unjustified celebration, Epstein suggested, of Snowden's presumed courage and extraordinary personal integrity. The eulogising of his actions was exemplified by le Carre's comments in his interview with the German current affairs magazine, *Der Spiegel*, shortly after it had been made public that the NSA surveillance programme included the hacking of Chancellor Angela Merkel's private conversations on her mobile phone. Le Carre's response was that Snowden deserved a medal for unveiling the monstrosities committed by the NSA and reminding Americans of their need to protect their hard-won liberal freedoms.²³ 'I was aware how the Americans skim everything,' he said, '... And of course it is illegal.'²⁴

Epstein's counter-argument seemed to be exclusively based on circumstantial evidence. Analysis of the chronology and content of the 1.7 million documents downloaded by Snowden from the NSA's Sigints (Signals)

²² Baker, Stewart, 'Is Snowden A Spy?' *Washington Post*, May 11th, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/news/voikh-conspiracy/wp/2014/05/11/is-snowden-a-spy/

²³ le Carre, *Der Spiegel* Interview, 12th December, 2013, P1

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Intelligence Centre in Hawaii, Epstein wrote, has strongly indicated to many in the senior ranks of the US intelligence community that his whole operation had been controlled by the Russians. Specifically, much of the information was said to refer to America's multifaceted strategic defence. According to a former senior CIA official, Robert Baer, who claims continuing close links with the spy agency, Snowden leaks had the hallmarks of a brilliantly planned FSB operation. Admittedly he could not prove such an allegation, Baer said, adding that nevertheless 'it makes an old Cold War warrior like me very suspicious.'²⁵ In addition, there was the fact that Snowden was subsequently granted asylum by the Putin government. This has meant that an enemy of the United States now has access to detailed documentation of 'unprecedented size and complexity'²⁶ of the 'military capabilities, operations, tactics, techniques and procedures',²⁷ including America's foreign and domestic espionage, particularly 'the secret operations against the cyber capabilities of adversaries.'²⁸

For many of Snowden's US critics, the salient point was his obvious anticipation of the strong probability that his revelations would inevitably jeopardize his personal security. Epstein claimed that from the beginning of his self-imposed exile, Snowden had deliberately made available to the general public 'only a minute fraction'²⁹ of the NSA material he had copied. As a calculated means of ensuring that he would find safe haven in Russia, his whistle-blowing narrative is thus 'at best incomplete, at worst fodder for the naïve.'³⁰ In other words, Snowden is simply an ego-driven, dissembling, A-list traitor who has imperilled the security of his homeland under the guidance of Putin's security service.

²⁵ Baer, Robert, 'Nonsense that Snowden was a Trained Spy,' Interview with *BBC Radio 4*, Today Programme, 29 May, 2014, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27616054

²⁶ Epstein, Op.Cit. p1

²⁷ Ibid. p2

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. p1

How plausible are such incriminating accusations? As suggested above, without considerably more information that might or might not be available to the American intelligence community, it is impossible to evaluate the evidence with even a hint of conviction. Are they perhaps the belated response of a destabilised US security establishment, which has become unhinged by new Cold War paranoia? Or are they part of a deliberately misleading strategy of attempted damage control? If so, on the surface at least, they have all the bathos of a ham-fisted case of implausible deniability, that has simply utilised a sympathetic media outlet, both to vilify Snowden and evoke a populist narrative of America under siege from Russian spies, as well as Islamist terrorists.

The difficulty here is that even as the plot of a le Carre novel about a successful conspiracy by the Russians, in which the entire inner core of the NSA's secrets and lies is exposed by the well-intentioned treason of a middle-ranking, 29-year-old computer technician, it is likely to strain credibility. On the other hand, as an actual sequence of events, Snowden's intelligence coup might suggest a case of 'stranger than fiction' that is not without precedent. For almost thirty years beginning in the mid-1930s, Britain's double agent, Kim Philby, shunted copies of files crammed with almost the entire MI6 archive to 'Moscow Central,'³¹ to the astonished chagrin of his family, close friends and many of his colleagues. As Macintyre writes, ironically there were periods when the ease with which this was achieved left even the Cold War Russian intelligence organisations incredulous about the veracity of what Philby had passed onto them.³²

'Well done, lad!'³³ was le Carre's response to what he believed was Snowden's professional agility in defence of the rights enshrined in the American Constitution. He also warned him to pay careful attention to his own safety, because in the corridors of US power he had committed 'a mortal sin - you

³¹ le Carre's fictional term for KGB headquarters in Moscow during the Cold War.

³² Macintyre, Ben, *Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal*, Bloomsbury, 2014, p55

³³ le Carre Interview, *Der Spiegel*, Op.Cit. p1

have made the U.S. government and corporate America look like idiots.³³ Evidently too, le Carre's unequivocal endorsement of Snowden's efforts has been shared by assorted members of the West's political commentariat, not least in America. Right Wing Texan Conservative, Ron Paul, for example, praised him for having 'done a great service to the American people by exposing the truth about what our government is doing in secret.'³⁵ In 2013, Snowden was awarded the Sam Adams Award for Integrity in Intelligence. The award was established in 2002 in honour of CIA whistle-blower Samuel A Adams, who documented the Johnson's Administration's lies about the escalation of the Vietnam War. Among the previous winners are Wikileaks founder Julian Assange; Snowden's fellow NSA employee, Tom Drake; and the retired intelligence analyst with Australia's Office of National Assessments (ONA), Andrew Wilkie,³⁶ who accused the Howard government of exaggerating intelligence to justify support for the US invasion of Iraq.³⁷

In common with Vladimir Putin, Snowden was also nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. In their supporting testimonial, the two members of parliament from Norway's Socialist Left Party, Baard Vegar Solhjell and Snorre Valen, described him as contributing to the creation of a more stable and peaceful world order.³⁸ In 2014, he was awarded the Ridenhour Prize for Truth Telling in a ceremony at Washington's National Press Club. Presenter James Bamford suggested jokingly that Snowden's achievement was that NSA now stood for 'Not Secret Anymore.'³⁹ Previous winners of this award include Daniel Ellsberg, who in 1971 while employed by the Rand Corporation leaked the 7000 page Pentagon Papers which documented the Johnson Administration's 'self-serving, presidential and congressional objectives in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Weiner, Rachel, 'Ron Paul Praises Edward Snowden,' *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2013 www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2013/06/10/ron-paul-praises-edward-snowden/ p1

³⁶ Andrew Wilkie was subsequently elected to the Australian Federal Parliament as the Member for Denison.

³⁷ The Sam Adams Award <http://samadamsaward.ch> accessed 24/9/2014

³⁸ Valen, Snorre, 'Therefore I nominate Snowden for the Nobel Peace Prize,' Online translation, 29 January, 2014, <http://www.sv.no/blog/2014/01/29/solhjell-og-valen-nominerer-edward-snowden-til-nobels-fredpris/>

³⁹ Snowden and Poitras, Op.Cit. p1

prolonging and escalating an unwinnable conflict'⁴⁰ in Vietnam; and Seymour Hersh who had unveiled the My Lai massacre by American troops during the Vietnam War, and the culture of torture and humiliation of prisoners held at Abu Ghraib in Afghanistan.

In his Ridenhour Prize acceptance speech delivered by video link, Snowden strongly endorsed le Carre's apprehensions about the erosion of liberal values as a result of the failure of proper vigilance by his country's citizens. He emphasised the absolute necessity of continuing to press for reform to the weak accountability legislation for surveillance operations by intelligence agencies. Referring to Benjamin Franklin's oft-quoted aphorism, it was a matter, he said, of 'A republic, if we can keep it.'⁴¹

At the same time, Snowden insisted in an interview following his acceptance speech that the ethics of leaking information always presented a complex and difficult dilemma because 'every case is unique. It depends on what you see, how do you see it, what is involved.'⁴² He warned that, however seemingly justified, revealing classified information should be a path of last resort, one that is approached with circumspection and awareness of the likely consequences. As a first step, he advocated lobbying members of Congress, not least for better legal protection of whistle-blowers, so that 'if you reveal classic waste, fraud and abuse, frivolous spending...'⁴³ the FBI will not be able to 'kick in your door, pull you out of your shower naked at gunpoint in front of your family and ruin your life.'⁴⁴ This was the experience, Snowden believed, of whistle-blower Tom Drake, a former senior NSA executive who a few years earlier also had made public his allegations that the agency's surveillance programme was violating the liberties of American citizens. In 2011, having

⁴⁰ Ellsberg, Daniel, 'Why the Pentagon Papers matter now,' *The Guardian*, 14th June 2011, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/jun/13/pentagon-papers-daniel-ellsberg P2

⁴¹ Snowden and Poitras, Op.Cit. p4

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p5

drained his family's finances on legal defence, Drake could be found working in an Apple store in Washington answering questions about iPhones.⁴⁵

It should be emphasised though that, as with le Carre, Snowden's cautious endorsement of whistle-blowing did not imply a general condemnation of espionage. Neither man has questioned the fundamental necessity of spying as a means of safeguarding the security of his country. Rather the issue is who spies on the spies to ensure the protection of the rights of individuals against immoral and illegal practices by the covert institutions of government. In this context, le Carre distinguishes between essential intelligence that:

At its best...is simply the left arm of healthy government curiosity. It brings to strong government what it needs to know. It's a journalistic job...but done in secret...But it's a good job as long as intelligence services collect sensible information and report it to their governments, and as long as that intelligence is properly used, thought about and evaluated.⁴⁶

As well, le Carre adds, it is unquestionably important 'to spy the hell out of'⁴⁷ terrorist organisations. But all the rest of what he calls junk, including intervention, destabilisation and assassination is '...not only anti-constitutional but unproductive and silly'⁴⁸ because of the law of unintended consequences:

Look at Afghanistan. We recruited the Muslim extremist movement to assist us in the fight against Russia, and we let loose a demon.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Nakashima, Ellen, 'Former NSA executive Thomas A. Drake may pay a high price for media leak,' *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2010, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/13/AR2010071305992.htm p1

⁴⁶ le Carre, 'The Art of Fiction,' *Op. Cit.* p6

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Also on le Carre's list of junk espionage is the information gathered by America's unconstrained global satellite and electronic surveillance systems; '...the cost of the evaluation,' he says, 'is disproportionate to the result.'⁵⁰ His controversial underlying suggestion is that the gathering of human intelligence (HUMINT) by skilled professionals in direct communication with informants in various countries may be more reliably, rapidly and less expensively interpreted than a dense swamp of electronic data.

Nevertheless, as Snowden and le Carre both argue, there appear to be no easy answers to the challenge of knowing how far one should go in defending the liberal democratic values of one's country, whether as a whistle-blowing intelligence analyst or a spy. Behind their view is the assumption that this should not be an innocent question, that it is necessary to weigh carefully the costs not only to yourself, but also to those you love and to your fellow citizens, of breaking open a world of secret information. In the words of Graham Greene, whose influence on his own work le Carre has acknowledged, in such circumstances innocence 'is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.'⁵¹ In le Carre's fiction, to be a spy is to have been trained to distrust mere good intentions in favour of outcomes, of being one step ahead of the game. It is a role that at best is morally ambiguous, enmeshed in complex plots and places where it is no longer certain that worldliness and tradecraft will, or should, turn out to be more important than compassion towards others. Implicit in this perspective is Isaiah Berlin's unfounded assertion that to be human is to share an atavistic revulsion for the notion that the sacrifice of even a single individual is an acceptable price to pay for the future happiness of all of us.

For le Carre's spies, the problem is that to place the needs of one person above some hollow, utilitarian pursuit of the national good most often means that they become martyrs in what after all might be an insignificant moral gesture. By the end of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, when Alec Leamas realises he has been misled and manipulated in a repugnant,

⁵⁰ le Carre, *Der Spiegel* interview, Op.Cit. p1

⁵¹ Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American*, William Heinemann Ltd, 1955, p40

politically expedient intelligence operation masterminded by Britain's George Smiley, he chooses to be shot alongside his lover, Liz Gold, by the security guards in the no-man's-land that divided East and West Berlin. His is an act of contrition for his part in the conspiracy of circumstances that led to her murder; and a romantic vindication of the transcendent value of his love for her. At the same time, because he is a dispensable, down-at-heel, aging spy, who has foolishly defied the call of his masters to save himself, Leamas's death is unlikely to elicit much regret, or even to be long remembered, in the shadowlands he has inhabited.

Unlike Snowden's carefully-planned rebuke to his country's illiberal powerbrokers, le Carre conjures a much darker world where espionage and ideology deliberately conspire against a compassionate acknowledgement of humanity's frailties. Often his novels emerge as modern allegories about moral corruption, as a kind of revelatory warning of the existence of contagious sociopathic forms of human evil. Spying may be driven by hatred as much as by high-mindedness, and its methods may mirror the worst excesses of the enemy. In the final pages of *Smiley's People*, the Russian masterspy, Karla, has been defeated by his old adversary, George Smiley, who has pursued him through the landscapes of his crimes, his tortures, his murders, the cunning of his wreckage of Smiley's marriage, and of the British secret service, to which belonged Smiley's unfaltering loyalty. But waiting in the snowy, freezing evening for Karla to cross the bridge from East to West Berlin where the lamplighters of British Intelligence are waiting for him, Smiley finds himself unable to accept that this is the moment of his triumph. Overwhelmingly he understands too clearly that Karla's defection is neither proof of his professional mastery of his enemy, nor a fitting retribution for all the killing. As an old man making his way slowly, Karla has acquired a human face. His betrayal of his homeland is driven by his self-sacrificial love for the vulnerable, wayward daughter he has sought to hide in a Swiss sanitarium. Smiley looked across the river, le Carre writes:

...and an unholy vertigo seized him as the very evil he had fought against seemed to reach out and possess

him...On Karla had descended the curse of Smiley's compassion; on Smiley the curse of Karla's fanaticism. I have destroyed him with the weapons I abhorred and they are his. We have crossed each other's frontiers, we are the no-men of this no-man's- land.⁵²

In the first book of the Smiley trilogy, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, the narcissistic cruelty of the mole, Bill Hayden, is emblematic too of this contagious malevolent fanaticism. 'What the gods and all reasonable humans fought in vain,' le Carre writes, 'was sheer, wanton, bloody indifference to anybody's interests but their own.'⁵³In common with descriptions of Kim Philby, on whom le Carre's characterisation is based, Hayden appears to be charming, irreverent, smart-as-hell, beguilingly worldly in his affected cynicism. For the privileged members of England's Pigs in Clover Society, Hayden quips, the name of the game these days is:

You scratch my conscience, I'll drive your jag...As a good socialist, I'm going where the money is; as a good capitalist, I'm going with the revolution. If you can't beat it, spy on it.⁵⁴

Similarly, le Carre suggests Philby's secret life in the service of the Soviet Union guaranteed him membership of an even more exclusive club, made up of his succession of comradely KGB controllers, and of those few men from his university days who shared his contempt for the hypocrisy of his colleagues and for Britain's decaying grandiosity. As well, his outrageous, bullying, upper class father and his absentee mother had created in him an outsider's sensibility. Philby himself denied he was a traitor. 'To betray you have to first belong,' he said, 'I never belonged. I was a straight penetration agent.'⁵⁵

⁵² le Carre, *Smiley's People*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1979, p324

⁵³ le Carre, 'A Delicate Truth,' Viking 2013, p296

⁵⁴ Bland, Roy, 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy,' Episode Three, BBC Television Series, 1979, YouTube download@38min

⁵⁵ Knightley, Phillip, Interview with Kim Philby, 1988, www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1PVPsb1ciu, @1min11sec,

The implication too is that his youthful romance with Marxism as a student at Cambridge, which led to his recruitment by the KGB, had opened up to him the seductive excitement of some kind of underground act of revenge.⁵⁶ In le Carre's contentious opinion, Philby 'really carried, metaphorically, a pistol in his pocket for the whole of society. If anything embraced him, he wanted to kill it.'⁵⁷ Such men, he implies, constitute the kind of dangerous fanatics about whom Isaiah Berlin also repeatedly warned us: those for whom the most punitive, barbaric means are justified in the pursuit of self-aggrandising, vengeful, messianic ends, whether of a world made perfect by communism's utopian dreams or safe for the allegedly exemplary universal freedoms of the world's democracies. To paraphrase Alexander Herzen, ordinary human beings become merely collateral damage on the altar of such abstractions. Or for such fanatics, le Carre writes, 'killing had never been more than the necessary adjunct of a grand design.'⁵⁸ Though meagre consolation, Philby's prodigious, self-destructive consumption of alcohol, which intensified as MI5 closed in on him, as well as the final quarter century of his marginal, disappointed, degraded existence in Moscow, points away from any kind of rapturous vindication of his communist convictions towards 'a sharp sense of their futility.'⁵⁹

Still, it has been estimated that Philby was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of agents of British and American intelligence across Europe and the Middle East, as well as the failure of every one of its major Cold War operations against the Soviet Union. According to the former CIA operative, Miles Copeland, who had believed himself to be one of Philby's closest friends during their time together in Beirut in the early 1960s, 'We'd have been better off doing nothing.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ le Carre, *The Art of Fiction*, p7

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ le Carre, *Smiley's People*, Op.Cit. p216

⁵⁹ Brodsky, Joseph, *Of Grief and Reason*, Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1995, p161

⁶⁰ Macintyre, Op.Cit. p270

In the aftermath of the information now publicly available online (and perhaps more extensively to the Russian government), through Snowden's monumental leaks, the question is whether the same observation could be made today about the West's staggeringly expensive global surveillance programmes? So far, as Baer points out, they seem to have had limited success in the crucial challenge of predicting acts of terrorism; instead their usefulness has been primarily in reconstructing crimes, such as the Boston Marathon bombing, after they have been committed.⁶¹ Conversely though, Baer argues that Snowden's information may have contributed to America's uncertainty about Putin's intentions in Crimea, as the Russians 'could have changed the codes and frequencies of communications to stop the US listening in.'⁶² Or more memorably, he says the impact of Snowden's revelations may have necessitated the rebuilding of all such aspects of the West's compromised intelligence apparatus.⁶³

Implicitly this might suggest that, together with the acknowledged failure of the US intelligence-gathering networks to have actually infiltrated the inner circles of the Kremlin, their other, more technologically-sophisticated, forms of espionage, such as satellite and electronic surveillance, have suffered a dramatic setback. On the other hand, it should be emphasised perhaps that because his leaks constituted a limited snapshot of the NSA, circa August 2013, it appears very likely that he created only a temporary hiatus in the West's ambition for total global surveillance. Given the current depths of disaffection between Putin's Russia and the US, again this raises the question of what exactly in the Obama Administration's response to the post-Snowden crisis in Ukraine might have been different if this alleged black hole in its intelligence had not opened briefly?

⁶¹ Baer, Robert, Interview BBC Radio Today programme, 29 May, 2014 www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada27616054

⁶² Baer, Robert, 'Was Snowden spying for Russia seven years ago?' *The Daily Mail*, 29 May 2014, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2642402/I-home-I-sleep-night-Whistleblower-Edward-Snowden-says-no-regrets-actions-interview-U-S-TV-network.html p1

⁶³ Baer, BBC Interview Op.Cit.

Section Two: What do we know and how do we know it?

One of the more common, liberal-oriented perspectives on relations between the Kremlin and the US government is that they might best be defined as a case of mutually assured incomprehension. As noted in the previous chapter, it is a view currently strongly shared by Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, who spent much of the later decades of the Cold War on diplomatic missions to Moscow and continues to be well-known and welcomed in Kremlin circles.⁶⁴ Harvard-trained Sovietologist, Angela Stent, warns too that much of the academic scholarship that informs US policy-making was squandered during the decade after the collapse of communism in the fantasies of the economists and democracy experts who flocked to Moscow, knowing very little about Russia. Nor are sufficient funds now being directed into American universities, she says, to cultivate a new generation of Russianists with an insider's understanding of events such as the crisis in Ukraine or the Putin government's foreign policies in the Middle East. In the absence of such scholarship enriching both public opinion and analytical intelligence gathering, there is now talk of 'a new Cold War and how hard Vladimir Putin will play "great power" politics.'⁶⁵

Today's Russia, Stent insists gently, is very different from Soviet times. Its people are open and accessible 'on the street and in the square', and 'it is possible to meet for hours with Putin, as I have done every year over the past decade, and challenge him with questions.'⁶⁶ Stent's observations about her country's failure to comprehend in any depth what has changed in Russia since the fall of communism are echoed in the NSA's claim in its leaked 2013 Black Budget papers that there are critical gaps in its intelligence about the Kremlin. As suggested above, for an outsider to the closed world of spying, it seems to be a remarkably puzzling and possibly disingenuous statement. If

⁶⁴ Kissinger, Henry, 'Henry Kissinger: To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end,' *The Washington Post*, 5/3/2014 www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html

⁶⁵ Stent, Angela, 'Why America Doesn't Understand Putin,' *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-america-doesnt-understand-putin/2014/03/14/81bc1cd6-a9f4-11e3-b61e-8051b8b52d06_story.html p1

⁶⁶*Ibid.* pp4-5

true, why exactly has it proven to be so difficult for Americans to infiltrate the Russian Federation's inner circles of power, in comparison to their apparent successes in almost every other country in the world? Assisted by the daily sweep of satellite and electronic surveillance or, more close at hand, a new generation of remote, wireless USB sticks, have there really been no instances of successful phone or internet hacking of the Kremlin's high-level politicians? Alternatively, perhaps even before the possible contribution of Snowden's leaks, Russia's information technology and counterespionage has been more than a match for the NSA?

A possible explanation could be that the decline in tertiary education in Russian studies signalled by Stent is reflected in the quality of America's or Britain's HUMINT. Typically, the West's Cold War spies were recruited from Oxbridge or Ivy League universities, were members of the upper classes, were very good multi-linguists and, not always judiciously, were believed by their colleagues to be 'one of us.' As le Carre suggests, the harvesting of HUMINT by personal networking and interviews with significant contacts, as well as by using the obsessive archival skills of a George Smiley or the Connie Sachs, requires a rich sense of the history and culture of a country such as Russia. Ironically, his 'perfect spy', Magnus Pym,⁶⁷ is also an accomplished liar, with an exceptional, chameleon-like talent for convincingly inhabiting whatever persona is required of him. Though it can turn out to be a dangerous, grubby occupation, in le Carre's novels the best of British spying is generally undertaken by imaginative, reliable, well-trained chaps, home counties types, such as Jim Prideaux or Smiley himself, with only a modicum of personal vanity and an unexpected amount of integrity and courage. With regard to the complexities of Putin's government, it could be said that these days there is simply an insufficient quota of such people in MI6's or the CIA's Russia sections.

Interestingly, le Carre has been accused of having an old Cold War warrior's nostalgia for HUMINT, which has failed to keep abreast of the developments in Signals intelligence (SIGINT). Le Carre is to intelligence gathering, Burrige

⁶⁷ le Carre, John, *The Perfect Spy*, Op.Cit.

writes, 'as the -century Luddites were to the industrial revolution - a rabid foe of technology.'⁶⁸ Burrige argues that in large measure le Carre's scorns SIGINT because it is US dominated and exemplifies that country's 'technological arrogance.'⁶⁹ Certainly American spies are among the least endearing characters in his novels, but many of his fictional British spooks such as Percy Alleline or Jack Brotherhood are similarly malleable and ethically obtuse. As argued above, le Carre consistently writes as much about the limitations of HUMINT as its successes, the harm it can cause as well as its achievements. His distrust of SIGINT seems more a matter of the ways he believes it dehumanises the processes of espionage to achieve ends that demonstrably have violated liberal freedoms in an unconstrained cyberworld. By comparison, human agency is 'often far more reliable,' he says, 'than the inductive fantasies, which result from the reading of signals and codes and photographs.'⁷⁰

Still, it is possible to argue that le Carre does indeed have a relatively outmoded perspective on the contemporary world of spying. The horror of the destruction of New York's twin towers by a handful of Islamists has been an enormous incentive for the erection of a less divisive paradigm for intelligence gathering and for what the NSA calls overseas 'contingency operations.' Dramatically enhanced by the technological advancements in global surveillance, it is one in which ideally the relationship between secret agents and SIGINT has become more closely intermeshed. Consider, for example, the utilisation of Document and Media Exploitation(DOMEX), which allegedly intensified in 2011 after US special forces 'acquired computers and various storage devices and media from Osama bin Laden's hideout.'⁷¹ DOMEX's mission statement is to ensure all acquired intelligence, whether open source or covert, is analysed and then submitted to a centralised

⁶⁸ Burrige, James, 'SIGINT in the Novels of John le Carre,' *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol.37, No.3 (1994) p130

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Stoerger, Jan, 'Raiding Bin Laden's Treasure Trove - Document and Media Exploitation (DOMEX),' *Open Source Intelligence*, May 9, 2011, <http://osintblog.org/2011/05/09/raiding-bin-ladens-treasure-trove-document.-and-media-exploitation-domex/>

clearing house which disseminates it to all US intelligence agencies.⁷² These include, for example, the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the CIA, the NSA, the Department of Homeland Security and the Defence Cyber Crime Centre (DCCC). Presumably it also shares it with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the UK under the multi-lateral Five Eyes agreement, described by Snowden as ‘a supranational intelligence organisation that doesn’t answer to the laws of its own countries.’⁷³

Apart from interviews and interrogations, DOMEX’s source materials constitute a form of crime scene investigation of almost any information collected in the field. The list includes letters, diaries, notes, books, identity cards, cell phones, answering machines, radios, computer files, USB sticks, digital cameras and video, sound or voice recordings.⁷⁴ As well, any information about the environment and circumstances in which the materials are found, and its links to other sites and networks of information, is added to what seemingly becomes an increasingly dense and challenging spaghetti of analysis. Ultimately the quality of the conclusions depends both on how painstaking is the collection of raw data by intelligence officers and whether a clear distinction can be made between sound judgment and half-substantiated opinion.

The following section explores this issue of whether such a coordinated, multifaceted approach to intelligence gathering might be any more reliable than le Carre’s superannuated form of HUMINT. Its focus is the leaked intelligence, disinformation and open source material surrounding the deployment of chemical weapons in Ghouta on the outskirts of Damascus on August , 2013. Determining who was to blame has been an ongoing, highly-charged arena of contention between the American and Russian governments. It is also revealing of the easy dismissal in non-Russian commentaries, both

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Snowden, Edward, Interview by Hubert Siepel, *Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR)*, February 4, 2014 www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pgNEsSz54I located @ 7.40-7.50 minutes

⁷⁴ US Army, (U//FOUO) U.S. Army Document and Media Exploitation Draft Manual, March 19, 2012, <https://publicintelligence.net/ufouo-u-s-army-document-and-media-exploitation-draft-manual/> p1, accessed 27/09/2014

scholarly and in public discussion, that commitment to legal cosmopolitanism might be a feature of Russian foreign policy with regard to Syria.

Section Three: Lies, Damn Lies and Russian-US Diplomacy, A Syrian Story

In the ragged, treeless desolation of Syria's Qalamoun Mountains, on the edge of the small township of Qara, is the ancient Melkite Greek Catholic monastery of St James the Mutilated. Like the landscape that surrounds it, its high walls are the colour of pale brown sand. It is an austere, weathered stone building that has endured across more than fifteen centuries. For the Belgium Catholic priest, Father Daniel Maess, who has been Director of its seminary since 2010, it is a place of intense, pure spirituality. He was drawn there, he said, by the monastery's deeply ecumenical vision: 'What touches me...is the freedom, the freedom of the children of God.'⁷⁵ Young people of all creeds are welcome, not to be instructed in doctrine or to learn to obey the rules of the monastic Christian community. Instead it is meant to provide a haven where they will be helped in their search for the godliness hidden in the depths of their hearts and to find their personal vocation.⁷⁶ Since the beginning of the Syria's civil war in March 2011, Father Maess said, it has also provided shelter and help to refugee groups, 'regardless of their religious affiliations.'⁷⁷

The monastery is close to Syria's border with Lebanon in an area that has been a strategic crossing point for supplies and for the rebel soldiers of Syria's Free Syrian Army (FSA), as well as non-Syrian Islamist soldiers from Hezbollah, the Al Qaeda affiliate, the Al Nusra Front, or recruited from other countries across the Middle East, Europe, Russia, Central Asia, America and Australia. Towards the end of 2013 the intensification of fighting created yet another wave of hundreds of displaced families escaping over winter's snow-covered mountains to the Lebanese refugee camps. The monastery too was damaged

⁷⁵ Maess, Father Daniel, Brief Statement from the Monastery uploaded to Youtube, Sep 30, 2011 www.youtube/watch?v=gRSat0V5i6E accessed 23/8/2014

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ News.VA Official Vatican Network, ASIA/SYRIA - A Catholic Belgian priest and a monastery are in the sight of the jihadists.' <http://www.news.va/en/news/asiasyria-a-catholic-belgian-priest-and-a-monester>

by gunfire and the bombing by Syrian government army helicopters that were probably targeting the rebels' arms depots 'placed in trenches...used for supplies of water in the Byzantine period.'⁷⁸ For Father Maess, there can be no victors in this war, only a savage, lawless chaos:

The Syrian regime had long since lost all credibility.
Today, the urgency is to allow Syria to survive.⁷⁹

The monastery has also been the home of Mother Agnes Mariam de la Croix, where she has been Mother Superior of its female community and a passionate, outspoken supporter of its ecumenism. Although her background is Lebanese/Palestinian, she has lived in Syria for almost two decades. She describes the people of her adopted country as a multi-faith family, whose aspirations for democratic reforms she supports, while lamenting what she sees as the reality that Syria's thwarted Arab Spring has plunged into an abyss of sectarian bloodshed. Tragically, the secular, liberal voices of the uprising, she says, are now being ignored in what has become a proxy war involving both regional and global powers. The demands of the anti-government protestors who gathered on the streets of Damascus at the beginning of 2012 have served 'as a Trojan horse'⁸⁰ for intervention by foreign governments. This has been especially evident in the hijacking of the uprising by non-Syrian militant members of Al Qaeda and other Islamist fighters funded by the Saudi monarchy.⁸¹ For though the Sunnis constitute around sixty percent of the Syrian population, she says, 'nobody has ever said that all the Sunnis aim...to adopt a Wahhabi-like system.'⁸²

Like Father Maess, Mother Agnes Mariam is a partisan political advocate for peace, whose work has received endorsement from the Vatican and from

⁷⁸ Ibid. p1

⁷⁹ Ibid. p2

⁸⁰ Mariam, Mother Agnes, Youtube video 'Mother Agnes at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Hobart, Australia,' October, 2012 p2

⁸¹ Ibid. p5, <http://socratesandsyria.com/mother-agnes-mariam/>

⁸² Ibid.

Catholic groups in America, Australia and Ireland. In January, 2012, she helped to found Mussalaha (Reconciliation), which describes itself as 'a community-based, non-violent popular initiative stemming from within Syrian society.'⁸³ The initiative's website gives no indication of the numbers and reach of its membership, claiming only that it includes 'all Syria's ethnic and religious communities who are tired of the war.'⁸⁴ In 2013 it became an integral part of an international Syrian Solidarity Movement, which not only shares its website but also regularly features Mother Agnes Mariam's public statements in response to events within Syria. One of the movement's most prominent recruits is the Irish Catholic peace activist, Mairead Maguire, who in January 2014 nominated Mother Mariam for the Nobel Peace Prize, which she herself had been awarded in 1976 for her work with the 'Women for Peace' movement in Northern Ireland. She describes Mother Mariam as 'a modern hero for peace,'⁸⁵ whose voice on behalf of Syria's victims of the imported terror and home-grown conflict has been 'clear and pure.'⁸⁶

she has chosen to risk her own existence for the safety and security of others. She has spoken out against the lack of truth in our media regarding Syria.⁸⁷

Not every Syria watcher endorses Mairead Maguire's glowing view of Mother Mariam's heroic political and religious convictions. Despite such an ostensibly impeccable curriculum vitae, the nun has been accused of being an apologist for the Assad regime by supporters of the rebels' struggle against what they believe is an intransigent, bloody-minded autocracy. Moreover, they claim she is not only proven herself to be a useful propagandist for the existing government's alleged inclusiveness and traditions of tolerance of Syria's diverse ethnic and religious groups. She has also helped to create a distorted

⁸³ The Syrian Solidarity Movement, Click Mussalaha on menu, 4 June 2014, www.syriasolidaritymovement.org/mussalaha/

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Maguire, Mairead, 'No to War in Syria,' 29 June 2012, <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/267-33/12167-no-to-war-in-syria-p1>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p2

picture of the Syrian war as a regional power grab by barbaric Islamic fundamentalists, which has resonated well with the Russian government's pro-Assad foreign policy stance.⁸⁸

Specifically, her critics allege that her prejudiced political affiliations are clearly evident in Mother Mariam's questioning of the documentary evidence provided by the United Nations(UN) Mission investigating the allegations regarding the use of sarin gas in the August 21, 2013 massacre of civilians in the Eastern and Western Ghouta areas on the outskirts of Damascus. The UN team had concluded that 'there was clear and convincing evidence that chemical weapons were used against civilians, including children, on a relatively large scale....'⁸⁹ This evidence included their alleged confirmation: that the exploded rockets and the surrounding area where people were affected were contaminated with sarin; that the blood and urine samples from affected patients tested positive for sarin; that in the more than fifty interviews with survivors, health care workers and first responders many of them reported that there were dead and dying in the streets whose bodies were unmarked by wounds from conventional weapons; and that the local hospitals had been overwhelmed by victims of the attack, with symptoms compatible with sarin poisoning.⁹⁰

It should be noted that the UN investigators also stressed that the terms of the ceasefire negotiated with local rebel groups to ensure their safe passage through Ghouta's streets meant that they had limited access to the five sites it examined. In practical terms, this entailed from two and a half to five hours at each site over a three day period. They reported too that:

The sites have been well travelled by other individuals both before and during the investigation. Fragments and

⁸⁸ Jalabi, Raya, 'Critics question Catholic nun's "alternative story" on Syria civil war,' *The Guardian*, 6 December, 2013, www.the-guardian.com/world/2013/dec/05/catholic-nun-mother-agnes-syria-syria-war accessed 2/11/2014

⁸⁹ United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 September 2013 www.un.org/disarmament/content/slideshow/Secretary-general_Report_of_CW_Investigation.pdf p19 accessed 1/11/2014

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp3-5

other evidence have clearly been handled/moved prior to the arrival of the investigation team.⁹¹

As a result, with regard to the critical issue of contention between Russia and the West about who was to blame for the attacks, the report was careful not to attribute responsibility either to the Assad regime or to the opposition rebels. It did, however, provide a detailed description of some of the rockets used, and was able to include a photograph of Cyrillic script on an M14 artillery rocket, which appeared to confirm its Russian manufacture. In two cases, the report concluded that the reverse azimuth of their trajectories indicated that the rockets had been launched into the suburbs of Ghouta from the north-west of Damascus. Based on this information, a consensus quickly emerged between the UN, the US and European countries sympathetic to the Syrian opposition movement that the pro-Assad Syrian army was responsible for the attack using its military installation in this area.

At the same time, as the Russian government was quick to point out, it appears to be equally possible to counter that this consensus should not be regarded as conclusive. 'We have serious grounds to believe the attack was a provocation by the rebels,' was Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's response to the UN report.⁹² Its central flaw, he added, was that while it confirmed that chemical weapons (CWs) had been used in Ghouta, it had not resolved the central issue of 'whether the weapons were produced in a factory or home-made.'⁹³ In common with Father Maess and Mother Mariam, Lavrov's statements embraced the view that, in violation of the humane international protocols against the use of CWs, the rebels had murdered civilians in their own strongholds of Damascus in a bid to incite a punitive military intervention by the West against the Assad regime. Underlying this view is the analytical bedrock of strategic geopolitics: if you want to know the motive, first look for those who you believe have the most to gain. In other words, Syria's Islamist

⁹¹ Ibid. Appendix 5, p18

⁹² Lichfield, John, 'Syria Crisis: Regime has given Russia "proof" of rebel chemical weapon use,' *The Independent*, Tuesday 17 September, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/syria-crisis-regime-has-given-russia-proof-of-chemical-weapon-use-8822185.html> p3

⁹³ Ibid.

fighters were barbarous fanatics, who had not hesitated to massacre the innocent in pursuit of their messianic aims.

Certainly, this is the assumption shared by Mother Agnes Mariam who in mid-September, 2013 downloaded onto the Syrian Solidarity Movement website her own 44-page report into the Ghouta attacks. She has also distributed it at the UN in Geneva. Despite the brief eruption of publicity she received in the Western media, her conclusions have emerged as highly speculative, which perhaps helps to explain why they have not elicited an official response either from the UN, or from British, Western European or American governments. They have however been cited by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov as supporting evidence for the rebels' culpability.

Her report provides an alternative account of the events of August 21 that radically challenges the results of the UN Mission. Instead she has woven together an acutely distressing horror story of hidden atrocities against young children and adolescents and the stage-managing by the opposition movement of the presentation of their bodies to the UN investigators and to the world media as the victims of a sarin attack by Assad's forces. Her analysis is based on her re-construction of the reported chronology of the attacks, as well as her interpretation of 13 videos that she alleges were 'amongst the first 35 to have been uploaded by video makers of the Local Coordination Committees of the rebels in East Ghouta.'⁹⁴ These 'rebel videos' were wrongly authenticated, she says, by the US Intelligence Community and screened on September 5, 2013 to America's Senate Intelligence Committee 'to incriminate the Syrian State for the illegal use of Chemical arms...'⁹⁵

Mother Mariam says her report was prompted by families contacting her organisation, who had recognised their abducted children 'among those who are presented in the videos as victims'⁹⁶ As she puts it:

⁹⁴ Ibid. p3

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Mariam, Mother Agnes of the Cross, 'The Chemical Attacks on East Ghouta to Justify Military Right to Protect Intervention in Syria,' Institut International pour le Paix la Justice et les Droits de l'Homme, 11.09.2013 p3

Our first concern was the fate of the children we see in the footages [sic]. Those angels are always alone in the hands of adult males that seem to be elements of armed gangs.⁹⁷

As a result of her own investigations, she has made the following chain of allegations. Firstly, she claims that presumably in close collusion with various members of the rebel groups, the local coordinating committees in Ghouta posted the photographs and videos much too quickly after the rocket attacks for them to be believable; an obviously more acceptable explanation is that they were fabricated before the event.⁹⁸ Secondly, their visual material allegedly from different areas of Eastern Ghouta contained images of the same children sometimes arranged in theatrically different ways. This indicates, she says, that they were moved from location to location as part of a pre-conceived plan to mislead investigators and the media about the nature and extent of the attacks; as well the children were laid out in rooms where no parents were tending their bodies or had come to mourn them. Thirdly, there were confusing and sometimes contradictory reports from so-called surviving eyewitnesses, with some claiming they only saw blood-stained bodies that had been injured by conventional weapons, others that they had smelled the lingering stench of sarin which, as it happens, is a fast-acting, quick-to-disperse, odourless killer. Fourthly, as a rebel stronghold, the Ghouta region on the edge of Damascus had been already almost destroyed by prolonged Syrian army bombardment; its empty streets and ruined buildings could not have generated the number of dead and wounded alleged by the UN Mission. Mother Mariam's report concluded with an urgent and powerfully emotive appeal to the international community to investigate the fate of the children and teenagers abducted a couple of weeks earlier by the Al Nusra Front from Alawite villages in Assad's home province of Latakia. Their unidentified bodies, she strongly implied, had been used by the rebels in the

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp26-27

creation of 'a FORGED STORY and a FALSE FLAG concerning the alleged Chemical Attacks.'⁹⁹

The nun's plea for a high-level international inquiry into the alleged disappearance of the Alawite children has not been realised. Though rumours persist about these and other kidnappings across Syria, this reluctance to investigate further could perhaps reflect a pragmatic acknowledgement that little would be gained, given the time that has elapsed since the Ghouta attacks and the reality that Damascus and surrounding regions continue to be war zones. As well, there has emerged the prevailing sense that the issue has become enveloped in the fog of an entrenched propaganda about who should be blamed, with supporters of the opposition rebels pitted against Assad regime loyalists, including allegedly Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

This has meant there is a very long and tangled list of accusations and counter-accusations which can be trolled through on social media sites including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and assorted blogsites; in commentary from academic researchers into CWs; from strategic analysts pronouncing on the likely motives of one or another of the militant groups fighting within Syria; and from both freelancers and former senior members of defence forces who claim expertise in the manufacture and sourcing of rockets and their delivery systems. Often too this debate has been reflected in more sketchy versions in online, print and television reports from Syria, across the wider Arab region and in the American, British, and European media, including those within Russia.

Amid these reports, it should be noted that in an interview with *The Washington Post* following the Ghouta attacks, Foreign Minister Lavrov officially denied that Russia is 'wedded to President Assad.'¹⁰⁰ In common with Father Maess and Mother Mariam, he describes his country's foreign policy as 'concerned with keeping Syria in one piece, territorially integral,

⁹⁹ Ibid. p43

¹⁰⁰ Weymouth, Lally, 'We Are Not Wedded To Anyone In Syria,' An interview with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, September 26 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2013/09/sergei_lavrov_interview_russia_s_foreign_minister_discusses_bashar_al_assad.html

sovereign, independent, and secular, where rights of all groups, ethnic and other, are fully respected.’¹⁰¹As well he says:

...it’s only now that people start recognising that the biggest single threat for international peace and security in Syria is probably Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and other organisations affiliated with al-Qaeda taking hold of the country.¹⁰²

Lavrov’s view repeated earlier statements by Putin in his opinion piece in *The New York Times*, entitled ‘A Plea for Caution from Russia,’ that there was ‘every reason to believe’¹⁰³ the poison gas was not used by the Syrian army, but by anti-Assad forces. ‘Syria is not witnessing a battle for democracy,’ Putin wrote, ‘but an armed conflict between government and opposition in a multi-religious country.’¹⁰⁴ This internal war was fuelled by foreign weapons and attracted hundreds of extremists from all over the Arab world, from Western countries and from Russia. Presciently, given that within a year the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had proclaimed a modern-day bloody-minded caliphate in the region, Putin also warned that this war ‘threatens us all.’¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, the problem remains that two aspects of the debate over culpability for the Ghouta CW’s attack challenge the plausibility of Mother Mariam’s September, 2013 report and therefore its use as evidence by Foreign Minister Lavrov and by Putin. The first is that despite her opening statement

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lavrov, Sergei, Radio Interview with the Washington Post, *The Voice of Russia*, September 25, 2013, http://voiceofrussia.com/2013_09_26/Full-text-of-Sergei-Lavrovs-interview-to-the-Washington-Post-8869/p4

¹⁰³ Putin, Vladimir. ‘A Plea for Caution from Russia,’ *The New York Times*, September 11, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?pagewanted=all&r=0> accessed 24/09/2014

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

that she has conducted 'a modest study on some of the 13 videos nominated by the US Intelligence Community and similar documentation,'¹⁰⁶ not a single one of her observations about this visual material appears to be clearly confirmable, exclusive or original. In part this is because none of the 35 video links listed at the beginning of her report are now accessible. But the second more questionable aspect of her allegations is that a scathing dismissal of most of them, which was posted almost three weeks before her report was published, can be found on the Yahoo-financed social networking blogsite, Tumblr.

Within relatively strict and enforceable guidelines that use blocking software for more repellent attempted uploads, Washington-based Tumblr is one of half a dozen such blogsite facilitators that provide international online forums on a very wide range of issues. It claims to average around 92000 posts per day, with extensive coverage and popularity, for example, in Russia, Central Asia and, not least, among opposing Shia and Sunni groups across the Middle East. In common with YouTube and other social media sites, it appears to rival more mainstream media as an ideologically-driven vehicle for accurate discussion and documentation of events, and at the same time as a tool for undermining such strivings for veracity by disinformation. Unfortunately, for the most part, the likelihood of convincingly distinguishing one from the other frequently appears to veer between impossible and merely uncertain. Tumblr's August 23, 2013 blog, *The Ghouta Chemical Attack Propaganda Frenzy - Debunked*,¹⁰⁷ seems to emerge as closer to the latter categorization. In other words, despite Russia's claims to the contrary, the blog appears relatively persuasive in its insistence that Mother Mariam's report simply repeats the poorly-substantiated propaganda that had already been circulated on social and other media by both the Assad government and its non-Syrian regime sympathisers.

¹⁰⁶ Mother Mariam Report, Op.Cit. p3

¹⁰⁷ Tumblr blogsite 'The Debunkation*of Assadist Media,' 23/08/2013 <http://the-assad-debunkation.tumblr.com/post/59079756229/the-ghouta-chemical-attack-propaganda-frenzy-debunked>

In particular, much of the Tumblr blogsite's 'debunking' of the rebel's responsibility for the Ghouta attacks is based on the identification of what the anonymous authors regard as the absurd protestations of innocence and the mendacity of the government in articles from Syria's Ministry of Information (SANA), from the Syrian Arab News Agency (FARS), and from reports in Moscow's English-language news, *Russia Today*. It also provides a detailed focus on what it calls 'the falsified images and unverified video footage'¹ which it says have been disseminated to a huge and apparently gullible global audience on Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Liveleak and Facebook. For example, the summary confutes the claim in Mother Mariam's report that the videos must have been produced before the Ghouta attacks by pointing out that the date and time signatures of their uploading onto YouTube was in accordance with Californian time, which is ten hours behind Syria; so that, by any plausible calculation, they were posted after the attacks. Similarly, her allegation that the videos were stage-managed is rejected through a step-by-step examination of a series of videos available on the blogsite. The images were selected out of 147 known videos from the hours and days beginning early in the morning of August 21, 2013. For instance, it seems evident from these analyses that, though the faces and clothing of the children were often similar, it was simply not the case that the exact same ones appeared in video posts from different locations.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Mother Mariam allegedly has failed to realise that many of these images had been quickly circulated to local residents and anti-Assad Coordinating Committees within Ghouta, at the same time as having been uploaded to wider internet and media recipients. According to the debunkers of Tumblr blogsite, in contrast to Mother Mariam's highly-biased assumptions this should not necessarily imply these groups were claiming the videos as evidence of a specific attack in their area.¹¹⁰

As suggested above, amid such a proliferation of claims and counterclaims, it is difficult not to conclude that at best Mother Mariam might be an amateur

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p1

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. pp3-7

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

and naïve conduit for government propaganda. At worst, she emerges as a more sinister character, motivated by overweening self-importance and a rigidly pro-Assad, anti-Islamist political and religious creed. Nonetheless, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's endorsement of her claims does not simply affirm a strong polarisation between the West and the Rest that is motivated by mistrust and divergent foreign policies. It is also symptomatic of the reality that unambiguous evidence about Syria's CWs' usage has emerged as one of the early casualties of the war.

Certainly it remains the case that a more open-minded, sceptical approach focused on the UN team's investigation might append an array of vexed questions. Among them are how accurate were the calculations of the rocket trajectories in the Ghouta attack, given they were ultimately dependent on the final angle at which they were deemed to have come to rest, as well as whether the rocket engines were sufficiently powerful to cover the necessary distance from a launch site to Ghouta? What was the likely impact on these measurements of the evidence that the sites had been tampered with 'prior to the arrival of the investigation team.'¹¹¹ What too of the possible confusion generated by video images which indicated not all the munitions that exploded on 21 August contained nerve agents.¹¹² And how convincing was the conclusion that the existence of the pro-Assad Syrian army's installation in north-west Damascus was confirmation of the launch site, especially as the rockets could just as readily have been dispatched from the flatbed of a pick-up truck during the pre-dawn hours of the attack, using Google maps to locate targets?¹¹³ What was the significance to the final assessment of the UN Mission, especially in ensuring accurate analysis of the type of sarin used, of the fact that the investigators were not able to gain access to the various areas of Eastern and Western Ghouta until almost a week and sometimes

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p3

¹¹² Jenzen-Jones, Nic, 'Alleged CW Munition in Syria Fired from Iranian Falaq-2 Type Launchers,' *The Rogue Adventurer*, August 29, 2013, <http://rogueadventurer.com/2013/08/29/alleged-cw-munitions-in-syria-fired-from-iranian-falaq-2-type-launchers/> p5 accessed 1/11/2014

¹¹³ Miller, Elhanan, 'Syrian opposition uses home-made rockets and Google technology, video reveals,' *The Times of Israel*, August 20, 2012, <http://www.timeofisrael.com/syrian-opposition-uses-home-made-rockets-and-google-technology-video-reveals/> p1, accessed 1/11/2014

longer after the attack? And despite the existence of Cyrillic script on one of the rockets launched into Western Ghouta's Moadamiya area,¹¹⁴ with what certainty can it be claimed that it was part of the Assad regime's current arsenal of artillery, sold to the government by either the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation at an unspecified time in the past? What of media reports that, inspired by the Palestinian factions in Gaza and facing an acute shortage of weapons, the Syrian rebels have been manufacturing their own short-range artillery rockets in suburban warehouses and backyard sheds since 2012; on occasions this apparently has involved 'refurbishing weaponry acquired during takeovers of Assad's military bases.'¹¹⁵

This last view is supported, for instance, by the findings of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that:

The main source of weapons for Syrian rebel groups appears to have been the capture of arms from government troops and arsenals.¹¹⁶

Confusingly though, it should be noted that these arsenals may not have been their only source. Whether the reports are always authentic, a perusal of relevant websites and blogs suggests that the supply of weapons to the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army has benefited substantially from the conflicts in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Lebanon. For instance, in its recent summary of information available on such internet sites, the BBC claims that the result of these local wars is an ongoing apocalyptic trade across the Middle East in black market armaments.¹¹⁷

With regard to the August 21, 2013, sarin attacks in Damascus, a second report compiled in September, 2013 by Human Rights Watch (HRW) provides

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Bayoumy, Yara, 'Desperate for weapons, Syrian rebels make their own, fix tanks,' *Reuters*, December 31, 2012 www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/31/us-syria-crisis-weapons-idUSBRE8BU07Q20121231 p1

¹¹⁶ Wezeman, Pieter D, 'Arms Transfers to Syria,' in "Armaments, Disarmament and International Security," SIPRI Yearbook 2013, www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/05 p5, accessed 1/11/2014

¹¹⁷ BBC Summary, 'Who is supplying weapons to the warring sides in Syria,' June 14, 2013 www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22906965

explicit responses to many of the above questions. However they are certainly not unqualified ones. For a start, the NGO acknowledges that, unlike the UN Mission, it was unable to gain direct physical access to Ghouta in the aftermath of the attacks. Rather its investigation is based on interviews by Skype with ten witnesses who provided accounts of their experiences after the rockets hit, as well as with three doctors who had been at the various locations and who described in detail the symptoms of the victims. Its report is careful to indicate that while its conclusions are well-supported by expert opinion, they constitute only 'the most likely'¹¹⁸ explanation of events.

In common with Mother Mariam's report and the Tumblr blogsite, the HRW also relies heavily on analysis of the dozens of photographs and videos that on the morning of 21 August it says 'began appearing on YouTube channels associated with the Syrian opposition...'¹¹⁹ These too show clustered groups of the dead and dying, with heart-wrenching clips of young children in white shrouds laid out in rows in preparation for burial, of a dead baby and two small girls, and of men and young boys convulsed and frothing from the mouth. As well, there is a still image from a YouTube video uploaded a couple of days after the attack of a large number of dead animals, including cattle, sheep, birds, dogs and cats.¹²⁰

At HRW's request, Dr Keith Ward, who is currently employed by the US Department of Homeland Security, contributed professional advice on the use of CWs in Ghouta.¹²¹ According to his personal website, Ward has approximately 30 years' experience in pure and applied research into their detection and clinical effects. Though it does not directly cite his findings, the HRW report appears tacitly to indicate that his cautious conclusion was that the rapidity of the dispersal of the poisonous gas at the sites of the

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, 'Attacks on Ghouta Analysis of Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria,' September, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org> p1

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p4

¹²⁰ *Ibid* p18

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p1

attacks, the details from medical workers and eyewitness interviews, and the images of the victims:

...all strongly suggest...an organophosphate chemical... most likely a toxic, but non-persistent chemical warfare agent such as sarin...¹²²

The report also points out that Syrian regime is 'believed to possess sarin,'¹ a contention that has since been corroborated by the publication of the locations of its numerous chemical weapons facilities as part of the agreement to allow the removal and destruction of the country's considerable stockpiles of sarin and other toxins.

In addition, the HRW visual material contained high resolution images of rocket parts from two of the attack sites. These were among more than a dozen such sites identified by satellite mapping of what the HRW headlines, apparently misleadingly, as the 'Chemical Weapon Impact Zones In Western and Eastern Suburbs of Damascus.'¹²⁴ In other words, there does not appear to be any independent, open source available evidence that all these impact zones were the result of rockets carrying CWs. Though a little unclear, nor does the substance of the HRW report appear actually to claim that CWs were confirmed at all the sites charted in their map.

The map's cross-referenced data sources are exclusively from American organisations, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), and the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA), which among other tasks services the array of other US intelligence agencies and the Department of Defence. Using these photos and others from the UN Mission, two freelance arms specialists assisting HRW, Australian Nic Jenzen-Jones, and Britisher Eliot Higgins, concluded that some of the rocket detritus was from 330mm rockets with a payload design

¹²² Ibid. p18

¹²³ Ibid. p20

¹²⁴ Ibid. cover page

that may possibly have been capable of holding CWs.¹²⁵ According to Jenzen-Jones, the rockets were compatible with an Iranian Falaq-2 333mm rocket launching system.¹²⁶ In contradiction of the Russian claims, he also conjectured that the quality of their construction and uniformity of appearance indicated these munition types was unlikely to have been homemade.¹²⁷

In its summary statement, the HRW report draws on a tentative supposition by Jenzen-Jones that, based on videos such as a 9 minute post on the Facebook page of Syrian rebel group 'Dayra Revolution,' these munitions were in the possession of the Assad government, who had not hesitated to use them.¹²⁸ The video purported to show regime forces at Mezzeh Military Airport on the Western edge of Damascus, launching a 330mm rocket with a CW payload towards Eastern Ghouta from a truck-mounted 333mm launcher.¹ Jenzen-Jones's analysis supported this claim, with the crucial exception that he was not able to confirm the rocket was carrying a nerve agent in its warhead.¹³⁰ He did however note that the second type of rocket identified by the UN Mission in Eastern Ghouta was the Soviet-manufactured 140mm rocket. With only a little more certainty, he claimed, however, that though a variant had been designed by the Soviet Union to carry 2.2kg of sarin, 'it is not believed to have been in the Syrian arsenal.'¹³¹

On this last issue, the HRW report challenges Jenzen-Jones's speculative conclusion. Eyewitness statements describing the victims' symptoms after of the 140mm rockets impacted, it says, as well as the reported absence of rocket remnants or injuries from explosive or incendiary payloads, point to

¹²⁵ Ibid. p2

¹²⁶ Jenzen-Jones, Nic, Op.Cit. p3

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch Report, Op.Cit. pp1-3

¹²⁹ Ibid. p13

¹³⁰ Jenzen-Jones, p5

¹³¹ Ibid.

the strong likelihood they were carrying CWs.¹³² But, unfortunately, while the report documents the sales of 140mm rockets to the Syrian government by the Soviet Union in the late 1960s, it appears to have no independently verifiable technical details on the crucial issue of whether the CW-carrying variant was either among them or actually deployed in Ghouta. In other words, to affirm that this second type of rocket lodged into Ghouta was carrying CWs simply on the basis of skype interviews with eyewitnesses appears to be a case of assuming what needs to be corroborated by identification of the toxin or type of rocket by independent investigators on site .

As a partial response to this issue, the HWR report cites unsourced information that not only the Soviet 140mm, but also the Iranian Falaq-2 330mm rockets, both of which were photographed in Ghouta by the UN Mission, have never been in the possession of the armed Syrian opposition. Moreover, it says, the rebels do not appear ever to have had 'the vehicle-mounted launchers needed to fire these rockets.'¹³³ In sum, in spite of HRW's repeated assertion that much of its report is preliminary, indirect or circumstantial, especially regarding the identification of sarin, it ends with the following strongly-worded declaration of Syrian government culpability:

The August 21 attacks were a sophisticated military attack, requiring large amounts of nerve agent (each 330mm warhead is estimated to contain between 50 and 60 liters of agent), specialised procedures to load the warheads with the nerve agent, and specialised launchers to launch the rockets.¹³⁴

There are two problems here that add to a sense of justified scepticism about this final summary. The first is that it ignores the issue of whether it can be confirmed that the Soviet 140mm rockets were carrying sarin. The second is that if, as seems probable, the Falaq-2 rockets were carrying CWs, further

¹³² Human Rights Watch Report, Op.Cit. pp5-6

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid

investigation may not be able to produce a more precise and therefore uncontentious estimate of the quantity and unique chemical composition of the nerve agent actually deployed. Among the difficulties is the mapped rocket impact sites are located in disparate areas across the approximately 370 square kilometres of Ghouta.¹³⁵ Without sufficient information about the scale, location and agency of its manufacture, neither the UN Mission, nor Human Rights Watch, nor Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov, nor America's Secretary of State Kerry would seem able to make absolutely definitive claims about how, where and by whom it was deployed. Instead, if only because of the huge quantities of sarin that from the 1980s is known to have been stockpiled in government facilities across Syria, what remains is balance of probability about who was to blame that appears to be weighted towards the Assad regime.

Or maybe not? What then of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's apparent certainty that not only the weapons used in the attack, but also the sarin itself were clearly home-made?¹³⁶ Moreover, the sarin had been identified, he said, as the same type that Russian investigators had confirmed had been used by rebels near the north-western Syrian city of Aleppo on March 19, 2013, 'only of a higher concentration.'¹³⁷ Lavrov also said this earlier investigation of a reputed sarin attack was his country's humanitarian response to a direct request from the Syrian government to the international community, which he alleges the UN had chosen not to pursue. It was carried out in full compliance, he said, with the guidelines of the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), of which Russia is a member. This meant that:

...Russian experts took samples of air, soil, clothing, tissues on site. The samples were under the constant

¹³⁵ Abana River website https://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wikilook/Abana_River.htm/

¹³⁶ Lavrov, Sergei, *The Voice of Russia*, Op.Cit.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

control of the experts, and were delivered to our OPCW certified laboratory without a break in this control.¹³⁸

Their analysis indicated that the chemicals used, and the missiles into which they were loaded, Lavrov said, ‘...bore no similarity’ to those that could have been used by the Syrian army.¹³⁹ That is, in a blunt denial of the conclusions of the HRW report and the US State department, the Foreign Minister insisted the weaponry for the Ghouta attack, including their sarin warheads, was already in the hands of the opposition rebels at least five months earlier.

Though not openly acknowledged, Lavrov’s confidence regarding the Russian teams’ alleged identification of similar home-brewed batches of sarin following the attacks near Aleppo and in Ghouta may have reflected his country’s long-standing research into the development and storage of precursor chemicals and nerve agents. A recently-published compilation of documents and interviews with Russian scientists and policy-makers, as well as with their American colleagues and US intelligence agency specialists, indicates this research continued in a reduced capacity at least during the first decade after the end of the Cold War, and possibly longer. In what le Carre has described as ‘a stunning and terrifying feat of research and narrative,’¹⁴⁰ Hoffman argues that by the beginning of the 1990s, the Soviet Union had amassed ‘at least forty thousand tons of chemical agents, and the United States thirty one thousand tons,’¹⁴¹ a substantial component of which was sarin.

The extended treaty negotiations between the two countries that resulted in the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention produced an agreed framework for the total destruction of these weapons. Nonetheless, one of the legacies of the Cold War’s toxic nerve agent arms race is that neither in Russia nor in

¹³⁸ Lavrov, Sergei, Interview given by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 18th November, 2013, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, official site, http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/af5ed26163e44257c2a002e87d8!OpenDocument_p1, accessed 23.6.2014

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Hoffman, David E., *Dead Hand*, Doubleday, 2009 le Carre comment on cover.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p309

America has this aspiration been fully realised. The independent monitoring organisation, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), for example, has estimated that in 2006 the Russian Federation had 11,700 metric tons of sarin stored mostly in semi-derelict facilities in various regions of the country.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, predictably perhaps, the American government firmly rejected Lavrov's assertion that the investigation by an experienced, though anonymous, team of chemical weapons experts had verified that the August attack in Damascus was clearly the work of the rebels. In an address to the US Senate, Secretary of State, John Kerry, countered that he was 'certain'¹⁴³ the scale of the strike was beyond the capacity of the opposition fighters. Significantly though, a recent article in the *Scientific American* journal has weighed into the debate with the suggestion that as a matter of purely scientific probabilities neither the Russians nor the Americans have a credible claim to knowing who was to blame. According to the report, it is extremely difficult to empirically verify the origin of a batch of sarin, or to determine whether or not it is home-made, by studying traces in hair or blood, or from soil samples taken from an attack site.¹⁴⁴ Specifically, while home-brewed sarin contains chemical by-products which distinguish it from the purified military grade, without the original recipe for a particular variety, it is impossible to identify which of these impurities to look for. In other words, the Catch 22 is that it is necessary to know the unique chemical components of the batch used before there is much likelihood of establishing that it was used at a particular site. Conversely, investigators would need to identify its chemical by-products at the site, before they can determine its batch. Moreover, even if the ingredients are known, 'detectives would need to know the normal levels of these compounds in the soil to assess whether the amounts are elevated.'¹⁴⁵ It should be emphasised though that the UN Mission made no suppositions about the origin and purity of the sarin analysed in

¹⁴² Nuclear Threat Initiative, 'Chemicals,' Report on Russia, www.nti.org/country-profiles/russia/chemical/ accessed 23.6.2014

¹⁴³ Maron, Dina Fine, 'Who Made the Sarin Used in Syria?' *Scientific American*, September 3, 2013 p1

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

OPCW laboratories, least of all whether it was a military grade batch from Assad's stockpiles.

Moreover, in spite of the Russian assertions about the evidence allegedly provided by their own high standards of scientific investigation, a comprehensive report published in 2011 also echoes Secretary of State Kerry's firm rejection of what he sees as dubious claims that the Syrian opposition fighters had the chemical weapons capabilities for the large-scale sarin attack described by the UN Mission. The report was compiled by a group of American analysts and counter-terrorism consultants attached to the Center for a New American Security, which among other initiatives provides advice to the US President on intelligence and defence policy issues. Based on interviews with half a dozen imprisoned senior members of the Japanese apocalyptic cult, Aum Shinrikyo, as well as the police investigations into the organisation, the report revisited what it termed 'a rare example'¹⁴⁶ of known sarin manufacture and dispersion by terrorists. Its aim was to distill lessons 'about the technical, organisational and psychological dynamics behind this effort.'¹⁴⁷

In 1995, the cult was responsible for a sarin attack in the Tokyo subway that killed 13 people and led to an estimated 6000 others seeking medical treatment.¹⁴⁸ Currently the group's much-reduced membership can be found in small groups in Japan and across the Russian Federation, where it has been banned since 1995 and continues to be closely monitored by the authorities.¹⁴⁹ In 2001 Aum Shinryko followers were arrested by officials in Moscow 'for planning to bomb the Imperial Palace in Japan as part of an

¹⁴⁶ Danzig, Richard, Sageman, Marc, Leighton, Terrance, Hough, Lloyd, Yuki, Hedemi, Kotani, Rui & Hosford, Zachary M, 'Aum Shinrikyo: Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons,' Center for a New American Security, July 2011 p5

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 'The Aum Shinrikyo in Russia,' October 31, 1995, Staff Statement, www.fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/part06.htm p1, accessed 1/11/2014

elaborate attempt to free their former leader, Shoko Asahara,¹⁵⁰ who has been sentenced to hang by the Japanese courts.

According to the Center for a New American Security report, guidelines for making sarin can be readily downloaded from both Russian and non-Russian websites whose information about production procedures has been derived from 'German organophosphate synthetic chemistry dating back to World War II.'¹⁵¹The report argues that the experience of Aum Shinrikyo demonstrates that for such dangerous, socially-marginal groups, its actual manufacture may be a complex, lengthy and unpredictable process. At the very least it requires the kind of imaginative skills and specialised training only haphazardly displayed by the cult's adventurous, tertiary-educated young Japanese recruits. Even with the appropriate precursor chemicals, the report argues it is not possible for sarin production to be a backyard operation, especially with regard to the quantities that both the UN Mission and HRW weaponry consultants deemed were likely to have been dispersed during the large-scale attack in south-eastern Damascus. The construction of the Aum Shinrikyo facilities near the small village of Kamikuishiki at the foot of Japan's iconic Mount Fuji included a substantial, multistorey building and a well-equipped and sophisticated laboratory, which together cost an estimated \$AUD30 million.¹⁵²And despite the cult's horrendous ambition to produce approximately 3000 kilos of sarin at the site, it fortunately never came even close to this goal.¹⁵³ In fact, the report argues, with more than 100 Aum Shinrikyo members working round the clock for approximately 18 months, it was only ever capable of producing around 45 litres of the chemical.¹⁵⁴In addition, even this relatively small amount proved difficult to transport safely over short distances and to disperse effectively to ensure a large number of casualties.

¹⁵⁰ Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, 'Aum Shinrikyo,' June 19 2012, www.cfr.org/japan/aum-shinrikyo/p9238.p1

¹⁵¹ Danzig, Richard et.al. Op.Cit. p27

¹⁵² Ibid. p28

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid pp27-31

In his rejection of the consensus amongst Western powers that the Assad government had deliberately exploded warheads loaded with sarin in Ghouta, Foreign Minister Lavrov said there was no necessity for his government for to reveal covert 'spy reports'¹⁵⁵ because the evidence for Jihadist culpability was so pervasive across the internet. Still, as indicated above, on the surface at least Russia's use of these sources appears highly selective and certainly contentious. Moreover, in its official, high confidence assessment of the attacks, the Obama White House also cites 'a significant body of open source reporting',¹⁵⁶ that points to the opposite conclusion. Unlike Russia though, it refers not only to its collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence, but also to classified assessments, which have been 'shared with US Congress and key international players',¹⁵⁷ but which are unavailable to the general public. It claims that the analysis of this secret intelligence indicated, for instance, the likely presence of Syrian government personnel preparing chemical munitions during the three days prior to the attack, with no indications of such activity by the opposition. High confidence assessment, the White House statement says, 'is the strongest position that the US Intelligence Community can take short of confirmation.'¹⁵⁸ From a contrary perspective, presumably this means there is an indeterminate margin of doubt

Again, according to the Russian government, it is indubitably an assessment that is clearly unwarranted. Here Foreign Minister Lavrov cites the damning claims of a group of retired American intelligence analysts from the the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS). The small group is composed of former employees of the CIA, the NSA, the FBI and US Defence Intelligence. Its self-designated role is as a watchdog for America's foreign policy and intelligence SNAFUs. In 2002 it established the highly-publicised annual Sam Adams' Award to honour each year's most significant whistle-

¹⁵⁵ Lavrov, *Voice of Russia*, Op.Cit. p3

¹⁵⁶ White House Press Release, 'Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013,' August 30, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21> p1

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p1

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

blowers. As former Australian Prime Minister John Howard has acknowledged,¹⁵⁹ the VIPS group's earlier insistence that there was no convincing intelligence on the existence of WMD's in Iraq to justify the 2003 US invasion of the country has been vindicated.

More recently, in an open memorandum to President Obama written a couple of weeks after the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, VIPS declared that in reality the most reliable intelligence indicates 'Bashar al-Assad was NOT responsible for the chemical incident...on August 21.'¹⁶⁰ The memorandum states that, according to anonymous CIA officers currently working on the Syria issue, the White House press release cited above is a case of *deja fraud* reminiscent of America's pre-Iraq War strategic obtuseness and gullibility about Saddam Hussein's WMDs. Echoing the qualified conclusions that thread through the HRW report, the UN investigation, and the analyses of experts in chemical agents and weaponry, it says that as a matter of fact:

We are aware of no reliable physical evidence to support the claim that this was the result of a Syrian military unit with expertise in chemical weapons.¹⁶¹

It also refers to 'some reports'¹⁶² that the nerve toxins were released into Damascus from open canisters rather than rockets. The alternative account offered by the memorandum of what actually occurred has the makings of a Hollywood 'faction' blockbuster, or perhaps of a lesser novel by le Carre that focuses almost entirely on the dirty deeds of an incurably nefarious and rather stupid CIA. The attack was part of a wider black operation, it says, devised through the collusion of Turkish, Qatari and US intelligence officials. Its goal was to accelerate the removal of the Assad regime by the joint efforts of a US

¹⁵⁹ Howard, John, 'Australian ex-PM Howard embarrassed by 2003 Iraq War dossier,' Interview with Channel Seven, 22/09/2014, www.channelnewsasia.com/news/australian-ex-pm-howard/1374656.html

¹⁶⁰ ANTI WAR.BLOG, 'Veteran Intelligence Professional Warn Obama on Syrian Intel,' September 06, 2013, <http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/09/06/veteran-intelligence-professionals-warn-obama-on-syrian-intel/> p2, accessed 1/11/2014

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

strategic bombing and missile attack and a well-supplied ground invasion by the Syrian opposition.¹⁶³

Seven months later the VIPS group's warning to the Obama administration of what some sections of the US security establishment allegedly had been planning in Syria was explored and amplified by the former Ridenhour prize winner, US journalist Seymour Hersh in his lengthy article, *The Red Line and the Rat Line*. Like the VIPS, he too bases most of his revelations on a series of conversations with unnamed former American intelligence operatives. The result is a catalogue of assertions woven together into a story that in almost all its aspects supports Foreign Minister Lavrov's claims. Specifically, he writes that from April 2013, it was well known to the British and American intelligence communities that Syria's Islamist al-Nusra Front maintained a very advanced sarin production programme. In addition, he says that according to classified intelligence from numerous agencies, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were the likely facilitators of the purchase, possibly on the 'Baghdad chemical market,'¹⁶⁴ of the precursor chemicals for the large scale manufacture of sarin by these Jihadists.

Hersh's most significant revelations, though, are centred on the direct role of Russian espionage in allegedly identifying through scientific analysis the batch of sarin used in Ghouta and therefore exactly where it came from. As claimed by Foreign Minister Lavrov, the investigation by his country's experienced experts had confirmed that the Syrian opposition already had deployed sarin five months earlier in March, 2013 near the north-western city of Aleppo. Though not revealed by Lavrov whose public statements refer only to open source evidence, Russian military intelligence operatives had also recovered samples of the chemical agent used in Ghouta within a few days of the attack. They were analysed by the Russians, Hersh writes, then they were passed on to British military intelligence by a Russian source, described as 'someone

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Hersh, Seymour, 'The Red Line and the Rat Line: Erdogan and the Syrian Rebels,' April 17, 2014. *London Review of Books*, Vol 36. No8, p21

with access, knowledge and a record of being trustworthy.¹⁶⁵ Further analysis at Britain's Porton Down Ministry of Defence laboratory confirmed the presence of a specific batch of sarin. Using as a baseline data previously exchanged under the Chemical Weapons Convention about the composition of each batch of Soviet manufactured chemical weapons, the laboratory also determined that the sarin did not match any of the stockpiles in the Syrian government arsenal.

As further background to his story, Hersh writes that in 2012, assisted by MI6, the CIA had established 'a rat line' to transfer weapons and ammunition from Libyan arsenals via southern Turkey to the Syrian opposition rebels. The agency had rapidly lost control of what was being shipped along the line into the hands of the more extreme Jihadists inside Syria, especially the contributions made by the Turkish government. Of particular concern were the portable surface-to-air missile launchers that could be used to shoot down commercial aircraft. Following the CIA's decision towards the end of 2012 to terminate the provision of money and manpower to sustain the rat line, the Turkish government shifted its resources to assisting the al-Nusra Front in achieving its own home-made chemical weapons. In fact, intercepted conversations and other data collected by the Americans after August 21, Hersh says, indicated the Ghouta attack was planned and facilitated by the Erdogan government to ensure American military intervention and the consolidation of a rebel regime sympathetic to Turkey. He concludes that, motivated by the desire not to reveal publicly the extent of its foreign policy idiocies, the Obama administration has chosen to ignore this post-attack intelligence.

As suggested above, Hersh has written an extraordinary tale, densely packed with quotations and transcriptions of conversations with unnamed intelligence agents about their knowledge of secret high-level conversations among other intelligence operatives and representatives of foreign governments. Very little of what he writes can be independently confirmed by outsiders. Indeed, as he points out at key intervals in the text, his assertions have been firmly

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

denied by other anonymous sources, often from the intelligence agencies he cites. The underlying suggestion is that such denials are inverse proof that he is unveiling the hidden facts. A multi-award winning investigative journalist whose previous reports have been based on deliberately leaked, covert intelligence, Hersh appears to have a long-standing and well-earned reputation for what his critics did not always immediately acknowledge was accurate reporting. Still, the problem remains the extent to which, buoyed by his previous successes, on this issue he might have been narrowly selective and unbalanced in his selection of secret sources. Above all, his article invites the question of whether, pending further more confirmable information, to opt for an open verdict born of a necessary scepticism.

Conclusion:

What then to make of the relationship between actual relatively recent events in which Russia has been embroiled and the role of covert intelligence with its leaked revelations and inherent dishonesties? The lesson perhaps of the inconclusive maze of interpretation about Syria's chemical weapons is the ease with which in the public arena the summaries and estimates by alleged experts transmute into political dogma. It points to the importance of not pretending to know for certain, or even with high confidence, what we plainly do not. If, as le Carre claims, journalism and spying are much the same game, then one of their shared characteristics might be the writing of history's first draft, where the result may turn out to be no more than a very sketchy opening up of an arena of potential understanding which demands further investigation. As with the substantial international scholarship currently devoted to the complexities of the Cold War, this is often not undertaken until long after the controversial events have occurred. Often too, what such investigation reveals about this particular era and its legacies suggests le Carre's dark, morally degraded world of espionage is more fact than fiction. Equally, this history suggests that perhaps we might yet discover Hersh's account of the West's complicity in an ignominious geopolitical conspiracy is not so implausible after all.

For the time being, in the chaotic savagery of wars such as in Syria, uncertainty might be the best that can be hoped for. In other words, when there is much that is deliberately concealed or distorted, and it is impossible to distinguish between sound intelligence and deliberate lies, more persuasive versions of events such as the murder of Mother Mariam's little angels in Ghouta are elusive. The alternative of a leap to judgment beyond the limitations of probabilities is unsteady ground on which to forge a humane common foreign policy, not least between Russia and the West.

A satirical anecdote by the former British spy, Nicholas Elliott, might serve as a portrayal of 'the wilderness of mirrors'¹⁶⁶ that aptly describes the world of modern espionage. Elliott knew Philby for half a lifetime, had worked with him at MI6, and had defended him steadfastly when he came under suspicion of being a Soviet agent. After Britain's MI5 had finally gathered indisputable evidence of Philby's guilt, Elliott had also conducted the final interrogation of his so-called old friend in Beirut in 1963, and may, or may not, have facilitated Philby's flight to the Soviet Union shortly afterwards.

Following Philby's death in Moscow in 1988, resplendent funeral with a KGB honour guard and burial in the elite military section of the city's Kuntsevo Cemetery, Elliott had recommended to the British government that it award him the prestigious order of St Michael and St George. Elliott offered to embellish the gesture with an accompanying note that he 'can now reveal that Philby was one of the bravest men I have ever known.' The KGB would then conclude that in fact Philby had been a triple agent, with the result that Britain could thereby enjoy 'the most gratifying posthumous revenge.'¹ Unfortunately Elliott's proposal was rejected.

¹⁶⁶ Macintyre, *Op.Cit.* p280

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid* p286

CONCLUSION

Whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other, to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism.

Chinua Achebe, *Anthills in the Savannah*.

What then of the starting point of these chapters in the late century's conceptual demarcation line between new Cold War warriors and re-invented fellow travellers? Far from fading from public discussion about Russia, the division continues to thread through much of the ongoing commentary about the country. In fact, the content of the anti-Russia rhetoric has changed very little in almost seventy years. In the judgment of today's new Cold war warriors, the Russian Federation has an inescapable legacy of cultural and political failings that ensure it remains untrustworthy, secretive, xenophobic, and expansionist. Consistently too, for the more intransigent new Cold War warriors, such as US Republican Senator John McCain or Bush Administration Vice President Dick Cheney, this has meant a portrayal of Putin as a wily, neo-imperialist autocrat, whose domestic human rights violations and foreign policy aspirations should be met by a resolute and, if necessary, militant response from the West. In this context, Putin's nomination for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his role in facilitating Syria's Assad regime's agreement to divest the country of its stockpiles of chemical weapons proved to be a merely a brief respite in his ongoing, widespread vilification, primarily outside Russia. Moreover, the eruption of the conflict in Ukraine appeared to ensure that this widespread international condemnation further intensified. Certainly, the Putin government's acceptance of Crimea into the fold of the post-Soviet Federation, and the subsequent civil war between eastern Ukraine's pro-Russian separatists and western Ukrainian forces, generated a great deal of overwrought anti-Putin/anti-Russian rhetoric.

Especially in America, high profile, long-term Russia Watchers began to warn about, and to lament, the unexpected resurgence of an 'immensely-

damaging'¹ new Cold War. Among the voices of alarm was Columbia University's Robert Legvold, whose arena of scholarship spans almost 40 years beginning in the decline of communist rule in the Soviet Union. The hope has now collapsed, he wrote, that with the end of the USSR 'Moscow and Washington might find common ground...The crisis in Ukraine has pushed the two sides over a cliff...Russia and the West are now adversaries.'² Unless defused, the grim reality of this revitalised enmity, he argued, is the further destabilisation of Europe's 'unsettled center' and of Central Asia. As well, it will undermine existing cooperation on significant issues, such as strategic arms control, civilian emergencies, counterterrorism and containing the ecological impact of developing the Arctic region's huge reserves of hydrocarbons.³

Though he believed that Washington and Moscow shared culpability for the headlong stumble into a new Cold war over the ethnic and sectarian violence in Ukraine, Legvold's plea was for the shared commitment of both countries to the overarching goal of making it 'as quick and as shallow as possible.'⁴ As suggested above, his concerns were endorsed by some of America's most eminent Russian Studies scholars. Princeton's Stephen Cohen railed against the West's escalation of the Ukraine conflict through measures such as stronger sanctions against Russia and the intensification of a US-Russia proxy war focused on pro-Russian enclaves in Eastern Ukraine. Writing in August 2014, Cohen described the West as facing 'the worst and most dangerous confrontation in many decades...The seemingly unthinkable is becoming imaginable: an actual war between NATO, led by the United States, and post-Soviet Russia.'⁵ One of the lessons of the Cold War, he said, was that there

¹ Legvold, Robert, 'Managing the New Cold War What Moscow and Washington Can Learn from the Last One,' *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2014, <http://foreignaffairs.com/articles/141537/robert-legvold/managing-the-new-cold-war-p2>, accessed 9.10.2014

² *Ibid.* p6

³ *Ibid.* p5

⁴ *Ibid.* p6

⁵ Cohen, Stephen F., 'The New Cold War and the Necessity of Patriotic Heresy US fallacies may be leading to war with Russia,' *The Nation*, August 12, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/180942/new-cold-war-and-necessity-patriotic-heresy-p1> accessed 1/11/2014

was little to be gained by Washington's 'surreal demonization'⁶ of the Russian leader which now constitutes 'a kind of personal vilification without any real precedent in the past, at least after Stalin's death.'⁷ In reference to Kissinger's critical remarks about the ideological ineptitude and cultural ignorance behind this phenomenon in America, he said 'I think it is worse: an abdication of real analysis and rational policy.'⁸

University of Chicago Professor of Politics, John Mearsheimer, warned too that the Ukraine crisis was emblematic of the enduring prevalence in American foreign policy of an intransigence that reflected little more than the country's moral arrogance and disregard of the motives and intentions of the Putin regime. Described as 'one of the country's most distinguished political scientists'⁹ and 'a notorious bull in a china shop,'¹⁰ Mearsheimer argued against the commonplace assumption that 'Putin is just an aggressive tyrant and that he decided to sort of seize Ukraine.'¹¹ From a Russian perspective, he said, the West's strategic commitment to NATO and EU expansion and to democratisation within its border countries, such as Georgia or Ukraine, has never been regarded either as acceptable or unthreatening. Moreover, there now exists the potential for the punitive reactions of the West to the Putin government's involvement in the crisis to further exacerbate a dire situation. There was thus nothing to be gained, Mearsheimer said, through the continuation by the US and Europe of its encouragement of pro-Western sentiment among sections of Kiev's anti-Russian powerbrokers: 'This is geopolitics 101. I don't understand why most Americans don't understand this.'¹² To paraphrase novelist Graham Greene, Mearsheimer's observations suggest another lesson of the Cold War: that it matters not at all whether the

⁶ Ibid. p2

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mearsheimer, John, 'Conference Call with John Mearsheimer on the Ukraine Crisis,' *Foreign Affairs*, September 2014, p1

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. p2

¹² Ibid. p3

US might have the best possible reasons for all the trouble it has caused in Russia's heartland.¹³

In common with Mearsheimer, Kissinger places the balancing of global order and stability before the dictates of what implicitly he believed was an overly Eurocentric, uncompromising promotion of democratic universalism. Harking back to the prescriptions that emerged out of the 1814-15 Congress of Vienna, he notes approvingly its aim was to produce a consensus:

...that the preservation of the system was more important than any single dispute that might arise within it; that differences should be settled by consultation rather than by war.¹⁴

To Kissinger, the history of conflicts and crises suggests the cultivation of such a constructive dialogue with the enemy could be said to require the kind of skill-set encapsulated by the German concept of *Fingerspitzengefuehl*.¹⁵ That is, it requires a superior intuitive, situational awareness, together with the ability to respond appropriately and tactfully. As a basis for a dexterous form of elite diplomacy, it is also suggestive of the need for an imaginative understanding of Russia's cultural and geopolitical stance; one that resists self-righteousness in the interests of the greater good of crafting a roadmap to maintaining peace and stability.

Kissinger, in particular, has been described as possessing such an exceptional public talent.¹⁶ According to Isaiah Berlin, for instance, his 'shuttle diplomacy' during the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Israel and Egypt was 'extraordinary.' When the histories of our time are written, Berlin said, 'Kissinger will emerge as a major transformer of international relationships. His CIA connections,

¹³ Greene, Graham, 'The Quiet American,' Op.Cit. p72

¹⁴ Kissinger, Henry, *World Order*, Penguin Press, 2014, p61

¹⁵ Halliburton, Rachel, 'Henry Kissinger's World Order: The outer edge of what is possible,' *The Independent*, Saturday 27 September, 2014, p3

¹⁶ Ibid.

Chile, etc will be forgotten or condoned...'¹⁷ In addition, at least in Berlin's fulsome opinion this 'etc' will include presumably his much-criticised role in the secret bombing of Cambodia during the prolonged war in Vietnam.

Still, among Kissinger's list of achievements as US Secretary of State from 1973-77 were the negotiation of the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, the US rapprochement with China, and the US withdrawal from Vietnam, for which he shared the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁸ It should be emphasised however that his approach was not necessarily anchored in openness or honesty about the underlying intentions of the foreign policy of one's own country. 'Kissinger can meet with six different people, smart as hell, learned, knowledgeable, experienced, of very different views,' observed former Head of the US Information Agency Frank Shakespeare, 'and persuade all six of them that the real Henry Kissinger is just where they are.'¹⁹

As a matter of historical record, nor is Kissinger's approach guaranteed to promote solutions that permanently avert the periodical eruptions of international conflicts, for instance in the Middle East or with regard to Russia's near abroad. Instead, given the constantly shifting realities in global affairs, what is required is a perpetual, vigilant, multifaceted engagement between countries. His historicist approach suggests too that, although short-lived, successful outcomes are more likely to reflect the professional charisma and shrewdness of 'the singer not the song.' More cynically, perhaps too it points to the need for an accompanying diplomat whose role is to carry a carpetbag full of IMF-sponsored monetary rewards and economic incentives into negotiations with recalcitrant countries.

Like Legvold, Cohen and Mearsheimer, Kissinger is the kind of liberal-minded fellow traveller with Russia, whose views have much in common with George Kennan's articulation of a more benign version of Cold War *realpolitik*. It is one that that embodies the latter's self-reflective American patriotism, but

¹⁷ Berlin, Isaiah, *Building Letters 1960-1975*, *Op.Cit.* p576

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p499

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p4

not his recurrently tormented conscience about his country's foreign policy blunders. In other words, Kissinger emerges as a more pragmatic advocate of the liberal pluralist philosophy of Isaiah Berlin, which had such a powerful influence on Kennan's approach to US diplomatic engagement with both the Soviet Union and the post-Cold War Russian regime. Fundamental to the liberal pluralism manifest in Berlin's work is his belief that the history of ideas constitutes the public conversation citizens have within and between cultures. The West's relations with today's Russia therefore should be underpinned by an historical and strategic depth that acknowledges both the country's communalities with the West and its ideological, geopolitical and cultural divergences from it.

Kennan's scathing condemnation of the further NATO expansion eastwards after the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, for example, is reflected in Kissinger's view that there was no possible benefit to America in its creating a significant crisis with Russia through encircling it with NATO member countries, including Ukraine.²⁰ Citing what he believes was Kennan's prescient commonsense, Mearsheimer too insists that the US should have understood its political meddling in Ukraine would prove to be 'a bridge too far.'²¹ In effect, the savage fragmentation of the Ukrainian state has been the outcome, in circumstances where preserving the country as a neutral buffer zone between Russia and the West should have been the primary aim of American policy. 'I think the first thing we have to do,' Mearsheimer said, 'is take NATO expansion off the table in a very public way. I think it's also important to take E.U. expansion off the table.'²² In addition, democracy promotion, he says, should be a long-term, low-key project, a secondary consideration if at all after the rescue of the Ukrainian economy as a joint endeavour between the IMF, Russia and Western Europe.²³

²⁰ Kissinger, Henry, 'Does the West Still Exist? America and Europe Moving Towards 2020,' February 23, 2007, Speeches and Statements, Washington DC, <http://www.henrykissinger.com/speeches/022307.html> p4, accessed 29/10/2014

²¹ Mearsheimer, Op.Cit. p2

²² Ibid. p5

²³ Ibid.

Pragmatism, the avoidance of the escalation of the war, and the assumption that Russia is not necessarily a unilateral obstacle to the achievement of a solution to the crisis, are the bedrock of this less hardline version of *realpolitik*. At heart it represents the liberal pluralist hope that the cultivation of an enlightened self-interest between countries that is anchored in geopolitical realities can be achieved by a skilful, patient, respectful, consistent, knowledgeable diplomacy. For the US, the priorities of such an approach, Kissinger suggests, should be more strategic and practical than driven by moralistic pro-Western ideology. Implicit therefore is the need to quell any inflated Wilsonian mission statements about America's exceptional responsibilities as the world's most powerful democracy. This should be especially evident with regard to the political sensitivities of the Putin-led regime, about which unfortunately the US knows critically little. For Kissinger, a more appropriate and constructive approach involves commitment to 'a gradual process, a willingness to pursue ultimate foreign policy goals in imperfect stages and to deal with the adversary as a reality while this process is going on.'²⁴ Presumably too, it involves a mindset that views failures as merely temporary setbacks.

Three other aspects of this interweaving of *realpolitik* and informed fellow travelling reflect the intellectual heritage of Kennan's views and, indirectly, those of Isaiah Berlin. The first is the importance of maintaining one's professional integrity, if necessary by swimming against the intellectual current. Particularly since the end of the Cold War this has meant an outspoken questioning of the received wisdom about Russia in the spirit of liberal pluralist inquiry. The alternative is acquiescence in a herd-like consensus that over time may be destructive of the ideals of negative freedom that ensure a vibrant civil society. As Cohen says, the contemporary dominance of the kind of militant, retrograde conservatism that has determined the path to the new Cold War indicates the perilous corrosion of these liberal ideals is already well-advanced in his country. '...unlike its forty-year predecessor,' he argues, 'there is no effective American opposition - not

²⁴ Kissinger, *World Order*, Op.Cit. p283

in the administration, Congress, establishment media, universities, think tanks, or in society.²⁵ Rather those woefully few critics of the government's policies that have contributed so disastrously to the bloodshed in Ukraine are without influential supporters and unorganised.²⁶ 'In my long lifetime,' he writes, 'I do not recall such a failure of American democratic discourse in such a time of crisis.'²⁷

The second aspect of a notion of a re-invented fellow travelling that is constrained by a cautious sense of realism towards today's Russia stems from Berlin's repeated warnings about the utopian dreams of philosophers and ideologues. What a short history of the century above all demonstrated, he believed, was that visions of perfectible human societies led in fact to the creation of nightmarish futures. Experience was a persuasive indicator that human life was chaotic and unpredictable, constantly demanding we make choices based on a blind reckoning of what is the lesser of two evils, or the more desirable of two seemingly good ideas. Berlin's insistence on the incommensurate nature of many of our most cherished moral values is echoed in Kissinger's pragmatic approach to diplomacy. Paraphrasing Goethe during a discussion of *realpolitik* at Harvard, he said, 'If I had to choose between justice and disorder, on the one hand, and injustice and order, I would always choose the latter.'²⁸

As suggested in Chapter One, the shortcomings of liberal pluralism are that in practical terms problems may arise in clearly distinguishing what exactly is likely to promote, for example, one or another of the various possible combinations of justice, order, injustice and disorder in any given circumstance. Equally, determining whether there might or might not be a positive or a negative interactive relationship between these concepts could prove problematic. The strengthening of legislative measures against election fraud, for instance, might appease Russia's opposition protest movement's

²⁵ Cohen, Op.Cit. p2

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Isaacson, Walter, *Kissinger: A Biography*, Simon & Schuster, 2005, p76

demand for justice in face of the partial undermining of their voting rights. It might also defuse any prospect of civil disorder on the streets of Moscow, at least on this particular issue. Alternatively, as is fondly hoped by many neo-liberal conservatives in the West, it might encourage more intensified popular protests directed at creating a fundamentally destabilising Russian Spring.

The third and related aspect is that as a conceptual framework for understanding the divisions within Western-oriented perspectives on contemporary Russia that is anchored in the agonistic arena of Liberalism, new Cold War warriors and re-invented fellow travellers is useful but not methodologically rigorous. In large measure, this reflects the analytical and predictive limitations of contemporary political theory and sociology. For the most part the reality is that only with hindsight can certain ends be explained by unravelling the complexity of variables that might over time constitute the means of their achievement, and not always convincingly so. Nor are the description of these dynamic processes uncontroversial. For example, the foundational neo-liberal assumptions that economic globalisation, is a sufficient, or even a necessary determinant of democratization, have been seriously questioned by the other influential models of modernisation provided by the command economies of China and Russia. In particular too, Piketty's very detailed though incomplete economic history, based on comparisons of available statistical data from Western countries, suggests that the rise of capitalism in fact has consistently promoted a very undemocratic widening of socio-economic inequalities.²⁹

By implication, one of the defining characteristic of quantitative sociological methodologies should be that they provide provisional rather than reliable paths to certain knowledge. As well, they should be regarded as creating interpretative edifices that are not only shaped by the ideological proclivities of their practitioners, but also by researchers who are often driven by a mission to change the world through exposing what they believe are its specific social, political and economic failings. Similarly, qualitative methodology, in which the plural of anecdote is assumed somehow to provide

²⁹ Piketty, Thomas, *Capitalism in the Century*, Harvard University Press, 2014

credible socio-economic data, demands further discussion and scepticism. By contrast, Berlin's contextualised history of ideas evokes the possibility of a much richer, empathic, experiential, literary and cultural world of conversation about the changeable patterns of our lives.

Here the implication is that the best kind of interpretation is not about the struggle to understand societies through the lens of abstractions, such as Class Conflict, Liberalism, Democracy or Authoritarianism. Instead the processes and patterns of change are located in our reflections and stories about everyday social interactions, that is, in all the different ways and words we use to describe to each other the events around us.

So where do such liberal pluralist perspectives leave the division between new Cold War warriors and re-invented fellow travellers? For the former, the harshest verdict condemns the poorly substantiated tenacity with which they assert Cold War prejudices about Russia. Against this often blind rigidity of thought, fellow travelling has much to commend it. At the same time, the history of the term's usage suggests the need to be mindful of the difference between pro-Russian sentiments and a defence of the indefensible; of reserving judgment when no easy distinction can be made between these camps; and of the importance of constructive pragmatism in an imperfect world.

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