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## **The Politics of National History: Russia's Ruling Elite and the Centenary of 1917**

'The lessons of troubles, revolution, the Civil War warn of how harmful to Russia are any schisms, [they] convince [us] that only unity of the people and social accord can lead to success, can guarantee the independence of the state and help repel any perfidious enemy.'<sup>1</sup>

President Vladimir Putin, February 2016

*This article examines the approach of Russia's ruling elite to the challenge of commemorating the centenary of the Russian Revolution, and thus what can be learned about both the mindset of Russia's rulers and representations of the Soviet past in Russia today. Through consideration of these issues, it provides more general reflection on the role of history in contemporary Russian politics and Russian foreign relations. The 'official' commemoration of the centenary has been low-key, and the approach of the ruling elite has been based primarily on stressing the dangers and undesirability of revolution. However, through a reading of the country's modern history that stresses the importance of a strong state and an overarching historical continuity, the Revolution and the subsequent course of Soviet power can be, and have been, integrated into the preferred national historical narrative. The article suggests that there has been a distinct, and quite deliberate, ambiguity in the approach of the Russian state towards the Revolution and its significance. This is a consequence not simply of the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany and the geopolitical might of the USSR, but also the historically progressive influences of Soviet socialism.*

**Keywords:** Politics of history; commemoration; centenary of the Russian Revolution; Vladimir Putin

The centenary of the Russian Revolution provides a welcome opportunity for its historians to observe and write about the politics of history and commemoration, and not just the historic events and processes themselves. The February and October revolutions of 1917 were events of global significance that have helped shape our world in myriad ways, leading to the establishment of the communist-led Soviet state. The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, and the more general geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe, demonstrate that the consequences of Soviet power and the collapse of both the Eastern Bloc and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) itself have not yet been resolved. Following decades of communist rule, societies in Central and Eastern Europe, and central Asia, experienced abrupt, often traumatic transitions to post-communist

polities and market economies. New national identities have been and continue to be forged, with the shadow of the twentieth century looming large in that regard. Indeed, in countries that **occupy** the vast spaces of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, and due in large measure to their extraordinarily tragic and complicated experiences of twentieth-century dictatorships, one can observe with particularly sharp resolution the principal tendencies often apparent in the politicization of national histories. These are attempts to create a ‘maximally cohesive’ national identity, and to manage – or attempt to discard – the guilt associated with a country’s past.<sup>2</sup>

Identities, whether individual or collective, are bound inextricably with memory.<sup>3</sup> In the context of national histories, commemorations of significant events have performative functions that reflect ongoing processes of constructing and affirming national identities, as well as claims to political legitimacy. Hence, major commemorations, or ‘memory events,’ offer us fascinating insights into the politics of history and public memory, a topic that has attained much prominence in several countries in recent years.<sup>4</sup> The focus of the present article is the approach of the Russian state to the challenges of commemorating the centenary of the Revolution, at a time when the state has been acting as a bulwark against revolutionary situations in Ukraine and Syria, as well as attempting to undercut the potential for upheaval at home. There has been much discussion of 1917 and its significance in Russian academia and media, and indeed in many parts of the world, during the centenary. However, within any polity, and especially one such as Russia’s, the state enjoys a rather privileged position in the production of the wider public discourse on national history, through its oversight of those features of ‘symbolic’ politics, such as commemorations and national holidays, that are concerned specifically with historical meaning.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the rationale for specific studies of the ‘official line’ on 1917.

The central questions to be addressed here are the following: What can be learned about the mindset of Russia’s ruling elite through examination of their approach to the centenary of the ‘Great Russian Revolution’ (as it is now usually referred to in Russia)? How does their representation of their country’s past reflect the concerns and policies of the state today? And how does the Soviet past, arising from 1917, find representation in the discourse of Russia’s ruling elite? We will see that the approach of the Russian state to the centenary has been based primarily on stressing the dangers and undesirability of revolution, and the importance of a strong Russian state. However, through a reading of the country’s modern history based on notions of statism and

an overarching historical continuity, the Revolution and the subsequent course of Soviet power can be and have been integrated into the national historical narrative. There have been imbalances, complexities, and ambiguities in how this has been done. The point, though, is that there has been ambiguity; the article argues that there is a place for the Revolution in the state's historical narrative as foundation of the Soviet system, and that subtleties and complexities are often evident in the state's approach to national history. We will also see that the state has been overtly committed to respect for the independence of the historical profession and a plurality of voices, despite its clear attempts to foster a unified (if ambivalent) historical narrative. In addition, discussions of the centenary and the Soviet past have become more politically charged in the context of the present nadir in relations since the end of the Cold War between Russia and several former Soviet neighbours, and between Russia and Western powers.

The article will begin with some brief, general comments on the revolutionary crisis a century ago, and the politics of historical commemoration, before an examination of official discourse (speech and written text produced by leading figures of state authority) on Russia's revolutionary centenary. The principal source base is transcripts and reports of speeches delivered by, roundtable discussions involving, and interviews given by members of the ruling elite, published on official websites or reported in Russian media. By the 'ruling elite,' I mean the president and government ministers, and other politicians elected or appointed to senior positions of state.

### Revolution and Commemoration

Memories and identities are representations of realities that develop over time through active processes of construction. Indeed, to remember is 'to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present.'<sup>6</sup> When it comes to collective acts of remembering and thinking through the past, social consensus is rarely achieved.<sup>7</sup> Since 2014, and in some places before then, much of Europe and the wider world have been experiencing a series of centennial commemorations of seminal events and processes: wars, revolutions, and state formations. Historically, of course, political revolutions have been at the root of much controversy and division within and/or between identifiable national communities. Revolutions, almost by definition, are divisive events, and scholars often identify social fragmentation accompanied by a weak or weakened state as one of their crucial determinants.<sup>8</sup> Intensely political and inherently unpredictable, they rarely involve consensus, and civil wars tend to follow. The resultant wounds in the body politic tend to heal with time, but revolutions of centennial vintage often retain divisive

potential. In any case, the commemoration of revolution can present a distinct challenge to incumbent authorities concerned by the possibility of revolutionary stirrings, or at least social discord, within their own societies or those of their strategic allies.

A century ago, Europe was experiencing a succession of extraordinary crises. The Russian revolutions of 1917 were the most dramatic and consequential results of broader processes of what Joshua Sanborn has described as decolonization in Central and Eastern Europe under the impact of the First World War. Four empires (Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman) collapsed into the 'shatter zones' of new national states, or in the case of the Soviet state, a new multi-ethnic, multi-national entity.<sup>9</sup> Decolonization was accompanied by state failure and breakdown in social order, and the experience of military defeat and state collapse cleared the space, literally and metaphorically, for the 'aftershocks' of paramilitary violence, atrocities, and extremist politics.<sup>10</sup> Largely phenomena experienced in Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe, the Irish Revolution and deployment of British paramilitary troops in Ireland, in particular, attest to the need for a broader geographic perspective. Socialism/communism and nationalism/racialised worldviews were the powerful revolutionary ideologies that helped ensure that subsequent decades in many parts of Europe were characterised by political extremism.

The Soviet state would prove to be the most violently destructive in modern peacetime European history. However, the Bolshevik party that began to seize power in Russia with the October Revolution was inspired by the idea of the complete liberation of Russia, and humanity in general, from the sufferings of capitalism and the horrors of imperialist warfare. Therein lies the great paradox of the October Revolution, which was by driven by ideological conviction and intended as a decisive moment of historic rupture that would alter the course of history. Reinhart Koselleck has explained that the concept of crisis as it relates to historical time 'can mean that chain of events leading to a culminating, decisive point at which action is required.' It can also mean 'a unique and final point, after which the quality of history will be changed forever.'<sup>11</sup> It is precisely in both those senses that Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, interpreted the political situation having returned to Russia in 1917. In the course of the summer, as the authority of the Provisional Government eroded and popular support for soviet power grew, he believed that the decisive time to act had arrived. The second, socialist revolution, he believed, would spark similar revolutions in other belligerent countries, and the promise of socialism and ultimately communism would come to be realised.

As the Russian empire experienced its revolutionary convulsions, at the other end of Europe, Ireland also experienced a turbulent but much less bloody political transformation. The result was a war of independence from British rule, the creation of the Irish Free State that later became the Republic of Ireland, and a civil war. In 2016, Ireland marked the centenary of the Easter Rising, the ill-fated event that nonetheless helped spark the Irish Revolution. In Russia, as we will see, the centenary of 1917 was unavoidable but quite uncomfortable for the state, whereas the Irish government in Dublin fully embraced the pageantry of commemorating 1916. What is evident, though, is that authorities in both countries have attempted, to some extent, to ‘flatten’ or ‘dilute’ those revolutionary processes as significant ruptures in their respective national narratives. Historian John A. Murphy, writing in the *Irish Times* in 2015, highlighted acerbically the irony of the Irish government’s attempts ‘to sound notes of “inclusivity” and “reconciliation” about an event which was essentially aggressive and confrontational.’<sup>12</sup> Murphy has touched upon the crux of the problem for governments when it comes to commemorating revolution, and this certainly applies also to Russia and 1917.

### Continuity, Consolidation, and Unity: Russia and 1917

#### *Context*

From the very outset of his time as president, Vladimir Putin has stressed the importance of social stability and unity, and the necessity for a strong state to guarantee Russia’s sovereignty. Taking office at a time of concern about the perceived weakness of the Russian state, declining international status, and violent conflict in the North Caucasus, President Putin’s administration in the early 2000s sought to undertake centralizing domestic measures that would strengthen the state and the power of the president.<sup>13</sup> There has been a renewed tendency in this regard since Putin’s re-election as president in 2012.<sup>14</sup> One can also observe the carefully scripted role that Putin has come to play as the personal embodiment of the nation’s strength, values, and unity.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Putin’s administrations have increasingly taken advantage of anti-liberal sentiment in Russian society in order to promote a new wave of Russian nationalism. During his second term as president (2004-8), Putin and the ruling elite began to stress a sense of Russian particularism, and Putin acquired the reputation of an anti-Western leader at variance with internationalist neoliberalism (although the economic policies of the Putin era appear both neoliberal and state

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capitalist).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, ‘anti-revolution’ has become an important component of the Putin presidency, although a more general negative attitude towards the country’s revolutionary past has been characteristic of Russia’s ruling elite since the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Matthew Rendle and Anna Lively have suggested that, in a negative sense, ‘the concept of revolution for Putin is inseparable from his understanding of statehood and sovereignty, and is a crucial element of his political thinking and ideology.’<sup>18</sup>

Putin’s popularity in Russia rests to a large extent on the relative stability that has followed since the end of the 1990s, and the rhetoric of opposition to revolution serves to stimulate Russians’ fears of a return to disorder and chaos.<sup>19</sup> The success of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of late 2004–2005, along with mass protests within Russia itself in 2005, gave rise to authorities’ fears of a ‘coloured revolution’ situation that could plausibly encompass Moscow. In response, as Robert Horvath has demonstrated, the Putin administration instituted a series of repressive measures and mobilizational strategies that have circumscribed the reality of democracy and pluralist politics in Russia, in the service of ‘preventive counter-revolution.’<sup>20</sup> The opposition movement in Russia that arose earlier this decade has not managed to present a very serious challenge to the incumbent authorities, but it has surely served as a further warning to the ruling elite.<sup>21</sup> Adapting Horvath’s analysis of ‘preventive counter-revolution’ to the politics of history, Mark Edele has illustrated the existence of a ‘historiographical front’ to recent state efforts at ‘inoculating’ Russian society from the ‘virus’ of revolution.<sup>22</sup> The official approach to the centenary of 1917 has undoubtedly been formulated, in part at least, with a view to undermine attempts by political oppositionists to mobilize popular opinion against the incumbent authorities.

According to the public rhetoric of the Putin administrations, the threat of upheaval and revolution (in Russia or elsewhere in its realm of interests) is linked with the attempts of Western powers to ‘export’ revolution wherever it serves their purposes, providing a link between 1917 and the present day.<sup>23</sup> It is not a surprise, then, that the term ‘foreign agents,’ with its Stalin-era connotations, received legislative effect in an Act of 2012 that targets non-commercial organizations.<sup>24</sup> This law prescribes that politically-engaged non-commercial organizations are

required to declare themselves as ‘foreign agents’ if in receipt of foreign funds, thereby building on legislation introduced in 2006 that targeted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the aftermath of ‘colour revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the rhetoric and practice of anti-revolution have played an important role in determining Russia’s relationship with the West under Putin.<sup>26</sup> The Russian state’s hostile reaction to the popular revolt in Kiev from late 2013 and its subsequent behaviour in Ukraine, as well as its continued support for the Assad regime in its strategically important Middle Eastern partner, Syria, reflect complex and multi-faceted foreign policy considerations. The state’s responses should be understood not simply in terms of realist geopolitical confrontations with Western powers, economic interests, and concerns about Islamist extremism and its effects on the North Caucasus. They should also be understood through the lens of its deep-seated, ideological opposition to revolution and to subversive forces fomented or supported by foreign powers. This is associated with a conception of state sovereignty (‘sovereign democracy,’ when applied to Russia itself) that does not permit the international community to intervene in a country and determine its future course, in order to counter what Russia perceives as American-led Western global hegemony.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as Sergei Lavrov, the Foreign Minister, explained in an article of 2016 intended for an English-speaking audience, ‘we can see that the United States and its Western Alliance are trying to retain dominant position at all costs [...] All kinds of coercive methods are used to this end [including] unconstitutional regime change techniques involving “color revolutions”.’ By contrast, Russia, according to Lavrov, ‘firmly believes in the preference of evolutionary change which should be made in such a form and at such a speed that would match the traditions of respective societies and their levels of development.’<sup>28</sup>

#### *Historical continuity and statism*

Within this context of ideological hostility to revolution, as the newspaper columnist Fedor Krasheninnikov has put it, for the ruling elite ‘1917 is the most uncomfortable year of Russian history for discussion.’<sup>29</sup> If commemoration is typically about those ‘extraordinary events’ that embody a people’s ‘deepest and most fundamental values,’ then it should follow that commemoration of the Revolution should have little place in Putin’s Russia.<sup>30</sup> In Soviet times, the anniversary of the October Revolution (on 7 November) was the foremost public holiday, the foundation myth of the state. In fact, until the Stalinist era, the February Revolution was marked



in the Soviet Union with a holiday on 12 March.<sup>31</sup> Following the collapse of the USSR, 7 November remained a public holiday, but in 1996 it was renamed the Day of Reconciliation and Concord. During the Yeltsin presidency, the February Revolution symbolised Russia's democratic potential and Westward leanings, but the October Revolution stood for the tragedy of Soviet rule.<sup>32</sup> In 2004, with the beginning of Putin's second term as president, 7 November ceased to be a public holiday at all. It is now overshadowed by the newly created Day of People's Unity on 4 November that commemorates the end of the seventeenth-century 'Time of Troubles.' Revealingly, 7 November is still the occasion for commemorating the military parade of 1941 on Red Square, a show of defiance with Nazi forces at the gates of Moscow, as it was once again in 2017.

The centenary of 1917 has been too significant for the state not to mark it. However, what we have seen in 2017, as noted by the editors of *Revolutionary Russia*, is that 'faced with an event that does not fit neatly into the positive, patriotic and unifying version of Russian history promoted in recent years [...] President Putin and his government have done relatively little to mark one of the greatest events of the twentieth century.'<sup>33</sup> It was not until 19 December 2016 that Putin instructed the creation of a commission to oversee the commemoration, under the influential and state-connected Russian Historical Society (*Rossiiskoe istoricheskoe obshchestvo* – RIO).<sup>34</sup> Key dates during the year, such as 12 March and 7 November, passed without much official recognition. Certainly, there was no public statement from Putin available on the official presidential website for those dates, and media reportage on 7 November concentrated on the ceremonial procession through central Moscow organised by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the official commemoration commission was certainly busy, as was the 'History of the Fatherland' Fund (*Fond Istoriiya Otechestva* - FIO), established in December 2016 by order of Putin. During the centenary year, there were 120 historical-educational events conducted under the auspices of the centenary commission, 70 of which received the financial support of the FIO.<sup>36</sup> According to Anatolii Torkunov, chair of the centenary commission, officially-supported academic conferences in 2017 devoted to the Revolution were conducted in the spirit of free discussion and plurality of opinion, involving foreign as well as Russian historians.<sup>37</sup>

Putin, as president, has displayed impressive interest in and knowledge of Russian history. Moreover, recognition of the importance of history, and more precisely a 'usable' past that stresses the positives of Russian statehood, has been characteristic of the Putin era as a means of fostering patriotic sentiment and a sense of unified national identity, a 'new national ideal.'<sup>38</sup> In a society as complex, variegated, and divided in socio-economic terms as Russia, history can be an especially important mechanism in that regard.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Sergei Naryshkin, Russia's foreign intelligence chief and a key figure in the politics of national history as chair of the RIO, remarked in July 2017 that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of history as an object of study for the 'upbringing' (*vospitanie*) of patriotic Russian citizens not easy to 'manipulate.' In particular, Naryshkin singled out the importance of understanding Russian statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*) as an integral part of 'great Russian culture' (see below).<sup>40</sup>

With that perspective, the ruling political elite and pro-state cultural elite have more to work with when it comes to the Stalin era, the era of military glory and superpower status, than with the more controversial and divisive revolutionary era. During the Putin years, memory of victory in the Great Patriotic War has become the key, even sacred, element of the symbolic infrastructure of patriotic national identity.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, the October Revolution can be seen to represent a misguided and reckless attempt to alter fundamentally the course of Russian history, and to undermine the strength and unity of the Russian state (largely within its imperial configuration). In early 2016, Putin caused controversy when he criticised Lenin for placing 'an atomic bomb' under the edifice of the Russian state by supporting a policy of national autonomy with right of secession within the structure of the USSR.<sup>42</sup> Historian Ol'ga Vasil'eva, Minister of Education, succinctly explained this differentiated understanding of the Leninist and Stalinist eras in an interview in November 2016. With the October Revolution, she explained, the Bolsheviks 'broke off continuity with pre-revolutionary history.' From the 1930s, however, Stalin restored a sense of historical continuity, tapping into Russian patriotism as a tool for popular mobilization.<sup>43</sup> To avoid misrepresenting Vasil'eva's views on Stalin, she then stressed in the interview that Stalin had been a 'tyrant.'

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Some commentators in Russian-language media have labelled the approach of the ruling elite to the centenary ‘undefined and schizophrenic,’ or at least ‘incoherent,’ a result of the state’s selective and unbalanced approach to the Soviet past.<sup>44</sup> The October Revolution presents a challenge, but under Putin the state has taken full advantage of other aspects of Soviet history, principally the wartime triumph over Nazi Germany, to mobilize patriotic sentiment and forge a sense of national unity. This has been accompanied by attempts firmly to police discussion of the Great Patriotic War. Most notoriously, a Presidential Commission to combat falsification of history (2009-12) was established under President Dmitrii Medvedev, and chaired by Naryshkin. After Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, and the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, legislation was passed in 2014 that criminalises intentional ‘public distribution of lies’ about the Soviet Union in the war.<sup>45</sup> Understandably, in advance of 2017, some Russian journalists questioned the state’s commitment to pluralist discussion of the centenary, in light of the fact that the ruling elite is not averse to declaring national history a matter of national security.<sup>46</sup> In fact, in October 2016, members of the scientific council of Putin’s Security Council proposed establishing something akin to the original Presidential Commission in order to combat any deliberate distortions of the 1917 revolutions. However, that proposal was rejected both by the Presidential Administration and by the RIO, on the basis that the content of discussions of the Revolution was the ‘prerogative of the scientific community.’<sup>47</sup>

What, then, is the state’s approach to the centenary? As a preliminary question, is it even possible to identify a coherent approach? Some scholars and journalists have drawn attention to certain divergences amongst relatively liberal and relatively conservative members of Russia’s ruling elite when it comes to appraisals of the Soviet era. For example, Thomas Sherlock has suggested that the state has struggled to find a dominant narrative on the Soviet period due to ‘ongoing political struggles’ within the regime.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, Medvedev sounded a more resolutely condemnatory tone than Putin when speaking about Stalinism during his presidency (2008-12), but the substance of their respective pronouncements seem closer than might initially appear.<sup>49</sup> Regarding the centenary of 1917, members of the ruling elite have provided slightly different messages or differences of emphasis in their pronouncements, but there is indeed a readily

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identifiable official message, based on several factors. These are: acknowledgement of the terrible consequences of serious social divisions that lead to and result from revolution; stress on the importance of a strong state; emphasis on an overriding continuity in Russian history, which involves inserting 1917 into the narrative of a strong and particular Russian state; recognition of the importance of national unity and historical reconciliation; neutralisation of ideological appraisals and avoidance of any sustained engagement with revolutionary ideology, yet acknowledgement that there were globally positive effects of Soviet socialism; and a commitment to free discussion and the independence of professional historians. Related to this final point, Putin has acknowledged that Russia's history has been characterised by dogmatism and enforced worldviews, and that there is no desire to return to that past.<sup>50</sup> Despite the unambiguous hostility toward revolution on the part of the ruling elite, there is state recognition that the revolutions of 1917 require thought, and a complex, multi-faceted – indeed ambiguous - intellectual approach.<sup>51</sup> In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in December 2016, Putin stated that 'Russian society needs objective, honest, deep analysis' of the events of 1917.<sup>52</sup> In fact, one can find acknowledgement by representatives of the authoritarian Russian state that the revolutions were motivated by ideals of justice, and that they resulted in large measure from the failures of the tsarist regime to reform.<sup>53</sup>

The politics of commemoration, however, are readily apparent in elite political discourse. Central to this has been the motif of an essential continuity in Russian history that survived the Revolution. Naryshkin, for example, has described Russia's history as 'integral and continuous.'<sup>54</sup> This has been accompanied by attempts to foster a unified collective memory, and a tendency towards an outmoded positivism in historical methodology, ostensibly to counteract any 'rewriting' of history (by foreign or Russian historians) for 'geopolitical' reasons.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, there has been a consistent refrain by Russia's leaders, certainly since 2013, that there should be a 'single logic' or a 'single position' in the teaching and understanding of national history.<sup>56</sup> According to one scholar, this signifies the first occasion since the Soviet collapse that a Russian administration has attempted 'to directly manage the production of an official narrative of Russian history.'<sup>57</sup> In

May 2015, the Ministry of Culture, along with some prominent historians (though with some dissenting voices), approved an appeal to Russian society in advance of the centenary of 1917.<sup>58</sup> The appeal suggested that public - including academic - discussion of the revolutions should be 'directed at the consolidation of Russian society, the creation of a single civic position on the basic stages of Russia's development.' This single position would be formed of 'recognition of the unity of historical development' from the Russian empire through the USSR to the present Russian state, and realisation of the 'tragedy of social schism called forth by the events of 1917 and the civil war.' The political agenda behind the state's approach to the centenary is more apparent still in Putin's comments to some business leaders in February 2016 (quoted in the epigraph) that the lessons of the Revolution and the subsequent 'Russian' Civil War should serve to warn of the dangers to Russia of serious societal division and dissent. It is only through 'social consensus,' he suggested, and increased government attention to the importance of patriotic upbringing of citizens, that the independence and security of the state can be guaranteed.<sup>59</sup> The 'independence' of the state here is undoubtedly a reference not just to the absence of foreign meddling in Russia's affairs, but also to Russia's strength on the world stage. This, presumably, is partly what Putin had in mind in 2005 when he famously described the collapse of the USSR as a 'geopolitical catastrophe,' resulting in several years of 'disintegration' at home and loss of great power status abroad.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, the rhetoric of a 'single logic' and 'social consensus' in representations of national history sits uneasily with commitment to respect for multiple interpretations of the past. Similar dissonance has been evident in Putin's pronouncements on historical matters for at least a decade. As Mark Edele has observed, Putin, with his inclination towards a positivist understanding of the past, does not appear to perceive 'the contradiction between the ideological function of history and the insistence that a plurality of views should be expressed.'<sup>61</sup> However, to reiterate, the state's approach to the centenary has recognised the legitimacy of diverse appraisals, despite – or alongside - the discourse of 'social consensus.' On the actual centenary of the October Revolution, the newspaper *Izvestiia* published an article by Valentina Matvienko, Chairperson of the Federation Council (upper house of parliament) and member of the ruling United Russia party. Matvienko acknowledged that diverse interpretations of the Revolution and sometimes heated debates do of course exist in Russia, and she welcomed the plurality of views expressed through

various media. What matters, she noted, is that the Russian people have supposedly proven ‘wiser’ than to allow any tensions to manifest in outbursts of serious disorder. Such ‘wisdom,’ according to Matvienko, is in contrast to the violence that erupted in North Carolina in summer 2017 over the controversial statue of the Civil War general Robert E. Lee.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Matvienko’s appraisal of social discordance during 2017 appears rather sanguine. The film *Matil’da*, which depicts the relationship between the ballerina Matilda Kseshinskaia and the young Nicholas II, generated much controversy for several months. It was finally released in October 2017, but not without considerable protest from Orthodox-monarchist groups (Nicholas II and his family were canonized by the Orthodox Church in 2000).<sup>63</sup> A more pointed indication of irony in relation to the state’s call for ‘reconciliation and accord’ is the fate of the monument devoted to the reconciliation of Reds and Whites in the Civil War, which was due to be erected in Crimea for the Day of People’s Unity in November 2017. This monument, proposed by the Russian Military-Historical Society (RVIO) with the backing of the Ministry of Culture, generated bitter opposition from both local communist supporters and veterans, and White sympathisers. By November, local authorities had at least deferred the idea.<sup>64</sup> What is clear, then, is that there are unmistakable limits to the state’s ability, and desire, to control historical discussion and symbolic meanings.

To return to the appeal of the Ministry of Culture and Putin’s remarks of February 2016, both underline the particular statism that forms such a central component of the ideology of Putin’s long tenure as president. Such statist ideology suggests the importance for Russia of a ‘strong state power, supported by all strata of the population,’ and the mistake of counting on foreign powers for help in internal political struggles.<sup>65</sup> David Brandenberger writes that, rather than simply promote patriotism, national history in Russia under Putin ‘holds that the state is better equipped to safeguard Russian national interests than grassroots political parties, social movements, or civic organizations.’<sup>66</sup> This iteration of statist ‘political consolidation’ under Putin is the most recent example of a phenomenon that has a long pedigree in Russian and Soviet history.<sup>67</sup> Putin’s remarks and the Ministry’s appeal also highlight the elite’s ideological hostility to the very thought of revolution, and their insistence that ‘peaceful,’ reformist methods of resolving social tensions should always be chosen above revolution. The most unambiguously hostile appraisal of the Revolution has come from the Orthodox Church, which has regained much influence in Russian

society after 1991. Citing the destruction of life and freedom that resulted from 1917, as well as Bolshevik repressions of the Church, the Patriarch marked the centenary of the February Revolution by castigating the Revolution as a ‘great crime.’<sup>68</sup>

Yet, one of the effects of a consensual and integrative approach to the country’s past, informed by a statist political culture, is that elements of the national story most likely to generate significant public divergence should be accepted as unchangeable parts of that story. This helps explain the persistent ubiquity of Soviet symbolism throughout Russia, especially the image and name of Lenin. Responding to a question about this from German radio in summer 2017, the executive director of the FIO, Konstantin Mogilevskii, averred that ‘nobody would support’ the removal of Lenin monuments, and he implied that efforts to ‘wage war with spectres’ of the past would unnecessarily challenge ‘social consensus.’<sup>69</sup> It is evident, then, that the overwhelmingly negative phenomenon of revolution must somehow be integrated into the grand national narrative. It must be ‘owned’ as part of ‘our’ history. One of the fullest and most interesting discussions on this theme of state continuity in Russian history, and how the Revolution can be integrated into the narrative, is a lecture delivered in November 2015 at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO) by the Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinskii.<sup>70</sup> His central argument in that lecture was that the victor in the Civil War was neither the Reds nor the anti-Bolshevik Whites, but ‘historic Russia’ (*istoricheskaiia Rossiia*); that is, a strong, integral Russian state that triumphed through Russia’s revolutionary troubles. This seemingly agentless, supra-human historic destiny - ‘that same Russia that existed a thousand years before the revolution, and will exist in the future’ - was more powerful than any human volition. Medinskii’s reasoning is that the historic role of the Bolsheviks was to give effect to this essential continuity of Russian history, to restore the authority and integrity of a Russian state that encompassed much of the former empire. According to Medinskii, the service rendered by the Bolsheviks to the deeper logic of Russia’s history occurred regardless of their ‘utopian conceptions.’ Through such an interpretive strategy, Medinskii is able not only to assert a statist reading of the Revolution, but to suggest a framework for reconciling opposing views of the legitimacy or otherwise of the February and October revolutions.<sup>71</sup>

Medinskii’s viewpoint suggests that a rather complex attitude towards the Revolution, and perhaps even to Lenin and Leninism, is available to Russia’s political and intellectual elite. This

is consonant with what Thomas Sherlock suggests is the more general approach to the Soviet past on the part of the state, based on the assembly or 'bricolage' of diverse, often contradictory features of that past to buttress the patriotic unity of state and people.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, Leninism was about 'smashing' the existing state, and there would appear to be little use in its ideological substance. On the other, it served a useful role in helping to reconstitute a strong state power. However, ambivalence towards the Revolution derives not simply from a statist reading of Russian history. 'I would say that the Revolution was a tragedy,' acknowledged Konstantin Mogilevskii of the FIO, but a tragedy that 'in the final analysis catalysed progress.'<sup>73</sup> Explicit acknowledgement of such ambiguity has in fact come from the very apex of political power, especially when directed at an international audience; both Putin and his foreign minister have been rather expansive about what precisely constitutes the Revolution's historic 'progress.'

Unsurprisingly, as foreign minister, Lavrov (in an article published in English) has lauded the service rendered by the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in deterring American-led nuclear aggression, and in supporting post-war decolonization. More interesting perhaps, Lavrov has referenced the Soviet welfare state as a model for Western European post-war welfare systems, adopted in response to the threat of Soviet-style socialism.<sup>74</sup> Putin, in remarks at the international Valdai discussion club in October 2017, similarly acknowledged the 'powerful stimulus' provided by Bolshevik ideology and the Soviet state for positive developments in the West. In particular, he mentioned rises in living standards, increased gender equality, labour reforms, educational provision, the overcoming of racial segregation in countries such as the United States, and a more general advance in human rights.<sup>75</sup> In fact, in early 2016, Putin remarked that he had not joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union out of necessity, and that he continued to see attraction in the almost biblical ideals of socialism and communism.<sup>76</sup> The effects of the collapse of the USSR, according to Lavrov and Putin, have been an increasingly precarious global security situation, a consequence in large measure of the hubris of the West. In addition, Lavrov has pointed to growing socio-economic inequalities and neoliberalism in much of Europe and the United States, in the absence of the Soviet alternative. Thus, Lavrov and Putin have been able to suggest that the current Russian state is more than a continuation of a historically strong state; it is also the



successor to a historic state - whether Muscovy, imperial Russia, or the Soviet Union - that has served an integral and at times leading role in determining and advancing 'European civilization.'<sup>77</sup>

The discourse of historical continuity, then, points to the ambivalent, complex, and somewhat incoherent views of the ruling elite regarding the October Revolution and its consequences. Yet, it also suggests a certain harmonisation between the views of the ruling elite and those of large sections of Russian society. An opinion poll conducted by the respected Levada Centre in March 2017 found that 38% of respondents thought that the October Revolution had played a largely positive role in Russian history (25% thought it largely negative), mainly because of its stimulation of social and economic development. Half of respondents thought that Russia after 1917 had continued along a path in accordance with its traditions and national particularities.<sup>78</sup> It should also be noted that amongst Russian and Western scholars, a consensus to a large degree has developed that the Revolution ought to be written into the broader narrative of modern Russian (and European) history. In particular, historiographical emphasis over the last twenty years has highlighted the significance of the First World War as the context of the Revolution, and historians have noted the relevance of a particular inclination towards statism in Russian political culture.<sup>79</sup> In other words, in somewhat Tocquevillian fashion, it is important to recognise continuities – as well as changes - in state practices and cultural attitudes across 1917.

However, and obvious though it may seem, stress on historical continuity on the part of Russia's ruling elite reflects their political concerns. Part of the impulse behind this is the role of historical contention in present-day international relations. Particularly acute in this regard are suggestions of immoral equivalence of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. In several former Soviet states, such as Latvia and Estonia, museums of Soviet occupation established after the fall of the USSR have attempted precisely to convey that message, accompanied by more general attempts to portray Russia (in whatever historical form) as the historic enemy Other.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, in 2009 both the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) passed condemnatory resolutions that implied a certain amount of equivalence between both 'totalitarian' regimes.<sup>81</sup> Such suggestions are certainly understandable. However, in light of the enormous sacrifices borne by the wartime Soviet population, and the importance of the Soviet triumph over the Nazi regime in constructions of

patriotic Russian identity, one can also understand that they are viscerally and intellectually unacceptable to the Russian state and much of Russian society.

Lavrov's article of 2016 draws attention to concerns amongst Russian political and intellectual elites that the centenary of the Revolution would provide another channel for Western anti-Russian commentary, a depiction of the October Revolution as 'some barbaric coup that allegedly messed up the entire history of Europe; or still worse, to equate the Soviet regime to Nazism.'<sup>82</sup> At the first meeting of the official centenary organisation committee in January 2017, Mikhail Shvydkoi, Putin's representative for matters of international cultural cooperation and a former Minister of Culture, similarly warned that the centenary would likely be used in anti-Russian Western media to criticise Soviet history in its totality.<sup>83</sup> These comments were echoed somewhat by Putin himself in the last of his interviews with the US filmmaker, Oliver Stone, aired in June 2017. In that interview, Putin criticised the 'excessive demonization' of Stalin as 'one means of attacking the Soviet Union and Russia.'<sup>84</sup> It would appear important, then, that the Russian state would provide its own narrative (outlined above) to counter-act such appraisals, for both a domestic and international audience.

On the basis of those remarks, it is instructive to note that in January 2018, the Ministry of Culture temporarily revoked permission to allow screenings in Russian cinemas of the successful British-French satirical comedy film, *The Death of Stalin* (2017). This came as a response to condemnation of the film by the Ministry's Public Council, members of which cited the film's 'pollution' of the country's 'historical symbols,' and its disrespectful portrayal of Marshal Zhukov. The chair of the Council, the writer Iurii Poliakov, described the film in terms of 'ideological struggle with our country.'<sup>85</sup> Criticisms of the film demonstrate that Russian cultural and political elites have appropriated the vogueish language of 'information warfare' between the West and Russia reminiscent of the Cold War, but they also suggest the depth to which elements of the Soviet past are bound with projections of Russian identity in the present. Screenings of *The Death of Stalin* would diverge from the tendency in Putin-era Russian cinema to utilise the genre of historical film to reflect a patriotic image of the country and its citizens.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, Putin has explicitly stated that it would be impermissible to 'ban anything' such as a film or publication unless it were actually criminal in nature.<sup>87</sup>

*The Soviet past and political repression*

One very significant dimension to the politics of history and memory in Russia and the legacies of the October Revolution, and the most obvious challenge to the overriding narrative of *gosudarstvennost'* (statehood), is the extraordinarily repressive history of the Soviet state. This is the question of a Russian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). How should the terrible history of political repression and violence in the USSR and Eastern Bloc be approached? How thorough, intensive, and extensive should be official and public examination, debate, and acceptance of this history? What should the attitude be to those individuals and organisations that try to keep that aspect of the Soviet past at the forefront of public memory? These are complex questions for much of the country's political and intellectual elite, as well as for Russian society. The violent history of the USSR presents a further complication to the Russian state because, in 1991, Russia's newly independent leaders determined that the state would become the legal successor to the USSR. Russia's relations with post-Soviet and post-Eastern Bloc states are, quite often, closely associated with the issues of Soviet occupation and repression.<sup>88</sup>

Once again, the message from Russia's ruling elite is not entirely clear. Contrary to the general impression of scholars and others that Putin's presidency has allowed for a positive appraisal of Stalinism that reflects an increasingly authoritarian and belligerent regime, the reality is more complex.<sup>89</sup> In recent years, there has been unequivocal state condemnation of the political repressions of the Stalin era. On 30 October 2017, a state-funded national monument to victims of political repression in the USSR, the 'Wall of Sorrow,' was opened in central Moscow by Putin. Speaking after Putin at the opening of the monument, Vladimir Lukin, chair of the memorial fund for victims of political repression and member of the Federation Council, lamented that young generations are well versed in their forebears' triumphs but know little of the tragedies of mass repression and Stalinist totalitarian dictatorship. Those terrible tragedies, he urged, should also be 'part of our historical memory.'<sup>90</sup> In fact, the violence that accompanied the Russian Revolution is sometimes cited by those that speak out most firmly in principled opposition to revolution. In an interview with a state news agency, the authoritative historian Aleksandr Chubar'ian of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a leading figure within the RIO, stated that the main lesson of 1917 is that revolution should never be repeated because it suggests 'violence and victims.'<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, it is clear that the ruling political elite would rather focus on a more triumphant narrative of the country's past, one that posits national overcoming of past traumas.

In his annual speech to the Federal Assembly in December 2016, Putin addressed the imminent centenary and stated plainly that the lessons of national history are needed 'for reconciliation, for strengthening the social, political, civic consensus that we have today achieved.' 'We are one people,' he noted, 'and we have one Russia.' Hence, he continued, it is 'impermissible to drag along the splits, rancour, resentments and bitterness of the past in our present-day lives.' To defy this would be, as he put it, to 'speculate' for particular political or other reasons 'on the tragedies that affected practically every family in Russia, regardless of which the side of the barricades their forebears were.'<sup>92</sup> Putin's statement could be read as a reference to the long history of political repression in the Soviet Union, and not just to the divisions of the Civil War that were his ostensible focus. Rather more unambiguously, Putin concluded his address at the opening of the 'Wall of Sorrow' with the message that it would be impermissible to agitate for a settling of old accounts (in relation to the violence of the Soviet state). Nothing or nobody should 'push' society towards confrontation on that basis.<sup>93</sup> The implication seems to be that it is time to draw a line under the sorrow and mourning of the past and to move on, to affix its place in national history as something to be condemned, but not to encourage further deep excavation.<sup>94</sup> The present nadir in relations with Western powers suggests that this attitude is unlikely to change soon, as the state will seek to reinforce patriotic pride in the positive achievements of the Soviet regime. It is within this ideological context that one can understand the tense relationship between the state and Memorial, the internationally-renowned human rights organisation that has for almost thirty years been at the forefront of attempts to memorialise the victims and research the processes of Soviet repressions. Memorial has been accused by Kremlin supporters of proffering a type of memory politics that occasioned a 'crisis' of national identity in the early 1990s, through comparison of Stalinism and fascism.<sup>95</sup> Most recently, Memorial has been embroiled in legal charges of having violated the 2012 law on foreign agents.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Memorial's struggles might serve to illustrate the potentially admonitory implications of the official search for 'reconciliation' and 'consensus.'

### Concluding thoughts

The centenary of the Russian Revolution has provided a fascinating opportunity to observe the politics of history in contemporary Russia, to understand the complex portrayals of the Soviet past

in projections of contemporary Russian national identity, and to enhance awareness of the controversies of historical representation in post-Soviet and post-socialist spaces. Russia's ruling elite have adopted a low-key approach to the centenary. This is a consequence of their ideological hostility toward revolution, as well as the unavoidable public attention during the centenary on the fate of the authoritarian tsarist regime, and the revolutionary ideals that animated those historic events and processes. The state has no desire to concentrate that attention even more. Yet, the centenary is too significant to be ignored, and this article has suggested that it does in fact have a place in the state's preferred national historical narrative. The message of the ruling elite has been that the current administration is the legitimate heir to and guarantor of the historic role and even destiny of Russia as a strong, integral political power, a message that is especially important at a time of deteriorating relations with Western powers. Their message has also been that the continued security of the state is not guaranteed, and that forces from without or within must be prevented from undermining it. Indeed, as Il'ia Kalinin has perceptively observed, the official state discourse of historical 'reconciliation' and 'social consensus' undoubtedly serves 'to smear any oppositional activity as synonymous with the cataclysmic image of revolution.'<sup>97</sup> Yet, however challenging the ruptures of 1917 might appear to the narrative of 'historic Russia' as a strong and persistent state power, the revolutionary upheavals of a century ago have been presented in a way that reinforces that narrative, allowing for absorption and integration of the Revolution and Bolshevik state-building. However alien to the incumbent elite is the communist idealism of the founders of the Soviet state, that same state and political system oversaw the glorious triumph in the Great Patriotic War, and attainment of a position of global influence and leadership through its alternative to American-led liberal-capitalist hegemony. Hence, there has been a distinct (and at times quite deliberate) ambiguity and complexity in the state's appraisal of the Russian Revolution, despite its predominantly negative tone.

The critical importance of concord between the state and the people has had a long pedigree in modern Russian political thought. The role of the individual leader and the cult of the leader's personality have historically served to embody this, and Vladimir Putin plays that role today in a way not witnessed in Russia for quite some time. A unified historical narrative and historical myth have also been significant components of an idealised projection of national unity. During the centenary of the Russian Revolution, the official discourse of 'reconciliation' and 'consensus' have seemed at times almost farcical, as demonstrated most clearly by heated manifestations of discontent over the film *Matil'da*, and over construction of the proposed Reconciliation monument in Crimea. Nonetheless, the ruling elite has attempted to play up the supposed strength of

democracy in Russia by pointing to the fact that the centenary year has passed without any significant manifestations of disorder over the public memory of events fundamentally important for the history of the country. There is also recognition on the part of the ruling elite that perhaps the key lesson of 1917 is the duty of the state to serve the needs of its people, and to avoid a potentially catastrophic future revolutionary situation.<sup>98</sup> The other - and often dominant - side to this sense of concord, or social contract, between state and people in Russian political culture is the duty of citizens to the broader collective and to the state, and the tendency for those groups or individuals that challenge this to be cast as unpatriotic and even treacherous. The extent to which political and cultural elites, and indeed ordinary citizens, truly believe the message of patriotic unity is open to question. However, that message has certainly helped to serve as a powerful mobilizing force and as a bulwark against the rise of widespread political opposition, especially in the face of heightened Russophobia in the West. It appears that Russia's rulers have learned some lessons from 1917, but how deeply they have done so remains to be seen.

#### ENDNOTES

1. 'U nas net i ne mozhnet byit' nikakoi drugoi ob''ediniayushchei idei, krome patriotizma,' *Kommersant*, 3 February 2016, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2907316> Accessed 10 November 2017.
2. Torbakov, 'History, Memory,' 43-4; Malinova, 'The embarrassing centenary,' 275; and Marci Shore, 'Poland Digs Itself a Memory Hole,' *New York Times*, 4 February 2018, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/poland-holocaust-law-justice-government.html> Accessed 10 February 2018. For an introduction to the particular challenges presented by memory in Eastern Europe, see Blacker et al., eds, *Memory and Theory*, 1-11.
3. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations*, 3 ff.
4. Torbakov, 'History, Memory,' 43. One can point to the violent events in North Carolina in August 2017 concerning the statue of the Civil War general Robert E. Lee, or the debates in South Africa and Britain since 2015 regarding statues of the imperialist Cecil Rhodes. On 'memory events' as 'acts of revisiting the past that create ruptures with its established cultural meanings,' see Blacker et al., eds, *Memory and Theory*, 6. National commemorations straddle the division between 'memory' and 'history,' as distinguished by Pierre Nora, although they are primarily the realm of 'history.' According to Nora, memories are unstable, evolving things

borne by 'living societies' that are rather unconsciously 'vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation.' History is an intellectual representation of the past that requires 'analysis and criticism.' See Nora, 'Between Memory and History,' 8-9.

5.Malinova, 'The embarrassing centenary,' 275, and Tikhonov, 'Revoliutsiia 1917 g.,' 93.

6.See Schwartz, 'The Social Context,' 374, and Gillis, ed., *Commemorations*, 4.

7.See Weedon and Jordan, 'Collective memory,' 144.

8.See, for example, Mau and Starodubrovskaya, *The Challenge of Revolution*, 30, 290.

9.Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*.

10.See here Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*; Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse*; Bartov and Weitz, eds, *Shatterzones of Empire*; Gerwarth and Horne, eds, *War in Peace*; and the special issue of *Contemporary European History*, edited by Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman, Vol.19, No.3 (2010).

11.Koselleck and Richter, 'Crisis,' 372.

12.John A. Murphy, 'Government priority is to make 1916 anniversary politically useful,' *Irish Times*, 28 September 2015, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/government-priority-is-to-make-1916-anniversary-politically-useful-1.2366850> Accessed 15 March 2017.

See also Madigan, 'Introduction,' 2.

13.Isakova, 'The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations,' 231.

14.Kelley, *Russian Politics*, 208.

15.See Wood, 'Performing Memory,' 176, and Guillory, 'It's the Series Finale.'

16.Hemment, *Youth Politics*, 26-8.

17.See here Malinova, 'The embarrassing centenary,' 273.

18.Rendle and Lively, 'Inspiring a "fourth revolution"?' 239.

19.Ibid, 241.

20.Horvath, 'Putin's "Preventive Counter-Revolution",' 1-25.

21.On the opposition movement of 2011-12, see Monaghan, *The New Politics*, 91-122.

22.Edele, 'Fighting Russia's History Wars,' 93.

23.See Sergei Naryshkin's remarks at the first meeting of the official 1917 committee, 23 January 2017, available at: <http://rushistory.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/pervoe-zasedanie-organizatsionnogo-komiteta-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniyu-meropriyatij-posvyashchennykh-100-letiyu-revolutsii-1917-goda.html> Accessed 13 November 2017. See also Rendle and Lively, 'Inspiring a "fourth revolution"?' 245.

24. 'Putin podpisal zakon ob NKO, vyipolniayushchikh funkstii inostrannogo agenta,' *RIA Novosti*, 21 July 2012, available at: <https://ria.ru/politics/20120721/705224525.html> Accessed 28 March 2018.
25. See Horvath, 'Putin's "Preventive Counter-Revolution",' 18.
26. Rendle and Lively, 'Inspiring a "fourth revolution"?' 245.
27. See here Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone*, 11; 142-4; 425-8.
28. Lavrov, 'Russia's Foreign Policy.'
29. Fedor Krashenninikov, 'Neudobnyi 17-i god,' *Vedomosti*, 1 November 2016, available at: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/columns/2016/11/02/663296-neudobnii-17-i> Accessed 9 November 2017.
30. Schwartz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration,' 377.
31. Tikhonov, 'Revoliutsiia 1917 g. v kommémorativnykh praktikakh,' 99.
32. Malinova, 'The embarrassing centenary,' 77.
33. Rendle and Retish, 'Introduction,' 1.
34. Ibid. See: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41498> Accessed 17 February 2018.
35. See, for example, the report on Channel One state television on 7 November 2017, available at: [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-11-07/335784-v\\_chest\\_stoletiya\\_oktyabrskoy\\_revolutsii\\_predstaviteli\\_kprf\\_organizovali\\_shestvie\\_v\\_tsentre\\_moskvy](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-11-07/335784-v_chest_stoletiya_oktyabrskoy_revolutsii_predstaviteli_kprf_organizovali_shestvie_v_tsentre_moskvy) Accessed 18 April 2018.
36. 'Sergei Naryshkin na zasedanii Prezidiuma RIO i soveta fonda "Istoriya Otechestva",' 26 December 2017, available at: <http://rushistory.org/sergey-naryshkin/vystupleniya-s-e-naryshkina/sergej-naryshkin-na-itogovom-zasedanii-prezidiuma-río-i-soveta-fonda-istoriya-otechestva.html>. Accessed 1 January 2018.
37. 'Rossiiskoe istoricheskoe obshchestvo podvelo itogi ukhodiashchego goda,' 27 December 2017, available at: <https://historyrussia.org/sobytiya/rossijskoe-istoricheskoe-obshchestvo-podvelo-itogi-ukhodyashchego-goda.html> Accessed 12 January 2018. The author was invited to present a paper at a conference funded by the FIO at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, in September 2017. This conference resulted in wide-ranging and sometimes lively discussion of a variety of themes and questions.
38. Rendle and Lively, 'Inspiring a "fourth revolution"?' 235, and Hemment, *Youth Politics*, 14.
39. See here Laruelle, 'Negotiating History,' 75.
40. 'Vyistuplenie Sergeia Naryshkina na Obshchem sobranii RIO,' 4 July 2017, available at: <http://rushistory.org/sergey-naryshkin/vystupleniya-s-e-naryshkina/vystuplenie-predsdatelya->



[na-obshchem-sobranii-rossijskogo-istoricheskogo-obshchestva-2017-goda.html](http://na-obshchem-sobranii-rossijskogo-istoricheskogo-obshchestva-2017-goda.html) Accessed 11 January 2018.

41. See Edele, 'Fighting Russia's History Wars,' 90-124; Wood, 'Performing Memory,' 172-200; and Norris, 'Memory for Sale,' 201-29.

42. 'Putin rasskazal uchenym o podryivnom role Lenina v rossiiskoi istorii,' *Interfax*, 21 January 2016, available at: <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/490856> Accessed 18 January 2018.

43. 'Ol'ga Vasil'eva: Ia ne retrograd i ne stalinistka,' *Interfax*, 7 November 2016, available at: <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/535818> Accessed 10 November 2017.

44. 'Putin boitsia gosudarstvennaia perevorota v 2017 gody,' *Obozrevatel*, 27 January 2016, available at: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/abroad/82596-putin-boitsya-gosudarstvennogo-perevorota-v-2017-godu-rferl.htm> Accessed 10 November 2017; and Timur Mukhamutulin, 'Medinskii nachal podgotovku k revoliutsii,' 25 May 2015, available at: [https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2015/05/20\\_a\\_6695345.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2015/05/20_a_6695345.shtml) Accessed 10 November 2017.

45. See <https://rg.ru/2009/05/20/komissia-dok.html> Accessed 10 February 2018. On the 2014 legislation, see Edele, 'Fighting Russia's History Wars,' 90-124.

46. 'Predmet natsional'noi bezopasnosti,' *Kommersant*, 5 April 2016, available at: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2956716> Accessed 24 March 2018.

47. Irina Nagorniykh and Viktor Khamraev, 'O roli tochnosti v istorii,' *Kommersant*, 31 October 2016, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3131019> Accessed 10 November 2017.

48. Sherlock, 'Russian politics,' 47. On certain divergences within the ruling elite towards the past, see also Edele, 'Fighting Russia's History Wars,' esp. 94.

49. On the differences between Medvedev and Putin in their remarks on Stalin and Stalinism, see Roman Badanin and Aleksandr Artem'ev, 'Medvedev popravil Stalina,' 7 May 2010. Available at: [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/05/07\\_a\\_3364297.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/05/07_a_3364297.shtml) Accessed 11 April 2018.

50. 'Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu,' 1 December 2016, available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379> Accessed 9 November 2017. Interestingly, Thomas Sherlock has observed the Kremlin's unwillingness to impose a particular historical narrative that suggests hyper-nationalism or re-Stalinization. See Sherlock, 'Russian Politics,' 45.

51. 'K 100-letii. Vevlikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii: osmyslenie vo imia konsolidatsii,' *Novosti Ministerstvo Kul'turyi Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 21 May 2015, available at: <http://www.mkrf.ru/m/654692/> Accessed 21 December 2016. See also Valentina Matvienko, 'Vsmatrivaemsia v proshloe, chtobyi luchshe vidtn' budushchee,' *Izvestiia*, 7 November 2017, available at:

- <http://www.council.gov.ru/events/chairman/85457/> Accessed 16 November 2017.
52. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379> Accessed 9 November 2017.
53. <http://www.mkrf.ru/m/654692/> Accessed 21 December 2016; Matvienko, 'Vsmatrivaemsia v proshloe.'
54. Sergei Naryshkin, 'Istoriia Rossii tselostna i nepreryivna,' 10 April 2014, available at: [http://www.duma.gov.ru/news/274/648768/?sphrase\\_id=2398451](http://www.duma.gov.ru/news/274/648768/?sphrase_id=2398451) Accessed 10 November 2017.
55. See the transcript of Putin's meeting with young academic historians and history teachers on 4 November 2014, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46951> Accessed 1 March 2018.
56. See also Rendle and Lively, 'Inspiring a "fourth revolution"?' 237.
57. Sherlock, 'Russian politics,' 51.
58. A link to the text of the appeal appears here, 'K 100-letii. Vevlikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii: osmyslenie vo imia konsolidatsii,' Novosti Ministerstvo Kul'turyi Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 21 May 2015, available at: <http://www.mkrf.ru/m/654692/> Accessed 21 December 2016. For a report of some dissenting voices at the meeting, see Timur Mukhamutilin, 'Medinskii nachal podgotovku k revoliutsii,' 25 May 2015, available at: [https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2015/05/20\\_a\\_6695345.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2015/05/20_a_6695345.shtml) Accessed 10 November 2017.
59. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2907316> Accessed 10 November 2017.
60. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTvswU5Eco> Accessed 10 November 2017.
61. Edele, 'Fighting Russia's History Wars,' 99-100.
62. Matvienko, 'Vsmatrivaemsia v proshloe.'
63. See Andrew E. Kramer, '“Matilda,” Heretical to Some in Russia, Mostly Elicits Giggles,' *The New York Times*, 25 October 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/25/world/europe/matilda-russia-tsar.html> Accessed 27 March 2018; and 'Sporyi po "Matil'de": Novyi fil'm Uchitelia vyzval skandal do vyikhoda na ekran,' *RIA Novosti*, 2 November 2016, available at: <https://ria.ru/culture/20161102/1480533338.html> Accessed 27 March 2018.
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66. Brandenberger, 'A New *Short Course*?' 832.
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81. See <https://www.oscepa.org/documents/all-documents/annual-sessions/2009-vilnius/declaration-6/261-2009-vilnius-declaration-eng/file>, 48-9, accessed 28 March 2018, and <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> Accessed 28 March 2018.

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94. On these points, see also Malinova, 'The embarrassing centenary,' 272, 280. For an excellent essay on elite and social views on Stalin and Stalinism in Russia today, including political repression, see Makhotina, 'Nostalgia, Pride and Shame.'
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98. See here Matvienko, 'Vsmatrivaemsia v proshloe.'

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