Fighting Russia's History Wars

Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II

MARK EDELE

Vladimir Putin shows remarkable interest in history in general and World War II in particular. This article explores this historian-president's attempts to codify the memory of this war in an open attempt to transmit a useful past to the younger generation. It argues that top-down models of historical memory are of little explanatory value in the Russian situation. The president rides a wave of historical revisionism that he shapes at the same time. Putin's government successfully uses it to mobilize Russian society against critical minorities within and perceived enemies without. The far-reaching consequences of this politicization for the history of World War II are sketched in the final section of the article.

Keywords: Russia; World War II; Great Patriotic War; history wars; Vladimir Putin

A FAILED HISTORY EXAM

On December 24, 2014, Vladimir Luzgin, a resident of Perm in the Urals, failed a history exam with fairly high stakes. He did so unknowingly, by sharing an article entitled "15 facts about the 'Banderovtsy', or: What the Kremlin Is Silent About." The article countered what its author perceived as Russian misconceptions about the Ukraininan independence movement in World War II, in particular the followers of one of its leaders, Stepan Bandera (1909–59). [1]

Bandera was born in Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In interwar Poland he became a prominent Ukrainian nationalist, incarcerated in the mid-1930s. He escaped prison between the German invasion of Poland on September 1 and the Soviet one on September 17, 1939, taking up residence in the German-occupied zone. There, he led the Bandera faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B, or *Banderovtsy*) after a split of the organization in 1940. OUN-B actively collaborated with German counterintelligence units on formerly Polish territory and helped set up two Ukrainian battalions, which participated in the invasion of the Soviet Union. Bandera himself was not allowed onto Soviet territory by the Germans, so the declaration of an independent Ukrainian state in late June 1941was left to his associates.

This step, however, sealed the fate of OUN-B in the German-controlled areas. Hitler was unwilling to accept independent nationalist movements of non-Germans on Soviet territory. OUN-B also did not endear itself to the Germans because of its assassinations of rival nationalists. The organization was outlawed and Bandera arrested. He languished as a somewhat privileged prisoner in Sachsenhausen concentration camp and was released in the eleventh hour, in 1944, when the Germans finally tried to instrumentalize anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments of former Soviet citizens in their fight against the Red Army. An integral nationalist, Bandera was no friend of Poles, Russians and Jews. His followers were involved both in the ethnic cleansing of Poles and in the Holocaust. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent in postwar Munich, where he had found refuge.[2]

During the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests in Kiev and the following 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea as well as the armed conflict over eastern Ukraine, the memory of Bandera became entangled with Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms. Ukrainians had long celebrated him as a freedom fighter, while Russian media portrayed him as a fascist and a Nazi collaborator. It is in this context that the "15 facts" were written and distributed.[3]

On that fateful day in December 2014, then, Luzgin shared the anti-Kremlin defense of Bandera and his followers on *VKontakte*, a Russian version of Facebook. While overall only twenty other users saw his post, one of them was employed by the State Prosecutor's office of Perm District. The procuracy soon investigated a charge of public dissemination of "lies about the activities of the Soviet Union in the Second World War," a crime that, since early 2014, is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment under article 354.1 of the criminal code ("rehabilitation of fascism"). The charge was brought to prosecution and in June 2016 the Perm District Court made history when sentencing Luzgin as charged.[4]

The court had to find that Luzgin's re-post was historically inaccurate, and that he could have known that it was. The historical inaccuracy was fairly easily established. Part of the offending paragraph read as follows:

> In contrast to the communists, who actively collaborated [*sotrudnichali*] with the Germans and divided Europe with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the UPA [Ukrainian Insurgent Army] and OUN-B did not collaborate either with the German occupation government or with the communist occupation government.

> In their turn, the communists [and the Germans] learned from each other, cooperated in repressions, held parades together, exchanged weapons, etc. THE COMMUNISTS AND GERMANY TOGETHER ATTACKED POLAND, UNLEASHING THE SECOND WORLD WAR on September 1, 1939. That is, communism and Nazism cooperated closely while Bandera sat in a German concentration camp Auschwitz for the declaration of independence of Ukraine....

There are so many tendentious mistakes in this paragraph, that it is hard to decide where to start unravelling them. For one, OUN-B did collaborate with the Germans. It was not Bandera but Hitler who ended the cooperation. Second, during the period when the Soviets and the Germans "cooperated closely"—that is in 1939–1941—Bandera was not in a concentration camp. He was only arrested after the declaration of Ukrainian independence, which happened not during the period of German-Soviet collaboration but after it had ended with the attack on the Soviet Union. Third, he did not sit in Auschwitz, but in Sachsenhausen.

The prosecution focused instead on a final inaccuracy, the statement that "the communists and Germany together attacked Poland, unleashing the Second World War on September 1, 1939." As the witness for the prosecution, Aleksandr Vertinskii, dean of the Faculty of History of Perm State-Pedagogic University, put it: this formulation did "not conform to positions recognized internationally."[5] Indeed, on September 1 only the Germans attacked Poland and hence unleashed the Second World War. The Red Army would invade Poland only on September 17.

While the first part of the prosecution's case relied on a confrontation of an amateur with somewhat hazy knowledge of history with the dean of a Faculty of History, the second required showing that Luzgin did not simply make a mistake but knowingly distributed lies. This charge he strenuously denied. He claimed, likely accurately, that he had never read the Nuremberg trial records and hence did not know what an international court had established about Germany's singular war guilt; he also claimed that he had learned in school that "on September 1, 1939, fascist Germany attacked Poland, while Soviet forces moved into the eastern part of Poland." The court dismissed this defense with reference to Luzgin's high-school diploma, which showed that he had passed history with a "B" (*khorosho*), and could thus be presumed to know the basic facts. Thus his dissemination of a document full of silly mistakes was indeed

the propagation of a historical lie. Luzgin was sentenced to a 200,000 ruble fine, quite a significant sum in a country where the average monthly wage stands at 36,525 rubles.[6] And Luzgin was lucky: he could have received a significantly higher fine or even have ended up behind bars.

Luzgin's prosecution marks a new level of escalation in the ongoing struggle over Russia's past. This history war has simmered for decades now. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, the question of what were the historical foundations of contemporary Russia became acute. While the victory over Nazism is not the only usable past embraced by many in Russia today, a sanitized version of "Russia's" World War II has become one heritage that many among both leaders and led could agree on. It developed into a cornerstone of a positive narrative about the nation. It has proved to be extremely popular, not least because it could build on the ideological work done since 1945, when the "Great Patriotic War" increasingly eclipsed the Bolshevik revolution as the foundational moment of the Soviet polity.[7] The new Russian "positive nationalism," however, has been challenged by critical historians within and foreign scholars and politicians without.[8]

In the context of the Ukraine crisis, these confrontations came to a head, leading to the passing of a law threatening prison for unspecified "lies" about the Soviet Union's World War II.[9] This article explores this law in the context of several presidential interventions into the controversy about how to properly remember this war. It argues that the memory law is part of the historiographical front of what has been called Putin's "preventive counterrevolution": a largely successful attempt to immunize Russian society against the virus of "velvet revolution."[10] Notwithstanding its propagandistic use, the official version of this history is a sophisticated, if tendentious, interpretation of the Russian World War II.

The president of the Russian Federation, of course, does not (re)construct the Russian past single-handedly. There are a variety of other players, whose contributions to the debate could provide material for further essays.[11] The most prominent politician of history is Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii (born 1970), a maverick historian who has long argued for the development of a useful past.[12] Putin at times follows Medinskii's lead, as we shall see below, but there are also moments of divergence. The president's style of argument, for one, is much more old-fashioned than his minister's. The younger man openly states that "facts alone do not mean very much" and that he wants to "modernize" the "Soviet war myth" to create a "positive mythology" as a

foundation of the "moral imperatives of the people." His writings are openly imperialist: "What kind of a myth do we need?" he asked rhetorically in 2011. "Very easy," he answered. Russia needed a myth stressing "the unified historical fate of the peoples of the former Russian empire."[13]

Putin, by contrast, presents himself as the defender of objective historical truth pure and simple. He is much more careful and much more guarded than Medinskii. He does not copy Medinskii's lines on every subject, but develops his own personal take on the past.[14] In the struggle over history as elsewhere in the complex game of Russian politics, Putin is an independent actor.[15] This essay argues that we need to take his thought on the past seriously: this former KGB operative is, indeed, a "history man."[16]

THE MEMORY LAW AND THE HISTORY OF HISTORY

On May 5, 2014, the history man in the Kremlin signed a new law, which had been passed by both houses of parliament on April 23 and 29, respectively.[17] Largely ignored by Western media too busy keeping an eye on the fast-moving events in Ukraine, what is popularly known as the "memory law" is entitled "On the insertion of changes in particular legal acts of the Russian Federation." It criminalizes the expression of certain opinions about the Soviet past. Article 1 threatens either up to 300,000 rubles or the equivalent of up to two years of salary, or three years of forced labor or a three-year prison term for the following offenses:

- public denial of facts established by the international criminal tribunal for the punishment of the major European war criminals of the Axis powers;
- public approval of said crimes;
- public distribution of lies about the activities of the Soviet Union in World War II, if the offender is aware of the false character of these statements [*rasprostranenie zavedomo lozhnykh svedenii o deiatel'nosti SSSR v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny*].

The penalties increase to 100,000–500,000 rubles, or the equivalent of one to three years' salary, or forced labor or prison for up to five years, if the above offenses took place while performing a public office or using mass media or while falsifying evidence.[18] In these cases, the perpetrators would also lose the right to perform their position or job for up to three years.

On the face of it the memory law might seem innocent. Who would deny war crimes judged at the Nuremberg trials? The devil, like so often, is in the details, in particular in what would constitute a "lie" about the Soviet past. In order to better understand the question of truth and lies about Stalin's war, we need to remember the deeper history of the Russian history wars about World War II. In the Soviet Union, World War II was remembered largely as the "Great Patriotic War." This war began when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, rather than when Japan and China went to war in 1937, as historians with their eye to Asia now advocate, or when Germany, backed by the Soviet Union through the Hitler-Stalin Pact, made short work of Poland in 1939, as the more conventional, European narrative has it.[19] The Great Patriotic War was a defensive war of good against evil, as Stalin stressed in his first wartime address to the population on July 3, 1941, which would set the tone for both wartime propaganda and the postwar war cult. It had been "forced upon" the Soviets by their "bitterest and most cunning enemy—German fascism." The Red Army was "displaying unexampled valor" fighting this foe. And the military was not alone: "the entire Soviet people" was "rising in defense of our native land." This "patriotic war of liberation against the fascist enslavers" (*otechestvennaia osvoboditel'naia voina protiv fashistskikh porabotitelei*) was a struggle not only for the "life and death of the Soviet state" and all the peoples of the USSR, but also for the liberation of Europe and the world from fascism.[20]

The Great Patriotic War narrative had several strongpoints. For one, the Soviet Union was a clear victim in this story. It was attacked by the most brutal dictatorship in the twentieth century, was threatened with genocidal policies and became a major player in the anti-Hitler coalition. At great cost and involving enormous suffering, the Soviet Union managed to win this war and hence save Europe, and maybe the world, from Nazi barbarism.[21] Thus, as a positive story of victimization and valor, the myth of the Great Patriotic War had the advantage that much of it indeed reflected historical reality.

Other starting points were less useful for a self-righteous national narrative. If the war started in 1937, the Soviets' role was much more ambiguous. Scared of a two-front war with Germany and Japan, unwilling to commit troops and fight the Asian imperialists on the side of the Chinese victims, Stalin committed weapons, military advisors, and some airmen, but refused to join the fight with all the might of the Red Army. The plan was to help enough to bog down Japan in China and thus neutralize the

threat to the eastern flank of Stalin's empire. And this strategy worked. After an undeclared border war in 1938–39 demonstrated to the Japanese that the Red Army was a tough adversary, Japan abandoned plans to attack the Soviets and oriented itself south instead, eventually clashing with the United States. The rest, as they say, is history.[22]

If in the war in Asia the Soviet Union's role was ambiguous, in the European war from 1939 it was problematic. Hitler attacked Poland after the pact with Stalin of August 23, 1939, assured him that the Soviets would keep out of the war as long as he would let them take control of their "sphere of influence" in eastern Europe. Despite such collusion between dictators, few historians blame the outbreak of war in equal parts on Stalin and Hitler.[23] Hitler's decision to attack Poland had been reached well before the neutrality of the Soviet Union had been guaranteed; Soviet neutrality eased rather than caused German aggression; it is unlikely that even a broad anti-Hitler coalition would have avoided war, given the German dictator's determination to have one.[24] The real disagreement is over Stalin's intentions in 1939, a discussion that cannot be reduced to a confrontation between "Russophiles" and "Russophobes," or their proxies. Positions on all sides of the scholarly frontlines are taken by historians of a wide variety of backgrounds, and all serious contenders in this debate marshal considerable evidence in support of their claims. Given the focus on intentions—a notoriously tricky field of historical inquiry—it is unlikely that a consensus will be reached through simple reference to the factual record.

On the one side of the argument are scholars who see Stalin's aims as essentially defensive: his actions were driven by a desire to stay out of the war.[25] They are opposed by others who see Stalin's maneuvers as the expression of a complex strategy to advance the Soviet system westward: an essentially aggressive, even imperialist venture. Far from intending to prevent a war, these scholars argue, Stalin tried to exploit it. The plan was to keep the Soviet Union out of a new world war as long as possible and to let the capitalists bloody each other, before joining in to push Soviet boundaries westward. The end goal was either the regathering of lands subject to Russian rule before 1917 or an export of the revolution to the West more generally.[26] Another disagreement is over whether or not Stalin had a choice in 1939, another debate where it is easy to find Westerners who view the course taken as completely understandable, and Russians who do not.[27]

Wherever one stands in these arguments about the origins of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, it is hard to deny that what followed was more than just a violation of

the sovereignty of independent states. After the annexation of parts of Poland, 21,857 former Polish citizens alone were shot for nothing more than being part of the ruling elite of the old regime.[28] In 1940 and 1941, not counting those arrested and sent to prison or concentration camp, 383,000 civilians were deported as class enemies from the incorporated Polish and Baltic territories to remote regions of the Soviet Union. Many died in the process.[29] If the ultimate goal of Stalin's 1939–40 westward expansion may have been defensive, this was active, forward defense, underwritten by utterly ruthless revolutionary violence on the ground.[30]

Real history is full of moral and political ambiguities. The history of a communist dictatorship surrounded by hostile capitalist countries and ultimately confronted by an even worse totalitarianism is no exception to this rule. Ambiguities, however, do not make for good mythmaking and hence are best avoided. The story of the Great Patriotic War did just that: it constructed a victory not only the Soviet state but also much of the Soviet population could be proud of. The basic evolution of the story is the following: under Stalin, the united Soviet people, in particular the Russians, under the leadership of the Communist Party, led by the wise Comrade Stalin, defeated the Fascist invaders and saved world civilization; under Khrushchev (1953–64), the dictator was removed, and the Communist Party alone, sometimes despite rather than because of Stalin, led the people in this war; under Brezhnev (1964–82), Stalin was carefully reinserted as a competent manager of the war effort. Then came Perestroika, followed by crisis and breakdown of the Soviet Union (1986–91). This war came under attack from all sides: 1939 was remembered as was the catastrophe of 1941; repression, executions, blocking detachments and penal battalions became a matter of public debate; the anti-Bolshevik feelings of many, the mass surrenders and the positive reception the Nazi troops received in some areas were documented; the campaign in Eastern Prussia and the behavior of Soviet troops there became a matter of the public record. The list could go on.[31]

Indeed, a fully blown counter-myth to the Great Patriotic War emerged, one where the Soviet people were driven on by gun-wielding commissars and where nothing but the worst assumptions about Soviet conduct was admissible.[32] This counter-myth was never dominant and always highly controversial, but it also was likely to lead to a backlash, once the conditions were right. In today's Russia, the old story has evolved to one where the Russian people stood united against the German and now also

the Ukrainian fascists (indeed, a Europe unified under the swastika), a further Russification and de-Bolshevization of the old Soviet master narrative.

PUTIN'S WAR IN 2007

What we see in Russia today, however, is more than just a cyclical backlash in the ebb and flow of public debate about a complex and terrible past. What we witness is the state actively taking sides again.[33] Indeed, Putin himself has repeatedly intervened in the history wars, in particular during two meetings the president held with historians, one in 2007, the other in 2014. Originally invitation-only events, they became also part of the public record by dissemination of their transcripts via the Kremlin's web page. They are thus significant both as a source for Putin's direct interaction with the particular professionals who attended the meetings and as "signals" to the wider community of scholars and teachers. A 2015 press conference shortly after Victory Day (May 8 in much of the West, May 9 in Russia) allowed the president to repeat many of his convictions, this time directed to an international as well as a domestic audience.

The president's position on World War II evolved over time while exhibiting important continuities.[34] In the 2007 meeting, Putin articulated what at first sight might seem like a contradictory position.[35] On the one hand, he stressed the ideological function of humanities in general and history in particular for his project of a positive Russian nationalism. Addressing the scholars present as "colleagues," he asserted the importance of the humanities as the "foundation of foundations" (*osnovoi osnov*), in particular in the education and cultivation (*obrazovanie i vospitanie*) of children. What was needed, he claimed, was the transmission of the "best traditions and values of [our] national culture" (*otechestvennaia kul'tura*) to the younger generation. The task of humanities education was to teach young minds what was common and positive about Russia. This would help "to decide the common tasks, which our country will face in the future." At current, there was too much "mush in the heads" (*kasha v golove*) of teachers, students and the public at large. Nobody could "teach us" anything about history, in particular not foreigners, whose scholarship was no more than an "instrument to influence our country." This accusation of cultural imperialism also encompassed Russian scholars who provided critical histories of the past centuries: they were in the pay of foreign grant agencies and hence just wrote what their masters demanded.

On the other hand, the president warned against thought control and advocated for plurality of views on historical events: “I speak about standards of education, not the standardization of thought … as this was at some time in the past under the rule of one ideology. Of course, textbooks should lay out a variety of views on the problem of social and state development....” Pressed by some in the audience to intervene directly in the history wars, he refused to pronounce an official position on this or that historical question:

> But just as [the state] must not take a position with regards to how to evaluate our recent past ... one should not call any particular view correct, including the view taken by those currently in power. But one has to help the pupils or students to develop their own understanding of this or that historical event on the basis of a conscientious presentation of the facts. That would be ideal.

Putin did not appear to perceive the contradiction between the ideological function of history and the insistence that a plurality of views should be expressed. Like many nationalists, he embraced a positivist view of history, both in the sense of looking at positive aspects, and in the sense that there is indeed a historical reality, which can be known through self-evident facts. People were allowed an “opinion” as long as they reproduced the “facts” which spoke for themselves. The “results of the Second World War” were a case in point:

> If a textbook says that Great Britain lost approximately 300,000 people in the Second World War, but we lost 27 million, it should also say, as the textbooks of earlier times did, how many units, divisions, how many men and machines there were in the Nazi army at the Eastern Front and how many on others; what the results were in the first period, the second period, and so on. In that case one could write whatever one wanted. The author of the textbook could reach whatever conclusions he liked, but when the students read all this, analyze what happened with the Second Front, when they opened it and so on, then they would come to their own understanding of the role and importance of our country in the victory over fascism.

It was in the process of teaching the actual facts that students would develop a "feeling of pride" for their country, "because we have something to be proud of."

Victory over "fascism" was not the only positive aspect of Russia's past. There were many positive Russian traditions of very long standing, which others should emulate. First of all, there was the long history of a multi-ethnic and multiconfessional state, which balanced the aspirations of majority and minorities alike. "Tolerance," the president claimed, "is in our blood."

For the Putin of 2007, then, the point was not to imprint one particular position on the minds of students. Rather, his assumption was that the real history of Russia was a positive one, and hence it would, all "opinion" aside, inspire devotion in those who knew it.[36] While Medinskii would soon argue that if you love your country you will write positive history because facts do not matter, Putin claimed that the factual record was positive and that therefore you should love your country.[37] The unstated corollary to this position is that critical approaches to the Soviet past are either "opinions" or, worse, "lies."

Like any positive nationalist, the president eschewed the difficult questions. If Russian history was one of tolerance toward minorities, why was it that so many thought of the Tsarist Empire as a prison house of nations? Why the disintegration of the empire along national lines in World War I? Why did Finland, the Baltics, Poland, Ukraine and the Trans-Caucasian Republics break away if they were so well integrated? Why the nearly persistent fight with "bourgeois nationalism" under the Soviets? Why the mass deportations of minorities under Stalin? And why the nearly immediate breakup into national republics in 1991, once central power was weakened? Such facts do not fit into the positive history of national tolerance and multiculturalism the president claimed for his country. This is not to say that there were no positive aspects to the Soviet "affirmative action empire;" but affirmative action and ethnic cleansing were so deeply intertwined that constructing an unequivocally positive narrative requires willing amnesia.[38]

Likewise, World War II was much messier than Putin presented it. True, as a little army of Western scholars (often equipped with money from foreign grant agencies) has pointed out, the Soviets took the brunt of the German onslaught and suffered most for victory over Nazism.[39] That, however, is just the starting point of the discussion. How much of the catastrophic population loss was due to German policies, and how much to Stalin's? What influence did the Great Terror have on the readiness

of the Soviet Union? Was the catastrophe of 1941 avoidable? Most troublingly of all, what role did the Hitler-Stalin Pact play in the early stages of World War II? Did the Soviets act as aggressors and de facto allies of Hitler in 1939–41 (in Poland, Bessarabia, the Baltics and Finland), before themselves falling victim to Nazi aggression? These are all difficult questions and one would expect historians (and readers of history) to disagree over their answers. They simply cannot be solved with reference to unmediated "facts." More troublingly, they all stand in the way of an unequivocally positive history of Russia.[40]

In 2007, the president-historian did not completely eschew such hard questions. Yes, he asserted, there were "problematic pages" in his country's history. In particular, he noted the terror year of 1937: "let us not forget about this." However, these terrible pages were not unique. "Every country" had them, he proclaimed. The United States, indeed, was much worse, to say nothing of the trump card in comparative atrocity:

> In any case, we did not use atomic bombs against civilian populations. We did not, let's say, pour chemicals over thousands of kilometers and we did not drop seven times more bombs on a small country than had been used in the entire Great Patriotic War, as happened in Vietnam. We did not have other black pages, such as Nazism, for example.

The Holocaust, Hiroshima, carpet bombing and Agent Orange taken together, then, showed that "every country" had its terrible past and that Russian history was nothing special. What Putin failed to note, however, is that many societies have actively struggled with the consequences of their dark histories. While the process is usually torturous and always contested, neither the German nor the US governments have taken an apologetic stance similar to the Kremlin's.[41] And official Russia is going backward rather than forward in this respect. The times are past when active responsibility was taken for Soviet crimes and rapprochement sought with the victims.[42] Under Putin's successor-cum-predecessor, Dmitrii Medvedev, the Russian state instead began a sustained campaign against a small NGO devoted to the memory of the victims of state terror: Memorial. This campaign only gathered force once Putin returned to the top job.[43]

PUTIN'S WAR IN 2014

The campaign against Memorial brings us to 2014. After signing the memory law in May, the president-historian addressed his "colleagues" again in November, this time early career historians and history teachers.[44] His basic position on history had remained the same since 2007, showing fundamental continuity between what has been called "Putin 1.0" and "Putin 2.0" (his more repressive incarnation from 2012).[45] Again he displayed a nineteenth-century sense of knowledge generation: history was a science (*nauka*) and hence could not be "rewritten" (as if scientific theories never change, are not subject to challenge, falsification by new evidence and, yes, revision).[46] Real historians were "objective" and hence would write the truth. Objective historians, on the basis of their study of the documentation, would arrive at the same conclusions.

Like in 2007, Putin presented himself as a moderate believer in enlightenment. Nothing should be forbidden, "with the exception of things with criminal character." Instead, false views of the past should be fought with argument and research. (He did not mention that earlier that year he had signed a law potentially criminalizing a whole range of statements about the Soviet Union's World War II.) Like in 2007, he asserted that behind the writing of foreign historians lurked the "geopolitical interests" of their countries. Again he stressed the multinational character of the Russian people; and again he noted the importance of the Eastern Front in the subjugation of Hitler (he did not deny the contribution of the Allies).

The president also added some more details on his view of the war. He now directly addressed some of the more complex questions he had eschewed in 2007. He admitted that there was "brutality" (*zhestokost'*) toward the population, and he suggested, without saying it outright, that this brutality was historically necessary in order to survive the Nazi onslaught (as if the Stalinist regime became brutal only on June 22, 1941):

> It is simply hard to say, if we could have won the war, had the state [*vlast'*] been less brutal, maybe as it had been under Nicholas II [who of course had lost against the Germans in World War I]. This is very hard to say. But what would the results have been, had we lost? The results would have been simply catastrophic. We are speaking about the physical extermination of the Slavic peoples, and not only the Russians, but many others: the Jews, and the Gypsies,

> and the Poles. This means, that once we put everything on the scales, it is not clear what outweighs what. One has to study this and make judgments, but they should be objective to an extreme degree (*maksimal'no ob"ektivnymi*).

In a very smart polemic, then, Putin mobilized both Hegel and Hitler. He suggested that whatever had happened was probably historically necessary because it had happened; and he used the comparison with the all-time winner in any contest of evil to make the Stalinist war look better than it otherwise would.[47] He used a similar tactic—combining moral equivalencies with the notion that what happened had been necessary because it happened—when dealing with the division of Poland in 1939 and the question if the Soviet Union had sided with Hitler and divided up the spoils.

First, Putin invoked Munich (1938) as the equivalent of the Hitler-Stalin Pact: it was a diplomatic agreement with Hitler, which led to the violation of the sovereignty of a third country not present at the occasion. (Of those at the table, of course, only Hitler would annex the Czech lands, Bohemia and Moravia, while in the Hitler-Stalin Pact, both dictators profited.) He claimed that the Munich agreement—*the* "lesson" of World War II, oft-invoked when discussing the dangers of "appeasement" and the necessity of military action against dictators[48]—was being "hushed up by your colleagues in the West." He then drew a second moral equivalency: Poland got its just desert ("the puck was returned," to use Putin's sporting metaphor). After all, the Poles had "taken part of Czechoslovakia" in the aftermath of Munich. After this pseudo-contextualization of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the president declared it a normal political move, further barricading this position against critique by appeals to objectivity: "serious research should show that these were the methods of foreign policy at the time."

Finally, the Hitler-Stalin Pact was necessary, because it happened:

> time was necessary to modernize one's army. New weapons systems needed to be developed. Every month counted.... Therefore, idle talk, chatter in this respect on a political level, might make sense in order to mobilize [*obrabatyvat'*] public opinion, but this should be countered with serious, deep, objective studies.

Putin's exposé of the reasons for the 1939 pact elaborated a line his minister of culture had taken in 2011.[49] It is probably a correct reconstruction of part of the thought processes of the Soviet leadership at the time.[50] If, therefore, they need to be embraced by the current Russian leadership is a different question altogether. After all, they alienate many neighbors in eastern Europe. Moreover, alternative interpretations of Stalin's conundrum in 1939 are available which are also consistent with the factual record, as I have outlined above. Stalin did indeed have a choice in 1939. Notwithstanding the glacial speed of negotiations, the British government was ready to ally itself with the Soviets. British negotiations might have been inept, but they were not insincere. The anti-Hitler alliance that came into being in 1941 could have fought the Germans together since 1939, had Stalin desired this outcome. Instead, he took the better offer the Nazis made.[51]

Whether this decision improved the Soviet strategic position is far from clear. Yes, time was bought. But the movement of the border into Poland and the Baltics also stretched the state apparatus thinner, required spending large amounts of resources to secure the new territory, prompted the dismantling of old and the building of new defensive positions and brought large numbers of new Soviet citizens with at best questionable loyalties into the Soviet orbit. In 1941 Hitler's forces quickly took back the new territory held by the Red Army. The question whether leaving the borders where they were in 1939 and throwing in the Soviet lot with that of Britain would have been a better strategy for the Soviet Union than the path actually taken is purely speculative; but so is the claim that the Hitler-Stalin pact improved the Soviet position when war came in 1941. "The facts," in other words, are by no means as clear as the Historian-in-Chief would have them.

PUTIN'S WAR IN 2015

By 2015, then, Putin had developed a fairly consistent line about the history of the Soviet World War II as part of a positive, nationalist narrative for today's Russia: the Soviet war was an achievement, as it was a war against fascism; Russia played the central role in this war; all negative aspects were historically necessary, "normal" in the context of the times, and relatively insignificant if compared with other atrocities. Russia could be proud of its past, and whoever said otherwise was either a foreigner

(and hence by definition furthering foreign interests) or a hireling of the foreigners. Armed with this basic narrative, Russia began the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in 2015.

The commemoration should have given Putin a platform to shine as a politician of world renown, but the annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine crisis more generally turned it into a show of defiance against "the West." Instead of a celebration of the common past of struggle against Nazism, the commemorations turned into a demonstration of Russia's isolation, as many heads of state declined the invitation to the Victory Day Parade.[52] German Chancellor Angela Merkel settled on a compromise, not attending the parade but laying a wreath the day after Victory Day. The following joint press conference achieved some notoriety because the Russian translation published on the Kremlin's website omitted Merkel's characterization of the annexation of Crimea as "criminal."[53]

More important for our context here, Putin was asked directly about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the fears its reevaluation in Russia engenders elsewhere in eastern Europe. He first dismissed such anxieties as an "internal condition of those who are afraid," and hence no concern of his. The sufferers of such nervous conditions should make an effort and forget about "the phobias of the past." As far as the pact was concerned, he retraced the well-trodden path that it was not Stalin's but the Western Allies' fault. The Soviet Union had tried hard to establish a system of collective security against Nazism, but failed. After 1938, it was clear to many that war was inevitable. Churchill understood that. The Soviet Union understood that, too, and it understood that it would have to face Hitler's Germany alone. The pact was signed in order to escape a direct confrontation with Hitler. Putin then again equated the Polish annexations of parts of Czechoslovakia after Munich with the Soviet annexations, implying that it served the Poles right: "And it so happened that after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the division of Poland" the country found itself "a victim of the same politics" it had tried to engage in itself.[54]

RIDING THE WAVE OR SHAPING IT?

Since 2007, then, Putin has developed a sophisticated polemical view about World War II, which skillfully combines historical facts with omission, relativization and

contextualization. This view of history is not easily dismissed. While doubtlessly dangerous both domestically and internationally, it is intelligent, informed and complex. If engaged, it requires argumentation on a fairly high empirical and historiographical level. It is also very popular within today's Russia. For one, it "binds together the Russian political leadership and its supporting elites," in particular among the military and security services.[55] It also has significant support among the nonliberal intelligentsia. Critical historians notwithstanding, many Russian colleagues—professionals as well as popular writers—are engaged in what amounts to a conservative counterstroke in the Russian history wars over World War II.[56] Moreover, the sentiments Putin's version of the war reflects have wider resonance. In the 2000s, Russian popular culture has indulged in heroic war phantasies drawing directly on Soviet mythmaking.[57] The old Soviet holiday of Victory Day remains immensely popular, and grassroots projects to commemorate the war started spontaneously "from below" and only later gained state support.[58] To a significant extent, then, Putin is riding a wave not of his own making.

Indeed, the president's position is in many ways more sophisticated and more informed than those held by many in Russian society at large. He does not deny basic facts but simply tries to relativize them in ways I have sketched above.[59] Meanwhile, many of his compatriots hold much more extreme views, as opinion surveys have consistently shown. A poll conducted by the independent Levada Center in 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2014 asked respondents "Have you heard about the secret protocols to the nonaggression pact between Fascist Germany and the USSR (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, providing for the division of Poland and the division of spheres of influence in Europe)?" In 2005, 43 percent answered "I heard about them and believe that they did exist." In 2014, this share was down to 39 percent. Meanwhile, those who answered "I heard about them, but think that they are a falsification" had risen from 9 to 14 percent. The percentage of those who supported the Hitler-Stalin Pact rose from 40 (2005) to 45 (2014); while the proportion of those who opposed it declined from 24 to 18 in a hundred.[60] The president was also in accord with many of his voters when he put his pen to the draft of the memory law, which had been approved by popular opinion much earlier: in a 2009 poll, 60 percent endorsed the idea of passing a law criminalizing "denying victory"—that is, the then draft "memory law."[61]

Clearly, the Kremlin's propaganda campaign—embedded as it is in wider currents of popular as well as high culture—is both sophisticated rhetorically and falls

on fertile ground culturally. As Igor Torbakov has put it in an insightful article, "the prevalent attitudes towards history and memory" cannot be explained with a top-down, the-Kremlin-brainwashing-the-hapless-population model. Rather, we find a "meeting of the minds between the rulers and the ruled in Eurasia."[62] Nevertheless, the Levada poll also contained some surprises. For example, those who believed that the 1940 occupation of the Baltic states can be described by that term remained at a constant 20 percent between 2007 and 2014, but the view that "occupation" was a misleading appellation lost support, declining from 63 to 53 percent. 27 percent now find this question "hard to answer." The voices from eastern Europe and those of critical Russian historians clearly did not go completely unheard. Likewise, while a majority of Russians in 2010 (63 percent) believed that the Soviet Union could have won without Allied support, this share was down from 71 percent nine years earlier.[63] Maybe it is this infiltration of critical voices that encouraged Putin to step up his campaign to rescue the past from those who want to criticize it?

THE REASONS FOR THE MEMORY LAW

This brings us to the question of timing. The memory law was long in the making. A first draft law was presented to the Duma on May 6, 2009, and it subsequently lingered in several versions in the corridors of power. Reportedly, there had originally been resistance to it from the highest echelons of power, which could explain why it was not passed for five years.[64] Given this back story, the question becomes: why now? Why did Putin decide to sign this law in the spring of 2014? The timing just before Victory Day was one factor. Maybe, then, it was simply the logical solution to the "memory war" that had been going on in eastern Europe since Perestroika and where Russia was "on the defensive," as summarized by Torbakov:

> Following the Soviet collapse, Museums of Occupation were set up in Latvia and Estonia; one of the museums' main objectives is to highlight the political symmetry between the two totalitarian regimes that occupied the Baltics in the twentieth century—German national-socialism and Soviet Communism. In May 2006, a Museum of Soviet Occupation opened in Tbilisi, Georgia, following the Baltic states' example. The same month, the Institute of National

> Memory was established in Ukraine, inspired by the Polish model. In November 2006, the Ukrainian Parliament passed a law recognizing the Holodomor (the disastrous famine of 1932–33) as genocide of the Ukrainian people perpetrated by the Soviet Communist regime. In May 2009 a landmark academic and political event took place in Vilnius—over eighty representatives of European cultural journals convened in the Lithuanian capital to discuss the topic of "European histories." The event's participants agreed that a comprehensive twentieth-century European history has yet to be crafted, and that the first step toward this goal should be the integration of Eastern Europe's tragic totalitarian experience into the overall European narrative.[65]

Indeed, some of the Russian state's initiatives can be seen as direct counterattacks in this international "memory war." The May 2009 announcement of the creation of a presidential commission to suppress the "falsification of history" was one such event.[66] But the flanking legislation, which would have given that commission some teeth, was at the time still judged to be too controversial and was hence shelved. Its return in 2014 therefore seems to have more to do with real-life politics than their symbolic equivalent. The year 2014 was not a major anniversary, nor was there a major assault of east Europeans on Russian historical memory. If this decision had been shaped only by the politics of memory, we should have expected this law to be passed in 2015 (70 years since the victory over Nazi Germany) or 2016 (75 years since the German attack on the Soviet Union), not 2014.

More important was the immediate political context. Much like the annexation of Crimea, the signing of the memory law looks like an ad hoc decision by a government that increasingly feels embattled and under threat from enemies within and without (witness Putin's persistent attacks on foreign historians and grant agencies).[67] History is part of the ideological front in this struggle, a battlefield in Putin's "preventive counterrevolution." Critical historians within Russia had long hoped that a different kind of national historical consciousness would aid the democratization of the country. As "negative nationalists" they attempted to critique the past to build a better future. President Putin shares their conviction about the centrality of historical memory in the political process, albeit with reversed value judgments. For this "positive nationalist," a monolithic, triumphalist narrative underwrites an authoritarian state as much as a critical, complex and nuanced one underwrites, in the minds of liberal Russians, a

democratic polity. The popular appeal of the authoritarian version of historical consciousness shows that Putin's counterrevolution is not just a top-down affair, but rather an active mobilization of one sector of society against another.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HISTORIES OF THE SOVIET WORLD WAR II

What we see in Russia today, then, is the partially cynical, partially sincere embrace by an increasingly authoritarian government of a fundamentally apologetic and positive narrative about a war which in reality was shot through with moral and political ambiguities. With the law of May 5, 2014, the exploitation of the popularity of Great Patriotic War nostalgia for purposes of national mobilization has become armed with the full might of the Russian legal-repressive system. A mystified history thus becomes part of the state apparatus.[68] While there is considerable popular support for this law and the kind of history it is supposed to preserve, there are also critics, both within the population and among professional historians, who embrace a very different version of the past. It is this section of the population—a minority, no doubt, but a significant one—that is supposed to be silenced by this law.

One might object that Russia is hardly unique in legislating a certain version of the past. Germany in particular, but also other countries around the globe, have criminalized the denial of the Holocaust. Critics of these laws have long maintained that they impinge on the freedom of speech, expression and research.[69] Wherever one stands in this debate, there is a crucial difference here: Holocaust denial laws outlaw the falsification of history. The systematic murder of Europe's Jews did happen, and even under the very unfavorable legal situation of British libel law, a Holocaust denier posing as a historian can be shown to be just this in a court of law.[70] The Russian law, by contrast, potentially criminalizes not only denying but also writing and talking about events that actually took place.

The formulation of the law is fairly ambiguous. What are "lies about the activities of the Soviet Union in the Second World War?" Will it be a "lie" to say that World War II in Europe started in 1939, after the Soviets had been "linking … efforts with Nazi Germany" in order to get eastern Poland, "Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bessarabia, and Finland … allotted to us," as Nikita Khrushchev put it?[71] Will it be a "lie" to denounce the annexation of eastern Poland as an illegal land grab flanked by

criminal deportations and mass killings? Will it be a "lie" to call the "liberation" of the Baltic countries a "reoccupation" of formerly independent states by a totalitarian power? Could the Melbourne academic, whose somewhat careless choice of words about actual historical events ("the barbarity of the Russian invasion of Germany in 1944–45") led to an outpouring of anger not only on Australian websites, but also in the Russian media, face court, should he be ill-advised enough to travel to Russia?[72]

The Luzgin case is thus far the only successful prosecution under this new law, and it revolved around an actual inaccuracy—the timing of the Soviet invasion of Poland.[73] If prosecutions follow this pattern in the future, the Russian law would follow a similar track as its Holocaust denial counterparts elsewhere in the world. However, it is conceivable that other courts might take a broader view. In 2002, the Russian ambassador to Britain commented on Anthony Beevor's book on the battle of Berlin by calling its description of mass rape a "clear case of slander against the people who saved the world from Nazism."[74] At the time, this outburst made for good copy and helped Beevor sell a book that did not add much to what others had already documented.[75] Today, would the same "slander" lead to the issuing of an arrest warrant? Will Filip Slaveski or Ian Kershaw have to convince a judge that they were not "aware of the false character" of statements they made "about the activities of the Soviet Union in the Second World War?" Both, after all, have written about similar "activities" to those described by Beevor, whose books have already been banned from school libraries in at least one Russian region.[76]

A more likely scenario would be that historians who claim that Stalin planned to attack Germany in 1941 would face the wrath of the new law. This has been a central debate in the last two decades, known as the "icebreaker controversy." Personally, I believe, like the majority of colleagues both in Russia and elsewhere, that the weight of evidence is on the side of those who think that there was no plan to attack, at any rate not in 1941.[77] However, this is an opinion arrived at on the basis of an open and controversial debate, and on the basis of evidence that requires contextualization and interpretation.[78] This debate simply could not have happened in Russia, had this law been in place.

A test case is Kirill Mikhailovich Aleksandrov, the preeminent Russian expert on the Vlasov movement — the most well-known military collaborators with the Germans.[79] His doctoral (*doktorskaia*) defense at the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences on March 1, 2016, became a cause célèbre in

Russian historical circles. Some of the most respected historians of Stalinism — such as Oleg Khlevniuk — submitted favorable reviews of Aleksandrov's work on Vlasov's officer corps. Other historians spoke harshly against Aleksandrov, as did representatives of war veteran organizations, but the Institute of History closed ranks and passed the dissertation anyway. Among the crowd of more than 90 attendees — defenses are public events in Russia, but usually draw much smaller audiences — were not only historians. Both sides of the argument had brought priests of the Russian Orthodox Church; veterans had turned out in force, one of them leaving the room with the words "Where would you be, had we not won? Would you be able to sit here [and talk]?"[80]

A right-wing NGO, Narodnyi Sobor (the People's Council, which can also be translated as the People's Church), which describes its goal as "the rebuilding of Russia on the basis of traditional spiritual-moral values of Russian civilization," went further.[81] It asked the public prosecutor to investigate if the new memory law had been broken. Ahead of the defense, the director of the Institute of History was summoned to the prosecutor's office for a "prophylactic conversation." This intimidation was part of an incredible amount of pressure "from above, from below, from the side" to cancel the proceedings, as the director told a journalist: "They asked me to think about the fate of the institute."[82] Historians hostile to Aleksandrov also tried to substantiate the case against him in a scholarly journal.[83]

A year later, the affair took a more ominous turn. The Highest Attestation Commission (VAK), in charge of approving all higher degrees in the Russian Federation, sent the offending work to the examination council of the General Staff Military Academy for another opinion. Predictably, the latter voted against granting the title.[84] VAK's Council of Experts followed this recommendation on May 29, 2017, just before this essay went to print. The final decision is with the VAK Presidium, but it is highly unlikely that the outcome will be different.[85] Moreover, Aleksandrov is now also fighting a legal battle in a St. Petersburg court against charges under article 354.1.[86] A conviction of a professional historian would mark a new milestone in the Russian history wars. At this stage, it is hard to be optimistic.

NOTES

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[1] "15 faktov pro 'Banderovtsev', ili o chem molchit Kreml'" (15 facts about the "Banderovtsy," or what is the Kremlin silent about), http://saracinua.livejournal.com/2147939.html (accessed August 22, 2016).

[2] Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist. Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2014).

[3] David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating a National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007); Per A. Rudling, "The OUN, the UPA and the Holocaust: A Study in the Manufacturing of Historical Myths," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies* 2107 (2011); Eleanora Narvselius, "The 'Bandera Debate': The Contentious Legacy of World War II and Liberalization of Collective Memory in Western Ukraine," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, nos. 3–4 (2012): 469–90; Serhy Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Andreas Umland, "Bad History Doesn't Make Friends," *FP* (October 25, 2016) http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/25/bad-history-doesnt-make-friends-kiev-ukraine-stepan-bandera/ (accessed April 7, 2017).

[4] The most detailed reporting about the case is Maksim Strugov, "Ssylka v Niurnberg: Zhitel' Permi oshtrafovan za repost materiala ob uchastii SSSR v okkupatsii Pol'shi v 1939 godu" (Reference to Nuremberg: Inhabitant of Perm fined for reposting material about the participation of the USSR in the occupation of Poland in 1939), *Kommersant.ru*, June 30, 2016, http://kommersant.ru/doc/3026212 (accessed August 23, 2016). For a short English-language summary see: "Man in Russia's Perm Fined

for 'Nazism Rehabilitation,'" *Moscow Times*, August 23, 2016, https://themoscowtimes.com/news/man-in-russias-perm-fined-for-nazism-rehabilitation-53543 (accessed August 23, 2016).

[5] Strugov, "Ssylka v Niurnberg."

[6] Ibid.. Wage data are for July 2015. "Russia Average Monthly Wages 1992-2016," http://www.tradingeconomics.com/russia/wages (accessed August 23, 2016).

[7] Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994); Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR 1941 to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Nikolai Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima: Istoriia i politika Rossii* (Memory of a severe regime: History and politics of Russia) (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011).

[8] By "positive nationalism" I mean the opposite of the critical embrace of one's heritage often found among intellectuals, particularly in Germany and Russia. Erich Kuby has described himself as a "negative nationalist." I found this term useful to describe Russian critics of Putin, who despite the accusations that they are mud-slingers are indeed worried about their country, its history and its future. See Erich Kuby, *Mein Krieg: Aufzeichnungen aus 2129 Tagen*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2010).

[9] On historical and historiographical aspects of the Ukraine-crisis see the forums "Ukraine and the Crisis of 'Russian Studies': Participant Observation of History in the Making," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2014): 22–228; and "The Ukrainian Crisis: Past and Present," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 1 (2015): 121–55.

[10] Robert Horvath, "Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 1 (2011): 1–25; and Robert Horvath, *Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution: Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[11] For the debate on Stalin and Stalinism up to 2014, see Anna Becker, *Mythos Stalin: Stalinismus und staatliche Geschichtspolitik im postsowjetischen Russland der Ära Putin* (Berlin: be.bra Wissenschaft, 2016).

[12] For the past under discussion here, see Vladimir Medinskii, *Voina: Mify SSSR 1939–1945* (War: Myths of the USSR, 1939–1945) (Moscow: OLMA, 2011).

[13] Ibid., 116, 642, 643, 76.

[14] For subtle differences in the line taken on the revolutions of 1917 see Mark Edele: "Putin, Memory Wars and the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution," *The Conversation*, February 10, 2017) https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-putin-memory-wars-and-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-russian-revolution-72477 (accessed April 7, 2017).

[15] See Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016).

[16] On Putin as "history man," see Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington: Brookings Institution 2013), chap. 4. See also Putin's thoroughly Soviet "reading list" on World War II: Vladimir Putin, "The Reading List" (2011) http://www.historynet.com/vladimir-putins-world-war-ii-reading-list.htm (accessed April 13, 2017).

[17] The text of the law is available at http://kremlin.ru/acts/20912 (accessed January 22, 2015).

[18] The law also punishes display of lack of respect for military honor and dates of commemoration, but this point is less central to the argument made here.

[19] For the Asian perspective, see Evan Mawdsley, *World War II: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); for the European equivalent, see: Gerard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[20] The Russian text of Stalin's radio address is reprinted in I. Stalin, *O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuza* (On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union) (Moscow: Kraft, 2002), 11–16; an English translation can be found at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1941/07/03.htm (accessed April 12, 2017). On wartime propaganda see Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[21] The best introductions to this history remain John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London: Longman, 1991); and Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941–1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005; rev. 2nd ed., London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For the definitive military history from below see Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011). For life and death at the home-front see

also Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds., *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

[22] For an excellent sketch, see Mark Harrison, "World War II," in James R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 4:1683–92. See also Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933–1941: Moscow, Tokyo, and the Prelude to the Pacific War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992); Zhang Baijia, "China's Quest for Foreign Military Aid," in Mark Peattie, Edward Drea and Hans van de Ven, eds., *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 283–307.

[23] Timothy Snyder claims that with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact "the Soviet Union had agreed to attack Poland along with Germany." *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), 116. Elsewhere he stated that the pact "led directly to the German-Soviet invasion of Poland the following month that began World War II." "Putin's New Nostalgia, *New York Review of Books*, November 10, 2014, http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/11/10/putin-nostalgia-stalin-hitler/ (accessed April 12, 2017).

[24] Sergei Sluch, "Warum brauchte Hitler einen Nichtangriffspakt mit Stalin?" in Roland G. Foerster, ed., *"Unternehmen Barbarossa." Zum historischen Ort der deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis Herbst 1941* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), 69–87; Mawdsley, *World War II*, 95; Gerhard L. Weinberg, "How a Second World War Happened," in Thomas Zeiler, ed., *A Companion to World War II*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 13–28; Peter Jackson, "Europe: The Failure of Diplomacy, 1933–1940," in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. 2, *Politics and Ideology*, ed. Richard Bosworth and Joseph Maiolo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 217–52, esp. 241, 252.

[25] For example, Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Geoffrey Roberts's books, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933–1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); and *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), chap. 2; M. I. Mel'tiukhov, *17 sentiabria 1939: Sovetsko-*

pol'skie konflikty 1918–1939 (September 17, 1939: Soviet-Polish conflicts, 1918–1939) (Moscow: Veche, 2009).

[26] For three versions — by Russian, Ukrainian and North American scholars — see S. Sluch, "Germano-sovetskie otnosheniia v 1918–1941 godakh: Motivy i posledstviia vneshnepoliticheskikh reshenii" (German-Soviet relations 1918–1941: Motives and consequences of foreign policy decisions), *Slavianovedenie*, no. 3 (1996): 101–13; V. M. Litvin et al., *Ukraina: Politichna istoriia XX-pochatok XXI stolittia* (Ukraine: Political history of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first centuries) (Kiev: Parlaments'ke vidavnitstvo, 2007), 665–69; Robert Gellately, *Stalin's Curse: Battling for Communism in War and Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46–49.

[27] For the latter, see M. I. Semiriaga, *Tainy stalinskoi diplomatii. 1939–1941* (Secrets of Stalinist diplomacy. 1939–1941) (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1992), 57–58. For the former, see the all-time classic of revisionist historiography: A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 263; similarly, P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), 305. For a reevaluation of Taylor's provocations see Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002).

[28] A. Shelepin to Khrushchev, March 3, 1959, reprinted in Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn. A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 332.

[29] Mark Edele, "World War II as a History of Displacement: The Soviet Case," *History Australia* 12, no. 2 (2015): 24. That these deportations were less lethal than the organized genocide the Germans implemented against the Jews is a fact worth considering. See Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Atina Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming 2017).

[30] Dietrich Beyrau, *Schlachtfeld der Diktatoren: Osteuropa im Schatten von Hitler und Stalin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[31] R. W. Davies, *Soviet History and the Gorbachev Revolution* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), esp. 100–14, and *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Bernd Bonwetsch, "Der 'Große Vaterländische Krieg' und seine Geschichte," in Dietrich Geyer, ed., *Die Umwertung*

Der sowjetischen Geschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1991), 167–87; Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*; Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima*; Stephen Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), chap. 6; Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[32] For a version of this approach, written by a leading German historian heavily influenced by the Russian debate since the 1980s and available in Russian translation from a leading academic publisher, see Iorg Baberovski [=Jörg Baberowski], *Vyzhzhennaia zemlia: Stalinskoe tsarstvo nasiliia* (Scorched earth: Stalin's reign of violence) (Moscow: Rosspen, 2014).

[33] On the concerted campaign to make memory of World War II into one of the ideological corner stones of the Putin regime, see Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38 (2011): 172–200.

[34] Putin's own family was directly affected by the war. His father was severely wounded at the start of the war and his brother Vitia died in the siege of Leningrad in 1942 long before the president was born. Wood, "Performing Memory," 185–88; Hill and Gaddy, *Mr Putin*, chap. 5; "Putinu pokazali mogilu brata, pogibshego v blokadu" (Putin was shown the grave of his brother, who died in the blockade), *MKRU*, January 27, 2014, http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2014/01/27/975982-putinu-pokazali-mogilu-brata-pogibshego-v-blokadu.html (accessed February 10, 2015).

[35] "Stenograficheskii otchet o vstreche s delegatami Vserossiiskoi konferentsii prepodavatelei gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk," (Stenographic report on meeting with delegate to the All-Russia conference of humanities and social science teachers), June 21, 2007, Novo-Ogarevo, http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2007/06/135323.shtml (accessed February 17, 2014).

[36] He had made a similar point already in 2003. See Vladimir Putin, "Vstupitel'noe slovo na vstreche s uchenymi-istorikami," (Introductory words at the meeting with scholars-historians), November 27, 2003, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22227 (accessed April 26, 2017).

[37] Medinskii, *Voina*, 643.

[38] Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (1998): 813–61, and *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[39] In addition to the works cited in notes above, see, for example, John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany, Volume One* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), and *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany, Volume Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); *pars pro toto* the immense oeuvre of Glantz: David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (New York: Penguin, 1997); Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Evan Mawdsley, *December 1941: Twelve Days That Began a World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Jochen Hellbeck, *Die Stalingrad Protokolle: Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten aus der Schlacht* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2012).

[40] See Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939–1945* (London: Penguin, 2006).

[41] Richard Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Historians and the Second World War, 1945–1990* (London, Routledge, 1993); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Bill Niven, *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[42] Inessa Iazhborovskaia, Anatolii Iablokov and Valentina Parasadanova, *Katynskii sindrom v sovetsko-pol'skikh i rossiisko-pol'skikh otnosheniiakh* (The Katyn syndrome

in Soviet-Polish and Russo-Polish relations) (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009); Alexander Etkind, Roy Finnin, Uilleam Blacker, Julie Fedor, Simon Lewis, Maria Malksoo and Matilda Mroz, *Remembering Katyn* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013); Thomas Urban, *Katyn 1940: Geschichte eines Verbrechens* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2015).

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[44] "Vstrecha s molodymi uchenymi i prepodavateliami istorii" (Meeting with young scholars and history teachers), November 5, 2014, Moscow, http://news.kremlin.ru/news/46951/print (accessed January 22, 2015).

[45] Maria Lipman, "How Putin Silences Dissent," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 38–46.

[46] Karl Popper, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntinstheorie der modernen Narturwissenschaft* (Vienna: Springer, 1935); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

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[49] Medinskii, *Voina*, 37–39; 50–52.

[50] On the Soviet position in the diplomatic jockeying of the interwar years see Jackson, "Europe," 223–27.

[51] Robert Manne, "Some British Light on the Nazi-Soviet Pact," *European Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (1981): 83–102.

[52] Mark Edele, "Russia Still Struggles with a Violent Past, 70 Years after the Defeat of Nazism," *The Conversation*, May 7, 2015, http://theconversation.com/russia-still-struggles-with-a-violent-past-70-years-after-the-defeat-of-nazism-41031.

[53] Carl Schreck, "Transmission: Merkel's Remark on 'Criminal" Annexation Omitted in Russian Translation," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 12, 2015, http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-merkel-putin-translation-criminal-word-omitted/27011285.html (accessed May 15, 2015).

[54] "Zaiavleniia dlia pressy i otvety na voprosy zhurnalistov po itogam vstrechi s Federal'nym kantslerom Germanii Angeloi Merkel'" (Press statement and answers to questions from journalists about the results of the meeting with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel), May 10, 2015, 16:00, Moscow, Kremlin, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49455 (accessed May 13, 2015). For comparison of the wording, the German translation is available at http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/05/2015-05-10-pk-merkel-putin.html (accessed May 15, 2015).

[55] Sherlock, *Historical Narratives*, 161–65, quotation on 165.

[56] See for example Elena Seniavskaia, *Protivniki Rossii v voinakh XX veka: Evoliutsiia "obraza vraga" v soznanii armii i obshchestva* (Enemies of Russia in the war of the twentieth century: Evolution of the "image of the enemy" in the consciousness of army and society) (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006); or Mel'tiukhov, *17 sentiabria 1939*. See also Inessa Jażborowska, "Russian Historical Writing about the Crime of Katyn," *Polish Review* 53, no. 2 (2008): 139–57; David Brandenberger, Vladimir Solonari, Boris Mironov, Anton Fedyashin and Elena Zubkova, "Toward a New Orthodoxy? The Politics of History in Russia Today," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 4 (2009): 825–68; and Karsten Brüggemann, "Russia and the Baltic Countries: Recent Russian-Language Literature," ibid., 935–56.

[57] Gregory Carlton, "Victory in Death: Annihilation Narratives in Russia Today," *History & Memory* 22, no. 1 (2010): 135–68.

[58] Stephen M. Norris, "Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance." *Soviet & Post-Soviet Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 201–29; Seth Bernstein, "Remembering War, Remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War II in Putin's Russia," *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 422–36.

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[61] "Press-vypusk No. 1216: 'Itogi Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny: peresmotr nedopustim?'" (Press Release No. 1216: "Results of the Great Patriotic War: Is a revision inadmissible?"), http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=11804 (accessed February 13, 2015).

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[63] "USSR Didn't Need Allies to Win WWII—Survey," October 23, 2010, http://rt.com/usa/ussr-didnt-need-allies/ (accessed February 10, 2015).

[64] See Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society, 1928–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 316–17, fn. 97. More work can be done on the history of this law—a pretty well-documented saga.

[65] Torbakov, "Divisive Historical Memories," 235–36.

[66] Ibid., 245.

[67] See Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men*; Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

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[69] Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?*, updated and expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 10–15.

[70] Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier* (New York: Harper, 2006).

[71] Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 1, *Commissar (1918–1945)* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 225–26.

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MARK EDELE is Hansen Chair in History at the University of Melbourne and Australian Research Council Future Fellow. He is the author of *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society* (Oxford University Press, 2008); *Stalinist Society* (Oxford University Press, 2011); and *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He has edited several collections of essays, including, with Daniela Baratieri and Giuseppe Finaldi, *Totalitarian Dictatorship: New Histories* (Routledge 2014); and, with Sheila Fitzpatrick and Atina Grossmann, *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Wayne State University Press, 2017). He is currently working on a short history of the Soviet empire, a historiography of Stalinism, and, with Martin Crotty and Neil Diamant, a global history of veterans. (medele@unimelb.edu.au)