



Writing an Illiberal History of the Russian Revolution: How the Kremlin Projected Policy into the Past, 1985–2011

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Abstract

Recent changes in global politics have revitalized research into the ideas, beliefs, principles, myths, and symbols that shape Russia's perception of the world and international relations. My empirical research explores how illiberal historical narratives of the 1917 October Revolution were transformed into an important component of Russia's contemporary political quasi-ideology. Though the Soviet foundation myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution has always been a focus of interest for historians of Russia, including those who use the memory-studies paradigm, my research is the first to analyze this significant historical event through the prism of illiberalism studies and the illiberal memory concept. Analyzing an extensive database of primary sources, I found that in the late 1980s the gradual decriminalization of anti-Bolshevik narratives written during the period of the Russian Civil War resulted in the renaissance of conservative memory culture. Also, the political struggle over attempts to confront historical injustices triggered a mobilization of illiberal Soviet narratives based on Marxist-Leninist views of world politics. When the failure of liberal reforms conditioned the rise of right- and left-wing populist movements and resulted in the political turnaround of 2000 with the election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency, these illiberal narratives were mobilized first by illiberal politicians and later by the Kremlin. A worsening of relations between the West and Russia led to the rapid illiberalization of the Russian state and a rollback of liberal memory culture.

Keywords: October Revolution, illiberal remembrance, memory boom, memory politics, United Russia, Communist Party of the Russian Federation

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The Kremlin precedes every foreign-policy move—including its full-scale invasion of Ukraine—with a retrospective journey into the past.¹ Illiberal memory has come to function as a state quasi-ideology in which the official narrative of Russia's thousand-year-old statehood is considered to be the backbone of the country's national identity, worldview, and culture, as well as the main source from which the Kremlin "learns important lessons for solving not only contemporary, but also future problems."² The Kremlin is not alone in this endeavor: every Russian loyal opposition (in Russia, referred to as "systemic opposition") party program routinely refers to historical interpretations that may challenge their political rivals ideologically while still consolidating around a shared illiberal platform.

This article traces the process of incorporating illiberal interpretations of the Russian Revolution into the existing state's official historical narrative between 1985 and 2011. Considered to be the crucial juncture in Russia's history, the February and October Revolutions and the subsequent Civil War (1918–1920) constitute a key aspect of the state's memory policy. Attitudes toward these events reflect perceptions of the country's imperial past, socialism, Communism, the Soviet political and economic system, Stalinism, and even the causes of World War II. Moreover, the way Russia's citizens view the Revolution and the Civil War reveals their vision of the birth and collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and how they locate these events within their post-Soviet national identity. However, despite extensive study of the Russian state's politics of memory in general and commemoration of the Revolutions and the Civil War in particular (the centennial of the Russian Revolution in 2017 inspired a large number of publications) nobody has yet examined these phenomena through the prism of illiberal remembrance.³ International experts and observers began to raise public awareness of the issue of Moscow's passion for history only in the early 2010s, when Russian leaders instrumentalized controversial historical narratives to legitimate their anti-Western foreign policy.⁴

Here I adopt the concept of illiberal memory. In his seminal article, "The Rise of Illiberal Memory," Gavriel Rosenfeld has shown that, like illiberalism at large, illiberal remembrance is deeply rooted in conservatism and has therefore inherited some features of conservative memory culture, such as the replacement of a self-

1 See Vladimir Putin, "Ob istoricheskoy edinstve ukrainsev i russkikh," Kremlin website, President of Russia, July 12, 2021, accessed November 29, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>; Vladimir Putin, "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 24 fevralia 2022 g.," Kremlin website, President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>; etc.

2 "Vstrecha Vladimira Putina s uchastnikami Obshcherossiskogo istoricheskogo sobraniia, organizovannogo RVIO i RIO 22 iunია 2016 g. v Kremle," *Vse my—Rossiia*, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.samddn.ru/novosti/novosti/vladimir-putin-rossiyskaya-istoriya-eto-osnova-nashego-natsionalnogo-mirovozzreniya/>.

3 Olga Malinova, "Neudobnyi iubilei: itogi pereosmyslivaniia 'mifa osnovaniia' SSSR v ofitsial'nom istoricheskom narrative RF," *Politicheskaya nauka*, no. 3 (2017), 13; Boris Kolonitsky, Maria Matskevich, "Desakralizatsiia revoliutsii i antirevoliutsionnyi consensus v sovremennoi Rossii," *Mir Rossii: Sotsiologiya, Etnologiya*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2018), 78; Vladimir Bekliamishev, "100-letie revoliutsii 1917 g. v Rossii: osobennosti i tendentsii v otnoshenii gosudarstvennoi istoricheskoi politiki," *Russkaya politologiya*, no. 2 (2017), 110; Vitaly Tikhonov, "Obraz Revoliutsii epokhi kontsa istorii," *Gefter*, <http://gefter.ru/archive/author/tikhonov>, etc. See also my book with Marlene Laruelle, *Memory Politics and the Russian Civil War: Reds versus Whites* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

4 Nikolay Kopusov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "World War II Memories and Local Media in the Russian North: Velikii Novgorod and Murmansk," in *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. David Hoffmann (London: Routledge, 2017); "Shared Memory Culture? Nationalizing the 'Great Patriotic War' in the Ukrainian-Russian Borderlands," in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak (Oxford: Berghahn, 2016); James Pearce, "Nasha Istoriia: The Russian Revolutions, the State, School Textbooks and Public Celebrations under Putin," *Revolutionary Russia* 32, no. 1 (May 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546545.2019.1607422>; Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Foreign Policy Narratives," George Marshall European Center for Security Studies 042 (November 2019), <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/russian-foreign-policy-narratives-0>; etc.

critical understanding of national history with “triumphalistic versions of the past that sustain national pride, honor, and virtue.”⁵ Basing his analysis on numerous cases worldwide, Rosenfeld has also developed a timeline wherein the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of the global rise of liberal memory, and the 2008 financial crisis launched an illiberal remembrance backlash.⁶ He has argued persuasively that the “protectionist reaction” to the global spread of a liberal culture of remembrance resulted from right-wing populist politicians’ rise to power.⁷ To confront the liberal memory boom, nationalist politicians deployed their own mixed strategy of memory denialism and affirmation, as well as an array of tactics including normalization, rejecting guilt, establishing an identity of victimhood, legislating remembrance, and so on.⁸

The understanding of illiberal memory as a backlash against the booming liberal culture of remembrance aligns with Marlene Laruelle’s broader definition of illiberalism as a rejection of liberalism following the experience of globalization and liberal reforms: resentment toward liberalization triggers the rise of political movements and politicians who “denounce the political, economic, and cultural liberalism embodied in supranational institutions, globalization, multiculturalism, and minority-rights protections.”⁹ She argues that this illiberal resentment is especially intense in Russia due to the very painful consequences of attempts to implement liberal market reforms there in the 1990s. Eventually, most Russians “came to associate it with a host of traumas, including total disruption of everyday life, a decline in socioeconomic conditions, a sharp decrease in life expectancy, and more.”¹⁰ This is the reason why a significant part of Russian society views the rejection of liberalism as some kind of “returning to normalcy.”¹¹ Laruelle also emphasized that during President Vladimir Putin’s rule, illiberal beliefs and attitudes have been gradually taken over by the state, indicating that the proponents of illiberalism received state backing.¹²

Here I explore how competing illiberal historical narratives of the Russian Revolution of 1917 were transformed into a quasi-official state ideology following the gradual decriminalization of anti-Soviet interpretations of history in the late 1980s. I study political party programs, publications, and interviews with and declarations of Russian presidents, government officials, and prominent politicians. Since an illiberal history of the Russian Revolution has been written by not only the state but also numerous other actors, from Communists to Russian Orthodox fundamentalists, I also examine the programs of the non-systemic political movements: the National-Bolsheviks, the Russian National Unity party,¹³ the National Patriotic Front (Pamyat),

5 Gavriel Rosenfeld, “The Rise of Illiberal Memory,” *Memory Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (August 2023), 820, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020988771>.

6 Rosenfeld, “The Rise of Illiberal Memory,” 822.

7 Rosenfeld, 822–823.

8 Rosenfeld, 823–828.

9 Marlene Laruelle, “Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction,” *East European Politics*, vol. 38, no. 2 (June 2022), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>.

10 Laruelle, “Making Sense of Russia’s Illiberalism,” 116.

11 Laruelle, 116.

12 Laruelle, 117.

13 This movement refers to itself, and is referred to by the Russian media, as a “party,” even though, technically speaking, it has never won any elections.

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and the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, as well as Metropolitan Tikhon's (Shevkunov) filmography.¹⁴

The Decriminalization of the White Russian Illiberal Narratives of the Russian Revolution during Perestroika

The core of all currently circulating illiberal historical interpretations of the Russian Revolution was formed on the basis of White (anti-Soviet) and Red (Soviet) military-political propaganda and agitation concerning the Civil War (1918–1920). The Bolsheviks applied Karl Marx's critique of liberalism (as a bourgeois-capitalist ideology that sought to justify the exploitation of labor) against the liberal Russian Provisional Government, the White movement, and their allies among the Entente powers.¹⁵ The Soviet leadership never forgot what Mikhail Pokrovskii (1868–1932), the founder of the Soviet school of Marxist history, said: "History is politics projected into the past."¹⁶

For more than 70 years, the narrative of the Great October Socialist Revolution opening the road to the creation of the world's first socialist state constituted the key principle of Soviet propaganda against countries with liberal-democratic political systems. Following Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, Soviet ideologists interpreted the October Revolution as having been the only possible way to ensure national survival following the collapse caused by the Provisional Government. Soviet propaganda emphasized that the Bolsheviks signed the separate peace treaty with Germany because, unlike Minister-Chairman Aleksandr Kerensky and his pro-British and pro-American Provisional Government, the former did not seek to sell Russian soldiers to the Allies as cannon fodder.¹⁷ Another important feature of the Soviet narrative was the rhetoric of socialist modernization: after overthrowing the liberals, the Bolsheviks rebuilt backward and weak Russia into a powerful and modern socialist state.

Formed as the anti-Bolshevik movement's reaction to its defeat in the Russian Civil War, the competing White narrative reflected the broad ideological and political spectrum of the Bolsheviks' opponents. The liberals and the right wing of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party portrayed Lenin and Trotsky as subversive German agents who had unlawfully overthrown the Provisional Government in October 1917, forcefully dispersed the All-Russian Constituent Assembly and, in violation of Russia's Triple Entente alliance commitments, signed the separate Soviet-German Peace Treaty.¹⁸ The monarchist right wing romanticized the country's pre-

14 Metropolitan Tikhon, rumored to be a personal confessor and spiritual advisor to Vladimir Putin, is a prolific writer, filmmaker, and organizer of historical exhibitions.

15 Lenin's Collected Works, 4th English Edition, vol. 29, *What Is Soviet Power?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 248–249.

16 Mikhail Pokrovsky, *Doklad "Obshchestvennye nauki v SSSR za 10 let,"* March 22, 1928; Mikhail Pokrovsky, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii v XX veke.* (Moscow: Dennytsa, 1926); Mikhail Pokrovsky, *Doklad "Obshchestvennye nauki v SSSR,"* in *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i Antanta* (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1927).

17 Leon Trotsky, "We Need an Army," Speech delivered at the Session of the Moscow Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, March 19, 1918, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/military/cho3.htm>.

18 Sergei Mel'gunov, *Krasnyi terror v Rossii* (Moscow: Puico P.S., 1990); Vladimir Voitinskii, *Dvenadsat' smertnikov* (Berlin: Izdanie zagranichnoi delegatsii P.S.R., 1922), 28, 30; Pavel Miliukov, *Rossiiia na perelome*, Vol. 1. *Proiskhozhdenie i ukreplenie bol'shevistskoi diktatury* (Paris: [no publisher listed], 1927), 184–201; Alexander Novikov, "Zagranichnaia delegatsiia PSR—organizator mezhdunarodnoi antibolshevistskoi kampanii 1922 g.," in *Noveishaia istoriia Otechestva XX–XXI veka* (Saratov: Nauka, 2007).

revolutionary past, idealized the Romanov dynasty,¹⁹ and viewed the February and October Revolutions as integral parts of a global Judeo-Masonic conspiracy against the Russian monarchy and the Orthodox Church.²⁰ In their sermons, priests of the émigré Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) cultivated the image of the USSR as a godless Communist Leviathan wherein Marxism had become the state religion, or even as a hell where the Bolsheviks represented antichrists and demons.²¹

Irrespective of their ideological and political beliefs, most émigrés, disappointed by their defeat in the Civil War, shared the view that the insidious and hypocritical Allied Powers had betrayed the last tsar, Nicolas II, the Provisional Government, and the White movement alike.²² An 18-part documentary series released in 2021 entitled, *Gibel Imperii: Rossiiskii urok* (The fall of an empire: The Russian lesson), reflected this century-old illiberal resentment. The author of the series, Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov), who is close to the Kremlin, insisted that the February Revolution had resulted from a conspiracy entered into between antigovernment opposition forces and the British military and Foreign Office. After forcing Nicolas II to abdicate, the British immediately recognized the Provisional Government; in addition, the United States had entered World War I to steal the fruits of Russia's victory. According to Metropolitan Tikhon, the reason for the Allies' treacherous behavior was their unwillingness to fulfill the terms of the secret Constantinople (1915) and Sykes-Picot (1916) agreements to transfer vast territories, including Istanbul and the Dardanelles straits, to Russia in the event of victory. The documentary-makers emphasized that Great Britain's hostile policies toward Russia were unchangeable, no matter the latter's political system, ideology, or the state of Russo-British relations.

The White émigrés' anti-Westernism grew significantly in the 1920s when the former Entente Powers abandoned the idea of a new military expedition against the Bolsheviks and diplomatically recognized Soviet Russia. Later, the Nazis made full use of the anti-Semitic narrative of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in their anti-Allied propaganda and in order to legitimate their occupation of the Soviet Union.²³ In the aftermath of World War II, the most influential and militantly anti-Communist émigré organization, the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists (Narodno-trudovoy soyuz rossiyskikh solidaristov, NTS), paid lip service to stopping the dissemination of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, yet their agents continued to spread propaganda materials portraying Trotsky as a subversive agent paid by Jewish-American bankers and the execution of the Romanovs as a Jewish blood libel.²⁴

19 Boris Brazol, *Tsarstvovanie imperatora Nikolaiia II v tsifrah i faktakh* (Moscow: Tovarishchestvo russkikh khudozhnikov, 1990).

20 George Gustav Telberg, Robert Wilton, *Last Days of the Romanovs* (New York: George H. Doran Company, New York, 1920); Mikhail Diterikhs, *Ubiistvo tsarskoi sem'i i chlenov Doma Romanovykh na Urale* (Vladovostok: Tipografiia voen. akademii, 1922); Konstantin Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich: B.i., 1923); Viktor Saulkin, "Molitva Tsarstvennym Muchenikam i Strastoterpsam rossiiskim" *Ruaskaia Narodnaia Liniia* (July 2018), accessed November 29, 2023, http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2018/07/16/molitva_carstvennym_muchenikam_i_strastoterpsam_rasseet_tmu/; Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundreds: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (No city listed): HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).

21 Ekaterina Zaranian, "Grazhdanskaia voina kak eshatologicheskoe perezhivanie" (report presented at the conference on Religion and the Russian Revolution, Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow, October 26–28, 2017).

22 "Kerenskii: esli by soiznizniki pomogli, sud'ba Rossii byla by inoi," interview by Leonard Shapiro, BBC (June 16, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-39579290>; Konstantin Sakharov, *Belaia Sibir'* (Munich: B.i., 1923); Grigorii Semenov, *O sebe, 1904–1921* (Moscow: Veche, 2007); S. Mel'gunov, *Tragediia admirala Kolchaka*, 2 vols (Belgrade: Russkaia tipografiia, 1930).

23 Dmitrii Zhukov, Ivan Kovtun, *Antisemitskaia propaganda na okkupirovannykh territoriakh RSFSR* (Rostov na Donu: Feniks, 2015).

24 Ilya Glazunov, *Rossia raspitaia* (Moscow: 1-ia obraztsovaia tipografiia, 2004), 25.

Until 1961, Article 58-10 of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic Penal Code provided criminal liability for a term of not less than six months for anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation, as well as for the unauthorized printing, possession, or dissemination of materials calling for overthrowing, discrediting, or weakening Soviet state power. Still, White representations of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War reverberated for years and, despite the harsh persecution, were leaked across Soviet borders through the *tamizdat* system (literature produced abroad to be sent clandestinely to the Soviet Union) and Western broadcasting.

Anti-Soviet narratives were gradually decriminalized following the emergence of the liberal memory boom in the USSR in the mid-1980s, breaking the taboo on public discussions of several sensitive historical topics. Alexander Yakovlev, the chief ideologue of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), considered to be the driving force behind the reform programs of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, attached prime significance to the reorganization of Soviet collective memory.²⁵ Yakovlev initiated the formation of the Politburo Commission for Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repressions, and in 1989, he made a report to the Second Congress of Soviets calling for the acknowledgement and condemnation of the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.²⁶ The criminal prosecution of *tamizdat* and *samizdat* (that which was produced domestically) was ended, previously forbidden books and documents were transferred to main collections from access-restricted archival and library storages (*spetskhran*), and state censorship was gradually lifted.²⁷

However, the *perestroika* reformers' efforts to introduce a self-critiquing memory culture in the USSR immediately caused a harsh response. Letters from regional Communist organizations, the military, and war veterans protesting the policy of "filling in the blank spots of Soviet history" arrived at the CPSU Central Committee in a steady flow.²⁸ The counter-reformers' firm belief that reconsidering the official historical narrative was first and foremost an assault on Soviet statehood was evidenced by the so-called "anti-*perestroika* manifesto"—the Communist conservative Nina Andreeva's letter to the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia*.²⁹ To reconcile the hostile groups within the CPSU, Gorbachev made an unsuccessful attempt to claim that his policy of *perestroika* was in continuity with the spirit of the October Revolution of 1917.³⁰

Moreover, the negative reaction of CPSU opponents of reform to the rather liberal memory politics unleashed severe anti-Westernism. In 1989, Andreeva attacked the *perestroika* historians who "under the supervision of their Western mentors

25 Alexander Yakovlev, "Shaping Russia's Transformation: A Leader of Perestroika Looks Back," interview by Harry Kreisler, Conversations with History, UC Berkeley Institute of International Relations, November 20, 1996, <https://iis.berkeley.edu/publications/alexander-yakovlev-shaping-russias-transformation-leader-perestroika-looks-back>;

26 Beseda A. N. Yakovleva, "S glavnyv redaktorom gazety *Moskovskie Novosti*," January 5, 1990, Alexander Yakovlev archive, <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/almanah/inside/almanah-doc/76206>.

27 Zakon SSSR, "O pechatii i drugikh sredstvakh massovoi informatsii," June 12, 1990, *Portal pravovoi informatsii*, <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102010995&backlink=1&&nd=602230979>.

28 Yegor Ligachev, *Kto predal SSSR* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2009), 201, Alexander Yakovlev, *Sumerki* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 510–511.

29 Nina Andreeva, "Ne mogu postupit' sia printsipami," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 13, 1988, 3.

30 Mikhail Gorbachev, "Oktiabr' i perestroika: Revoliutsiia prodolzhaetsia," report at the meeting of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Supreme Soviet, November 2, 1987, Alexander Yakovlev Foundation, <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/66062>.

reversed Soviet history” and “despised their country’s heroic past.”³¹ This illiberal way of perceiving state-sponsored critiques of official Soviet narratives as ideological subversion and high treason is still reflected in the current political programs of the group Communists of Russia, as well as of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF): “the corrupt *partnomenklatura* [the CPSU establishment] ... under the pretext of renewing socialism and transitioning to a market economy launched a psychological war against their own people by raining down on them a barrage of falsifications of Soviet and Russian history.”³² The prominent Soviet and Russian historians Genrikh Ioffe and Gennadii Bordiugov emphasized the high degree of politicization and polarization of history and highlighted the surprisingly important role that anti-Soviet historical narratives played in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.³³ In 1991, Gennady Zyuganov, a future CPRF leader, accused Yakovlev of being the architect of “a national calamity commensurable to the Civil War or the Nazi invasion.”³⁴

The Soviet state’s change in policy toward the Russian Orthodox Church, which addressed not only the Moscow Patriarchate but also the vehemently anti-Soviet ROCOR, resulted in the full decriminalization of the far-right émigrés’ illiberal narratives.³⁵ Notably, Nina Andreeva was among the few commentators to observe that the conflicting memories that had been corroding the seemingly monolithic Soviet narrative originated not only from liberals and socialists but also the far right.³⁶ The mutual repugnance between these two wings of the anti-Soviet opposition can be represented by the decision of the founders of the International Historical Educational Charitable and Human Rights Society (Pamyatnik, or “monument,” which promoted a liberal approach to remembrance) to change their group’s name to Memorial to avoid any negative association with the ultranationalist National Patriotic Front (Pamyat, or “memory”).³⁷ Both organizations pursued the goal of reconsidering Soviet history, but the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Pamyat—which was at that time more popular and whose protest activities were more intense than Memorial’s³⁸—demonized the Bolsheviks as a tool of international Judeo-Masonic conspiracy.³⁹

The current Russian leadership’s obsession with history must thus be understood within the context of their belonging to the generation impacted by the shared experience of witnessing the effective weaponization of conflicting historical interpretations, leading to the end of the CPSU’s ideological monopoly and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR. In their speeches to the Congresses of Soviets, the Interregional Deputies’ Group (Mezhregional’naia deputatskaia gruppa) referred

31 Nina Andreeva, *O nekotorykh chertakh krizisa i zadachakh obshchestva “Edinstvo,”* Moscow, May 18, 1989, <https://infopedia.su/15x9a1f.html>.

32 *Programma partii*, CPRF website, <https://kprf.ru/party/program>.

33 Genrikh Ioffe, “Bor’ba za proshloe—kontrol’ nastoiashchego,” *Scepsis*, https://scepsis.net/library/id_3768.html; Gennadii Bordiugov, Aleksandr Ushakov, and Vladimir Churakov, “Beloe delo: Ideologiya, osnovy, rezhimy vlasti,” in *Istoriograficheskie ocherki* (Moscow, Russkii mir: 1998), 190.

34 Gennady Zyuganov, “Arkhitekto u razvalin,” *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, May 7, 1991.

35 Sergei Shchukin, “Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi zagraniem,” ROCOR website, accessed December 3, 2023, http://www.synod.com/synod/history/his_rocorshchukin.html.

36 Andreeva, “Ne mogu postupit’sia printsipami,” 3.

37 *Memorial: Epizod 1*, Memorial website, accessed December 3, 2023, <http://prequel.memo.ru/>.

38 “Pogovorim na ravnykh: Beseda Borisa Yeltsina s chlenami ob’edineniia ‘Pamiat’,” *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 20, May 17, 1987; “Obshchestvo ‘Pamiat’’: Kak poiavilas’ organizatsiia natsionalistov v SSSR,” *Rambler/Novosti*, January 11, 2018, <https://news.rambler.ru/other/38865749-obschestvo-pamyat-kak-poyavilas-organizatsiya-natsionalistov-v-sssr/?updated>.

39 Dmitry Vasil’ev, “Chto-to s pamiat’iu moei stalo,” *Novyi vzgliad*, no. 28, August 15, 1992; Semyon Reznik, *The Nazification of Russia: Antisemitism in the Post-Soviet Era* ([no city listed]: Challenge Publications, 1996).

to conflicting narratives of the October Revolution to legitimate their calls to reject Marxist-Leninist ideology and implement political democracy and liberal market reforms. The Group's members substituted the Soviet designation of the Russian Empire as a backward and underdeveloped "prison of nations" with the diametrically opposed White narrative—namely, that on the eve of World War I, Russia had entered a phase of unprecedented growth, and the country's pace of economic development was the fastest in the world. Thus, the Bolshevik Revolution was presented not as the salvation of nationhood or the road to modernization, but as a national catastrophe that forcefully terminated the liberal democratization process that had been launched by the Provisional Government following the February Revolution that same year. The Great October Socialist Revolution was therefore not a revolution but an illegitimate coup that instigated a fratricidal civil war, forcefully imposed a Western socialist "utopia" on Russia, and caused the destruction of Christian values that, for nearly a thousand years, had been the foundation of Russian statehood.⁴⁰

In 1991, to legitimize its rise to power, the anti-Communist opposition again used the competing White narrative of the godless, terrorist Communist state breaking Russia's Orthodox continuity, but eventually collapsing after just over 70 years following the unlawful Bolshevik coup. Putin, at that time the deputy of Saint Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, would later echo the new ruling elite's vision of the Soviet state and the October Revolution when he declared in 1992 that the Bolsheviks had planted "a bomb under Russian statehood," murdered the tsar and his family, and maintained a totalitarian system that had given birth to an inefficient autarkic economy.⁴¹ Therefore, "the coup" had resulted not in successful socialist modernization but in economic backwardness and the international isolation of Soviet Russia. Thirty years ago, Putin did not criticize, much less reject, liberalism and liberal institutions, but enthusiastically shared the new elites' fascination with the liberal world order.

Projecting the 1990s onto 1917

The short-lived fascination with the West, a significant part of which constituted the perestroika-era rise of liberal memory, encountered harsh illiberal backlash after only a few years. The day after President Boris Yeltsin signed the Decree of November 6, 1991, which banned the CPSU and the Communist Party of the RSFSR, people all over Russia took to the streets to protest in anger. In Moscow, protesters carrying red banners and portraits of the founders of Soviet Russia broke through a police line to enter Red Square.⁴² November 7—October Revolution Day, a Soviet public holiday—became the day of annual antigovernment protests and a powerful symbol of the Communist opposition. The Communists and their numerous supporters condemned the Belovezha Accords (which formally dissolved the Soviet Union and created the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS] in its place) as a pro-Western fifth column's means of subversion, which "in disregard for the Soviet people's will as clearly expressed at the 1991 Referendum on the future of the Soviet Union, treacherously destroyed the world's first socialist state."⁴³

40 "Pervyi s'ezd deputatov RSFSR 16 maia—22 iunია 1990," *Stenograficheskiĭ otchiot* [1st Congress of the RSFSR Deputies, May 16–June 22, 1990: A Shorthand Report], vol. 1: 567–571, vol. 2 (Moscow: Respublika, 1992): 17, 426–427.

41 TASS, "Putin v 1991 g. vpervye publichno zaiavil o zalozhennoi bol'shevikami 'mine,'" Russian News Agency TASS, February 22, 2022, <https://tass.ru/politika/13799783>.

42 "7 noiabria 1991—demonstratsiia v Moskve," *Docukino*, December 9, 2017, accessed December 3, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4tiSmI_ZcI.

43 Viktor Anpilov, *Lefortovskie dialogi* (Moscow: Paleia, 1994), 111.

Viktor Anpilov's Working Russia party (Trudovaiia Rossiia), the Russian Communist Workers' Party (Rossiiskaia Kommunisticheskaia Rabochaia Partia), the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Vsesoiuznaia Kommunisticheskaia Partia Bol'shevikov) led by Nina Andreeva, and Anatoly Kriuchkov's Russian Party of Communists (Rossiiskaia Partia Kommunistov) were formed immediately after the banning of the CPSU, and in February 1993, the CPRF, headed by Gennady Zyuganov, emerged on the post-Soviet political stage. It was the mass discontent with Finance Minister and later First Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar's liberal market reforms that allowed the Communists' rapid rebound in popularity: price liberalization, the depreciation of physical persons' deposits with the state bank, Sberbank, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and the dissolution of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (collectivized agricultural structures) caused an abrupt decline in the already disastrous living standards of the average Russian and resulted in a dramatic growth in the crime rate.⁴⁴ The Communists promised that if they achieved an electoral victory, all of these problems would be solved by a return to the Soviet political and social welfare systems.

These newly reborn Communist parties and movements portrayed the collapse of the Soviet Union as the antithesis of the October Revolution—a bourgeois counterrevolution organized by pro-Western dissidents and the corrupt *partnomenklatura*. Targeting personal enrichment through the privatization of state property, the “fifth columnists” skillfully used the population's discontent with foodstuffs and consumer goods shortages. According to the Communists, the shortages were artificial and caused by intentional disorganization in the consumer market that in turn resulted from the rejection of a centrally-planned economy.⁴⁵ Several ultranationalist leaders, like Alexander Barkashov of the far-right organization Russian National Unity (Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo) and Sergei Baburin of the Russian All-National Union (Rossiiskii Obshchenarodnyi Soiuz) movement, supported this view. The seemingly paradoxical mix of previously antagonistic ideologies mirrored the establishment of the militantly illiberal Russian group known as the National Salvation Front by some great-power nationalist (*derzhavniki*) and Communist groups. This informal alliance's ideological mix was a whimsical but highly flexible fusion of Marxism-Leninism, far-right geostrategist and philosopher Alexander Dugin's brand of Eurasianism, together with Russian nationalism in the mold of that exemplified by the Nobel Literature laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn—anyone could choose which aspects most suited them, or even create a new mixture for themselves.⁴⁶

With the increasingly close ties between some antigovernment right-wing movements and the Communist opposition, a tendency toward mixing the previously antagonistic Red and White historical interpretations emerged. Propagating “burning hatred for the antihuman triad of Liberalism, Democracy, and Capitalism,” the National Bolshevik Party (Natsional-Bol'shevistskaia Partia) of Eduard Limonov and Alexander Dugin aimed at a “revolutionary overthrow of Yeltsin's government and the creation of a new Russian empire.” The party promised to fight against the perceived domestic and foreign enemies of Russia: corrupt bureaucrats, and the

⁴⁴ “Crime and Administrative Offenses in 1998,” in *Statistical Digest* (Moscow: [no publisher listed], 1999), as cited in *Criminology*, ed. Azaliia Dolgova (Moscow: Norma, 2001), 216.

⁴⁵ *Programma partii*, CPRF website, accessed December 3, 2023, <https://kprf.ru/party/program>.

⁴⁶ Artiom Fomenkov, “Front natsional'nogo spaseniia i ego rol' v politicheskikh protsessakh Rossii v 1992 g.” *Nauchnye vedomosti* no. 2 (42) (2008).

“cosmopolitan intelligentsia,” as well as the United States and “globalists of Europe incorporated into NATO and the UN.”⁴⁷

In the fall of 1993, the political conflict between the liberal reformers and the counter-reformists evolved into the so-called “mini-October Revolution”⁴⁸—a political and constitutional crisis that resulted in several dozen dead and hundreds wounded in Moscow.⁴⁹ In response to the presidential decree on the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation,⁵⁰ the Congress of People’s Deputies and Presidium of the Supreme Soviet used their constitutional power to remove Boris Yeltsin from office. Yeltsin’s supporters justified the decree with the old White thesis on the illegitimacy of the Supreme Soviet as the successor to the Bolshevik Soviets, who in 1917 had forcefully and unlawfully expelled the Provisional Government and dismissed the democratically-elected Russian Constituent Assembly. Following this logic, if the Supreme Soviet had been elected on the basis of the electoral law enacted in 1917 by the illegitimate Soviets and in the rogue Soviet state, then its members had exercised their power unlawfully.⁵¹ During a television appearance, Gaidar focused on the opposition’s keen desire to revive the Soviet Union, strip the people of their hard-won freedoms, and drive them back into the totalitarian regime’s gulags. Sobchak, one of the authors of the 1993 Constitution, emphasized the illegitimacy of the October Revolution and the unlawfulness of the socialist principles of equitable distribution. According to him, it was these principles that “misshaped morality and introduced the habit of living lawlessly” that finally led to the bloodshed of the “mini-October Revolution.”⁵²

The “mini-revolution” came to a dramatic end after Yeltsin ordered army tanks to shell the Russian parliament building.⁵³ The Congress of People’s Deputies and the Supreme Soviet were replaced by the Federal Assembly and State Duma, the president concentrated tremendous power in his own hands, and Communist organizations and newspapers were banned again. In light of these events, Article 2 of the new constitution—which declared that man and his rights and freedoms were to be the supreme value and that the state was obligated to recognize, observe, and protect human and civil rights—sounded hypocritical to some people.⁵⁴ Vladimir Osipov, a prominent dissident and ardent anti-Communist, labeled the shelling of the Supreme Soviet on October 4, 1993, as an unlawful coup and Yeltsin and his liberal orbit as “self-seekers and committed Liberal-Russophobes who wrote the new Constitution under orders of the US Department of State and forced its adoption at

47 “Programme of the National-Bolshevik Party,” *Vansternationaell*, <https://vansternationell.wordpress.com/natioal-bolshevik-documents/programme-of-the-national-bolshevik-party>.

48 “Malaia Oktiabr’skaia Revoliutsiia,” *Rosbalt*, October 13, 2013, <https://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2013/10/03/1182725.html>.

49 Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, eds., “Yeltsin Shelled Russian Parliament 25 Years Ago, US Praised ‘Superb Handling’” National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, October 4, 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-10-04/yeltsin-shelled-russian-parliament-25-years-ago-us-praised-superb-handling>.

50 “Presidential Decree No. 1400, September 21, 1993,” Kremlin website, President of Russia, accessed December 3, 2023, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/4364>.

51 Boris Yeltsin, “O demokraticheskoi gosudarstvennosti i proekte novoi Konstitutsii,” *Obozrevatel*, no. 15, 1993, p. 4., as cited in Olga Malinova, “Neudobnyi iubilei: Itogi pereosmysleniia ‘mifa osnovaniia’ SSSR v ofitsial’nom istoricheskom narrative RF,” *Politicheskai nauka* no. 3 (2017): 23–24.

52 Anatoly Sobchak, “Zhila-byla KPSS,” (Saint Petersburg: RuLit, 1995), <https://www.rulit.me/books/zhila-byla-kommunisticheskaya-partiya-read-250004-37.html>.

53 Mikhail Sokolov, Anastasia Kirilenko, “20 Years Ago Russia Had Its Biggest Political Crisis since the Bolshevik Revolution,” October 4, 2013, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/20-years-ago-russia-had-its-biggest-political-crisis-since-the-bolshevik-revolution/280237/>.

54 Constitution of the Russian Federation, available at RefWorld, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b59f4.html>.

the barrel of the tank guns.”⁵⁵ The mass disenchantment with liberal market reforms and democracy was on display in the 1993 elections of the first State Duma: Gaidar’s Choice of Russia (Vybor Rossii) party lost the vote to the populist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Liberal’no-demokraticheskaia partiia Rossii: LDPR) led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

During Yeltsin’s second term, his ideologists continued to trace his power to the Provisional Government;⁵⁶ however, it has also been claimed that, fearing a “Red revanche,” the Kremlin considered restoring the monarchy through either the coronation of Yeltsin or his regency governing in place of a Romanov scion.⁵⁷ To confront the newly-born opposition’s propaganda, Yeltsin’s ideologists began to more actively rely upon both liberal and far-right White versions of Russia’s history. In this political context, the cult of national repentance for the treason against Nicolas II and his family promoted by the ROCOR and émigré monarchists drew more attention, and calls for canonizing the executed Romanovs as saints and the reburial of their relics increased.⁵⁸

The opposition’s antigovernment propaganda projected their vision of the collapse of the Soviet Union onto 1917, aligning them with pre-existing illiberal interpretations of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. Thus, the Communists confronted the state’s self-representation as the legitimate heir to the Provisional Government and the Romanovs with calls for a new socialist revolution as the only road to national salvation amidst the all-encompassing crisis caused by economic and political liberalization.⁵⁹ The Communists of Russia party continued to vilify the last Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, along with Yeltsin, as “the same lackeys of the West as the Provisional Government who sold out Russia’s national interest and demonstrated a cynical attitude toward their own country, people, and history.”⁶⁰

Between 1994 and 1999, polls showed that Russians viewed liberalization and globalization with growing pessimism, and in 1998, nostalgia for the Soviet Union reached its highest point since the dissolution of the USSR.⁶¹ Throughout the parliamentary and presidential election campaigns of 1995 and 1996, the boundary between the previously irreconcilable Red and White versions of illiberalism became even more indistinguishable. Sobchak’s claim that the Communists’ triumphant return to the political stage was due to their populist and ultranationalist rhetoric, which they used in order to stir up the already massive discontent with liberal market

55 Vladimir Osipov, “Overnight I Became a Russian Nationalist,” interview by Sergei Prostavkov, *Russkaia planeta*, February 27, 2013, <http://rusplt.ru/sub/interview/va-za-odnu-noch-stal-russkim-natsionalistom-8321.html>.

56 Olga Malinova, “Neudobnyi iubilei: Itogi pereosmyslvaniiia ‘mifa osnovaniiia’ SSSR v ofitsial’nom istoricheskom narrative RF,” *Politicheskaja nauka*, no. 3 (2017), 18.

57 Fiodor Barmin, “Nesostoiavshaiasia koronatsiia,” *Spetsnaz*, May 2018, <http://www.speznaz.ru/articles/204/27/1906.htm>; Geidar Dzhehal, “Tsar’ Boris” i romanovskie ostanki,” Poistine (online organization), <http://poistine.org/car-boris-i-romanovskie-ostanki>; Aleksandr Berezovskii, “Pravoslavie-Samoderzhavie-Narodnost’ v usloviakh liberal’nykh reform,” *Obozrevatel’*, http://observer.materik.ru/observer/NO9_93/9_08.HTM.

58 Aleksandr Kyrlezhev, “Utverdit’sia li v Rossii novaia eres?” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, November 15, 2000, http://www.ng.ru/facts/2000-11-15/1_analis.html?fbclid=IwARoCOiOhOLEYKcVc_A6oNmITz8aV9BL5EAX-qHp2VJxsXbto2j48wcfMQM; “Predstoiatel’ russkoi tserkvi osudil t.n. ‘chin vsenarodnogo pokaianiiia,’” *Pravoslavie.ru*, <http://pravoslavie.ru/25327.html>.

59 CPRF, “Programma partii.”

60 Communists of Russia, “Programma KR,” *Kommunisty Rossii* website, accessed December 2, 2023, <https://komros.info/about/programma/>.

61 Levada Center, “Nostal’giia po SSSR,” [Nostalgia for the Soviet Union], Levada Center website, December 19, 2018, <https://www.levada.ru/2018/12/19/nostalgia-po-sssr-2/>.

reforms,⁶² resonated with many. Historian Vitaly Tikhonov, a member of the CPRF, shared Sobchak's opinion and observed that, "in the mid-1990s, the cosmopolitan Leninist-Trotskyist idea of the World Revolution and the Communist International was completely replaced with the Stalinist national patriotic concept of the necessity of salvation from colonial enslavement by the West."⁶³

The disenchantment with liberalism and democracy heavily influenced the construction of a new party: Our Home—Russia (Nash dom-Rossii). The party positioned itself as a liberal-conservative movement and promised to maintain political stability, uphold law and order, and strengthen the state's role in the economy, as well as to provide "smart protectionism" and adjust the liberal foundations of Russia's economic life to the social protection system's needs. The party's leadership also assured the public that it would be able to achieve Russia's "active and full participation in the creation of an international world order that would be based on the principles of collective security, respect for national sovereignty, and territorial integrity."⁶⁴

The 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis and the decline in hydrocarbon prices had a major impact on Russia, leading to the devaluation of the ruble, a default on domestic debt that resulted in hyperinflation, and a new wave of mass impoverishment followed by a dramatic increase in crime; even pro-government mass media affirmed that the 1998 sovereign default had proven the complete failure of liberal market reforms.⁶⁵ Fierce antigovernment protests erupted all over the country, and crowds of striking miners carried red flags and demanded Yeltsin be impeached.⁶⁶ The reluctantly-appointed prime minister, Yevgeny Primakov, openly aligned himself with the Communist opposition's criticism of widespread corruption and the liberal reforms which, he claimed, had left the Russian economy vulnerable and too dependent on the West.⁶⁷ After the outbreak of the Second Chechen War and a series of terrorist attacks in 1999, the political influence of the CPRF was on rise again. Responding to Yeltsin's dismissal of his extraordinarily popular prime minister, the CPRF faction and their allies in the State Duma initiated impeachment proceedings against Yeltsin for the third time. The parliamentary opposition observed that, during Yeltsin's rule, Russia's population had decreased at a higher rate than during the years of the Civil War.⁶⁸ They further accused the president of having brought about the dissolution of the USSR, the illegal coup of 1993, unleashing the two Chechen Wars, and weakening the country's security and defense capabilities.⁶⁹

In this context of political instability, illiberal memory backlash emerged not only from the left wing, but also from the far right, interweaving the White émigrés' conspiracy theories with the Communist opposition's propaganda. Now even some senior government officials did not hesitate to propagate the wildly anti-Semitic

62 Sobchak, "Zhila-bylya KPSS."

63 Levada Center, "Nostal'giia po SSSR."

64 Maksim Barabanov, *Partii i mnogopartiinost' v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskii oblastnoi universitet, 2011); "Kliuchevoe slovo—stabil'nost'," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, May 16, 1995, <https://rg.ru/1995/05/16/ndr.html>.

65 Yegor Gaidar, Anatolii Chubais, *Razvilki noveishei istorii Rossii* (Moscow: Norma, 2011), 110–116.

66 Igor Solovenko, "Rel'sovye voiny v Rossii v 1998 g.," *Omskii nauchnyi vestnik, Istorii i arkheologii* (Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo politekhnicheskogo universiteta, 2011).

67 Yevgeny Primakov, *Vosem' mesiatsev plius ...* (Moscow: Mysl', 2001), 79–80, LibCat, <https://libcat.ru/knigi/dokumentalnye-knigi/publicistika/100755-81-evgenij-primakov-vosem-mesyacev-plyus.html#text>; Boris Yeltsin, *Prezidentskii marafon* (Moscow: ACT, 2000), <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/book/9201/>, 180, 209–213.

68 Anastasia Larina, "Vrag naroda," *Kommersant*, May 13, 1999, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/218225>.

69 Larina, "Vrag Naroda."

tropes that interpreted both the February and October revolutions and the collapse of the Soviet Union as a Judeo-Bolshevik/Judeo-Masonic conspiracy.⁷⁰ Thus, for instance, the governor of the Krasnodar region blamed Yeltsin's government for carrying out the same "Zionist genocide of ethnic Russians" that the "Bolshevik emissaries of the World Revolution" had begun in 1917. The RNU ideologists asserted that, like all other revolutions in the world, the collapse of the Soviet Union had been brought about by a conspiracy of the *mirovaia zakulisa*—the global elite operating behind the scenes.⁷¹ The far right's antigovernment propaganda emphasized the real or imagined Jewish origins of the new oligarchs, bankers, Yegor Gaidar, Sergei Kiriyenko, and other liberal reformers.

This analysis of the illiberal memory politics of the 1990s proves Laruelle's thesis that illiberal backlash in Russia resulted from mass discontent with the largely unsuccessful liberal market reforms and the process of globalization. Domestic unrest following the drop in living standards and dramatic growth of corruption, organized crime, and terrorism provided popularity for those political actors who advanced conservative and ultranationalist rhetoric promising "stability and predictability, a strong leader able to enforce law and order, and a revival of statism and patriotism."⁷² All the antigovernment opposition parties (the Communists, the far right, and new hybrid political structures like Limonov and Dugin's NBP) readily mobilized illiberal historical narratives of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War for their own anti-Yeltsin and anti-Western agitation and propaganda. Using these narratives, the opposition legitimized their calls to overthrow Yeltsin and reject liberal reforms and globalization.

By the end of the 1990s, the counter-reform opposition had already reconciled conflicting methods of viewing the history of the Russian Revolution into a hybrid illiberal narrative, and the political actors who had encouraged the acceptance of liberalism's culture of remembrance during perestroika were gradually losing their political influence. Moreover, the near-universally adopted practice of Russian politicians using historical interpretations of the Russian Revolution to legitimate calls to overthrow the government makes it unsurprising that the current Russian leadership regards conflicting historical narratives as a serious threat to national security.⁷³

The Russian Revolution and the Government Takeover of Illiberal Memory

Analyzing the political context in which the illiberal memory backlash originated in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, with nationalist parties coming to power in Hungary (2010) and Poland (2015), Rosenfeld mentioned that in Russia the right-wing turn had taken place at least a decade earlier.⁷⁴ And while this political backlash had roots that went back to the early 1990s, finally coming to fruition with Putin becoming Yeltsin's successor, proponents of right-wing historical narratives

70 Alexandr Verkhovskiy, Anatoliy Papp, and Vladimir Pribylovskiy, *Polliticheskiĭ ekstremizm v Rossii* (Moscow: Institut eksperimental'noi sotsiologii, 1996), 19–22, 31–32; "Iudofobiia i antisemitizm v 1990–2000 gg.," *Elektronnaia evreiskaia entsiklopediia ORT*, <https://eleven.co.il/diaspora/judeophobia-anti-semitism/15533/#0401>.

71 Viacheslav Likhachiov, "Natsizm v Rossii," SOVA center, <https://www.sova-center.ru/files/xeno/nazi2002.pdf>.

72 Marlene Laruelle, "Making Sense of Russia's Illiberalism," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 3 (July 2020): 3.

73 "Putin nazval tsel' popytok fal'sifikatsii istorii zapadnymi stranami," *Izvestiia*, November 5, 2022, <https://iz.ru/1425849/2022-11-15/putin-nazval-tcel-popytok-falsifikatsii-istorii-zapadnymi-stranami>.

74 Rosenfeld, "The Rise of Illiberal Memory."

have received support of the Kremlin ideologists. In the last years of the 1990s and first years of the 2000s, the presidential administration, headed by Chief of Staff Alexandr Voloshin, built up the idea of “managed democracy” on the basis of the hard lessons the Kremlin had learned after the failures of the radically liberal Choice of Russia party (which later became known as Democratic Choice of Russia) and the conservative-liberal OHR in the State Duma elections of the late 1990s. Moreover, a dangerous new political adversary had emerged: the political bloc Fatherland—All Russia (FAR), formed by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and ex-premier Primakov, had arisen as Putin’s main competitor in the 2000 presidential election, further influencing the Kremlin’s decision to make a sharp illiberal turn. FAR promised to restore a strong, stable, and predictable state capable of ensuring democracy, law and order, and the advancement of Russia’s national interests on the global stage. The bloc’s political platform mentioned that building a powerful military was a precondition for Russia’s equal participation in the global economy and politics.⁷⁵

To compete with his illiberal challengers successfully, Putin (at that time prime minister) had no other choice but to signal his readiness to roll back some reforms. As a result, the political bloc Unity, created to support Putin in the 2000 presidential election, based its platform on the clearly illiberal concept of “managed democracy.”⁷⁶ The new bloc was aimed at “overcoming the Revolution in public consciousness,” and both Communism and liberalism were defined as “antitraditional, antinational, antireligious ideologies.” Furthermore, Kremlin ideologists asserted that Communists and “radical liberals”⁷⁷ were revolutionary-thinking “ideological extremists who reject a sense of community, mutual aid, and manifestations of traditional social-psychological communality,”⁷⁸ who promoted their—allegedly intrinsic—individualism as a universal value. The Kremlin, therefore, equated revolution with the critical situation of the 1990s that it was promising to overcome by turning toward “national tradition and spirituality.”⁷⁹

After a decade of anti-Communist policy embodied by the Yeltsinian administration, Putin’s declaration that the Bolshevik Revolution had forced Russia “to leave the main road of human civilization” was, of course, no surprise. What was astonishing was his unabashed illiberalism: Putin said that the apparent failure of the reforms had shown the necessity of returning to a government-managed economy and social protection system. In Putin’s *Millennium* article of December 31, 1999, the October Revolution was used again as a metaphor to refer to the all-encompassing 1990s crisis when Russians once and for all realized that “Russia has depleted its reserves of revolutions, coups, and radical political and socio-economic transformations.”⁸⁰ Therefore, the main task of the Unity bloc was to bring stability, security, and reconciliation to a fractured post-Soviet Russian society, and, according to Putin, this task could not be achieved by simply borrowing liberal values that were “not

75 “Otechestvo—vsia Rossiia, predvybornaia programma,” Website of Research and information center “Panorama”, accessed December 22, 2023, <http://www.panorama.ru/works/vybory/party/p-ovr.html>.

76 “Upravliaemaia demokratiia poshla izuzom,” *Izvestiia*, November 5, 2003, <https://iz.ru/news/283507>; “Chelovek dnia: Aleksandr Voloshin,” *Polit.ru*, March 3, 2021, <https://polit.ru/news/2021/03/03/voloshin/>; Mikhail Vinogradov and Vladimir Rudakov, “Kto byli osnovateli dvizheniia ‘Edinstvo’, iz kotorogo vyroslo partiia ‘Edinaia Rossiia?’” *Compromat.ru*, October 5, 2009, http://www.compromat.ru/page_28343.htm; “Edinaia Rossiia,” *Kommersant-Vlast*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3082417>.

77 “Programma Obshcherossiiskoi politicheskoi obshchestvennoi organizatsii—partii ‘Edinstvo, 2000,” in *Prava i svobody cheloveka v programmykh dokumentakh osnovnykh politicheskikh partii i ob’edinenii Rossii. XX vek*. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), 56.

78 “Programma Obshcherossiiskoi politicheskoi obshchestvennoi organizatsii—partii ‘Edinstvo, 2000,” 56.

79 “Programma Obshcherossiiskoi politicheskoi obshchestvennoi organizatsii—partii ‘Edinstvo, 2000,” 57.

80 Vladimir Putin, “Rossiia na rubezhe tysiacheletii,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, December 30, 1999, https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html.

rooted in the country's history.”⁸¹ While the country's thousand-year history clearly demonstrated that Russians are committed great-power nationalists who wholeheartedly support the idea of a strong state, Putin found that consolidation of the nation was possible only on a platform of social solidarity and patriotism. This new post-Soviet Russian patriotism therefore needed to be based on “those proud of our national history, including the Soviet state's achievements that are undeniable though made at too great a sacrifice.”⁸²

The process of the government's takeover of these hybrid illiberal narratives intensified significantly after the complete reorganization of the Unity bloc into the ruling party United Russia in 2003 and the transformation of the concept of “managed democracy” into “sovereign democracy.”⁸³ This new concept continued to use the idea of the uniqueness of the Russian cultural consciousness originating from the people's fundamentally holistic worldview. In political culture, this alleged uniqueness was revealed in the idealization of politics, the personification of all political institutions with a strong leader, and striving toward integration through a highly centralized power structure and concept of political authority.⁸⁴ At the top of this structure the author of “sovereign democracy” (and then first deputy chief of the Presidential Administration), Vladislav Surkov, positioned the president as the guarantor of the Constitution and protector of the existing balance of the three branches of government: an upset in this balance would lead to decentralization which, in turn, could trigger political chaos and the degradation of democratic institutions and structures. If such destruction happens, the system would be replaced with oligarchic clans and extranational organizations, as had already occurred in the 1990s.⁸⁵

Equating the “revision and falsification of Russia's history” with subversion and foreign interference in the state's functioning, Surkov initiated the Kremlin's prioritization of the politicization of history and strongly emphasized that history must be written from the perspective of its conformity to the President's policy. This perspective likely encouraged the conclusion that the revolutions shaking Russia for a century needed to be excluded from politics forever. The Kremlin's leading ideologist insisted that the revolutionary catastrophes had been inflicted by the global elite's clandestine support for Russian radicals and extremists—including, of course, the Bolsheviks.⁸⁶ To provide evidence for the perception of the West's policy towards Russia as eternally hostile and treacherous regardless of the political system or form of government, Surkov also borrowed a tactic from the anti-Yeltsin opposition, drawing a parallel between the bloody Civil War and the poverty, crime, terrorism, and demographic decline of the “wild 1990s.” Following this narrative tactic, Surkov positioned perestroika and the liberal reforms of the 1990s as being in line with other “moments in our history that we should remember for our contemporary political purposes”: the reforms of Emperor Peter the Great, of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's promises to fully achieve the goals of Communism by 1980, and the

81 Putin, “Rossiia na rubezhe tysiacheletii.”

82 Putin.

83 “Suverenitet – eto politicheskii sinonim konkurentnosposobnosti,” United Russia website, February 22, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060418035317/http://www.edinros.ru/news.html?id=111148>.

84 Vladislav Surkov, “Russkaia politicheskaia kul'tura—vzgliad iz utopii,” *Teksty 1997–2007* (Moscow: Evropa, 2008), 9.

85 Surkov, “Russkaia politicheskaia kul'tura—vzgliad iz utopii.”

86 Surkov, “Naputstvie nachinayushchemu liberalu,” *Teksty 1997–2007*, (Moscow: Evropa, 2008), 19.

1917 revolutions—episodes of Russian and Soviet history that had previously been considered important milestones on Russia’s path to Westernization.⁸⁷

Surkov’s vision of the Bolsheviks as subversive fifth columnists and pro-Western traitors to their country was weaponized by the Kremlin to diminish the Liberal opposition:

Even if you do not like something in your country, do not wish defeat for her like the Bolsheviks did. If you do not like the regime, you can fight against it using every legal method, but you cannot wish defeat or weakening for your country. This, I think, would be stupid and immoral. We all know that such slogans had been put forward in 1917 at a time when this country was waging war.⁸⁸

While criticizing the Bolsheviks, Surkov was apparently addressing himself to Russia’s liberals, appealing them to remember that “... democracy is the power of a people that is notoriously sovereign. And this is the power of our nation in our country, not that of a foreign nation in our homeland.”⁸⁹ Surkov also mentioned that, unlike the Baltic states, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan “did not have their own history and could exist only under protection of foreign sponsors whom they changed easily”; according to this view, Russia had always been and always would be such a sovereign state. He emphasized that Russia could not and should not sacrifice her sovereignty and freedom for the sake of “liberal fundamentalism” and other “fancy assumptions.”⁹⁰ Borrowing from the émigré narrative, the Kremlin continued to juxtapose the Bolshevik internationalists against the nationalist White movement’s great-power nationalist leaders such as Anton Denikin and Alexander Kolchak, and insist that Lenin had planted the bomb of National-Communist separatism under the territorial integrity of both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. In his speech at the ceremony for the reburial of Anton Denikin and his wife in 2005, Putin highlighted that, unlike the Bolshevik internationalists, the iconic White general did not tolerate even discussions about the separation of Russia and Ukraine and defined them as criminal and treasonous.⁹¹

Despite significant disagreement regarding their degree of rejection of liberalism, United Russia, the center-left party A Just Russia, and the ultranationalist Motherland party all implicitly or explicitly mourned the collapse of the Soviet Union and blamed it on the liberal West. All loyal opposition parties shared the opinion that Russia’s transition to liberalism would be advantageous only to the West and those who supported it. Moreover, the shared view of the West as Russia’s primordial enemy, and the oligarchs as a product of liberalization and globalization, unified the loyal opposition with the Communists and the right wing. Like Surkov, they connected the rise of the oligarchs with the liberal market reforms they claimed had been forced upon Russia by the West. The flexibility of the “sovereign democracy” concept allowed for the incorporation of ideologically competing illiberal historical representations.

87 Surkov, “Natsionalizatsiia budushchego,” *Teksty 1997–2007*, (Moscow: Evropa, 2008), 31.

88 Surkov, “Russkaia politicheskaia kul’tura. Lektsiia, pročitannaia v Rossiiskoi akademii nauk 8 iunია 2007 g.” 20.

89 Surkov, 21.

90 Surkov, 21.

91 “Putin vozlozhil tsveti k mogilam ‘gosudarstvennikov’ Denikina, Il’ina, Solzhenitsyna,” News.ru, May 24, 2009, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/24may2009/spo.html>.

The causal nexus between liberalization and globalization was depicted in another documentary, *The Fall of an Empire: The Lesson of Byzantium* (2008), by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov)—at that time the head of an influential Moscow monastery.⁹² The “documentary parable” (as the author defined this genre) argued against Yegor Gaidar’s 2007 book, *The Fall of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia*, in which the father of Russia’s shock-therapy transition to capitalism justified his policies and argued that specific lessons needed to be learned from the fall of the Soviet Union. In response, Tikhon accused the West of “genetic hatred” of Russia’s nationhood and of conspiring to destroy the Russian Empire, the USSR, and the Russian Federation. The reason for this pathological hatred, he claimed, was Orthodox Christian Russia’s status as the spiritual successor to the Byzantine Empire following the latter’s conquest by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Just like Russia in 1917 and 1991, the magnificent Byzantine civilization collapsed not because of its economic deficiencies, but because of its defeat in the information war unleashed by the republics of Venice and Genoa. These geopolitical adversaries destroyed Byzantium’s state ideology by portraying their main competitor as an evil empire that rejected universal human values and impeded free markets. The West then manipulated the all-sufficient country into participating in global trade, resulting in the Byzantine Empire’s loss of control over its financial system, trade, and industry.

This militantly illiberal parable-narrative is rich in countless innuendos about the political battles of the tumultuous period between the 1980s and 2010s and the West’s “genetic hatred” of Russia. The oligarchs fled abroad to create and lead the internal opposition to the state, but eventually, the greedy and treacherous West left most of them bankrupt and with no other choice than to commit suicide, as Boris Berezovsky, a powerful (and infamously corrupt) Russian tycoon and Putin’s adversary, had done in the UK. Moreover, the film connected the beginning of political instability with the breaking of the Byzantine system of top-down governance and the development of short-term rule for the emperors. In addition, having been seduced by the idea of nationalism borrowed from the European Renaissance, the ethnically Greek intelligentsia had facilitated the collapse of the multinational Byzantine Empire by provoking separatist movements on her Slavic periphery. Consequently, the uncivilized and greedy European crusaders took advantage of the Empire’s military weakness to pillage the wealthy city of Constantinople and seize hundreds of tons of gold, which then became the source for building the global banking system. The film interwove far-right interpretations of the falls of Byzantium, the Russian Empire, and the USSR into a single narrative of the West’s eternal conspiracy against Russia and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

These constructions demonstrate how, in the early 2000s, the Russian state was sponsoring the building of illiberal historical narratives in which the Russian Revolution was portrayed as a link in a chain of events that had plunged the country into chaos again and again, and a Western conspiracy against Russian statehood. With the state’s support, the narrative was transformed into a system of conceptually formalized ideas—an illiberal quasi-ideology. One can see that the incorporation of selected patterns from competing and often diametrically opposed historical interpretations enabled these actors to unify previously ideologically incompatible political movements around a platform of conservatism, national reconciliation, economic and political stability and, of course, loyalty to the state. Along with the successful political consolidation and economic growth during Putin’s first term, the

⁹² Sretenskii monastery channel, “Gibel’ imperii. Vizantinskii urok,” YouTube, December 19, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoJhCb5CT7c>.

rejection of unpopular liberal reforms secured his and Dmitry Medvedev's victory in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections.

The analysis of interpretations of the February and October Revolutions that the Kremlin transmitted between 1999 and 2008 leads to the conclusion that the process of gradual illiberalization of memory in Russia fits into Rosenfeld's concept of illiberal memory culture. By introducing the idea of "managed democracy," Putin and his parliamentary bloc seized the initiative from the other illiberal parties and movements that promised to roll the liberal reforms back. In the 2000s, seeking to build a new national identity, the Kremlin's ideologists used the "normalizing the past" strategy⁹³ and a generalized tactic of embracing victimhood,⁹⁴ while denying guilt for historical injustices of the Soviet state.⁹⁵

Historical Interpretations of the October Revolution and Russia's Anti-Western Foreign Policy

Since the mid-1990s, the idea of "sovereign democracy," even before it was formulated as such, has been used to validate Primakov's doctrine of an international multipolar system and a multifaceted approach to Russia's foreign policy.⁹⁶ While serving as foreign minister, Primakov completely broke from the policy line of his predecessor, Andrey Kozyrev, whose resignation commentators connected with his failure to receive large-scale financial and economic assistance from the West, as well as with widespread accusations that he had betrayed vital national interests.⁹⁷ In late 1998, Primakov, by that time already prime minister, complained that the International Monetary Fund had demanded an increase in the federal budget surplus at the expense of further impoverishing the already deprived population. According to Primakov, the US government made its financial and economic assistance dependent on Russia's position on an antiballistic missile treaty and policy regarding Serbia.⁹⁸ The beginning of the implementation of the Primakov doctrine of a multipolar world and Russia's primacy in the post-Soviet space—which now constitutes the foundation of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy⁹⁹—was obviously facilitated by a rise in anti-Americanism.¹⁰⁰ When NATO carried out air strikes in Yugoslavia, groups of young Russians threw eggs, tomatoes, and paint cans at the US embassy building in Moscow. In March 1999, the embassy building was fired upon by a grenade launcher for the second time (the first time having been in September 1995).¹⁰¹

93 Rosenfeld, "The Rise of Illiberal Memory," 823.

94 Rosenfeld, 824.

95 Rosenfeld, 824.

96 TASS, "Lavrov: v nedaliokom budushchem istoriki sformuliruiut takoe poniatie kak 'doktrina Primakova,'" Russian News Agency TASS, October 28, 2014, <https://tass.ru/politika/1537769>.

97 James A. Baker III, Vy tak i ne postroili svobodnuiu rynochnuiu ekonomiku," [You never built a free market economy], interview by Piotr Aven, Forbes.ru, March 12, 2013, <https://www.forbes.ru/sobytiya/vlast/80010-dzheims-beiker-vy-tak-i-ne-postroili-svobodnuyu-rynochnuyu-ekonomiku>; "Zhar Ptitsa Mistera 'Da,'" October 27, 2019, Vesti.ru, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1367226>.

98 Yevgeniy Primakov, *Vosem' mesiatsev plus* ... (Moscow: Mysl', 2001), 63, 66–69, LibCat, <https://libcat.ru/knigi/dokumentalnye-knigi/publicistika/100755-73-evgenij-primakov-vosem-mesyacev-plyus.html#text>.

99 Kirill Barskii, "'Vostochniy vektor' nachertil Primakov," in *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 10 (2016), <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1746>.

100 Lev Gudkov, "Otnoshenie k SShA v Rossii i problema antiamerikanizma," *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mnenia* 2, no. 58 (March–April 2002).

101 "Terakt v posol'stve SShA," *Kommersant*, September 14, 1995, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/117488>; "Mukhi' do Ameriki ne doleteli," *Kommersant*, March 30, 1999, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/215805>; "Priklucheniia posol'stva SShA v Moskve," BBC, August 1, 2017, <http://bbc.com/russian/features-40796201>.

The Communists portrayed America and its allies as aggressively anti-Communist, imperialist states that had restored capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, and Mikhail Gorbachev's concessions on arms and strategic safety as irresponsible unilateralism that had upset the military-strategic equilibrium in favor of NATO and decreased the Soviet/Russian military's fighting capacity. As a result, NATO began to advance obtrusively toward Russia's borders in order to transform what had once been the world's first socialist state into a colony of the imperialist countries.¹⁰² Nina Andreeva's "All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)" (VKP[b]) painted an even gloomier picture: "the imperialist countries had not only turned former Soviet republics into their colonies but also dreamed of separating Russia from the Northern Caucasus, Urals, Siberia, and the Far East."¹⁰³ According to her, to earn monopolistic excess profits, enslave weaker countries, and prey upon them, "the imperialists" created the international financial institutions of the Washington Consensus, and liberal democracies were responsible for militarism, colonialism, initiating two world wars, countless local conflicts, and an arms race, as well as reactionary movements and political obscurantism.¹⁰⁴

Despite Putin's claim during his first year as president that he could not imagine Russia as an enemy of NATO and Europe,¹⁰⁵ the document "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" had already mentioned the existence of a "mismatch between NATO political and military objectives and Russia's national security interests."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the Russian foreign policy establishment pointed out that the absence of equal participation in creating the main principles of how the world financial and economic systems function enhanced the possibility of large-scale crises and made Russia vulnerable to external actions. In 2003, Putin openly condemned US President George W. Bush's war in Iraq,¹⁰⁷ and in 2004, he criticized for the first time his predecessors' "ill-judged concessions to the West" that had "imprudently weakened Russia's defense capability."¹⁰⁸ Three years later, he accused NATO of breaking its promise not to expand eastward and declared the independence of Russia's energy policy from that of the EU.¹⁰⁹ In addition to concerns about NATO's eastward expansion, discontent concerning the "non-participative process of making international security decisions exclusively by the Western countries dominated by the US" was also expressed.¹¹⁰ Criticism of the United States continued to harden, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis:

Everything that now is going on in the global economy and finance began, as we all know, in the US. This crisis that many countries have encountered, and—what is the most

102 "Programma partii," CPRF website, <https://kprf.ru/party/program>; "Programma PP KR," Communists of Russia website, <https://komros.info/about/programma/>.

103 "Programma VKPB-VKP(b) Niny Andreevoi (priniata III s'ezdom partii)," ch.2, VKPB-VKP(b) website, accessed on April 14, 2021, <http://vkpb.ru/programma-vkpb.html>.

104 "Programma VKPB-VKP(b) Niny Andreevoi (priniata III s'ezdom partii)," ch. 6.

105 "Interv'iu v efire programmy 'Zavtrak s Frostom' na telekanale BBC," [BBC Breakfast with Frost Interview: Vladimir Putin, March 5, 2000], President Rossii, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24194>.

106 "Kontseptsia vneshnei politiki RF, utverzhdiionnaia Prezidentom Putinyim 28 iunna 2000 g.," Konsortsium-Kodeks, <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901764263>.

107 Vladimir Putin, "Voina v Irake grozit katastrofoi vsemu regionu," *RBK*, March 20, 2003, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/03/2003/5702b5509a7947783a5a45bb>.

108 Vladimir Putin, "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Putina Vladimira Putina 4 sentiabria 2004," Kremlin website, President Rossii, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22589>.

109 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie i diskussia na Miunkhenskoj konferentsii," Kremlin website, President Rossii, February 10, 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

110 Putin, "Vystuplenie i diskussia na Miunkhenskoj konferentsii."

disappointing—their incapacity to make adequate decisions is not the issue of certain individuals' irresponsibility, but of the entire system, the system that claimed leadership. But it is obvious that it does not have the ability to lead and cannot even make adequate and necessary decisions to overcome the crisis.¹¹¹

Although Putin defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century,¹¹² his ideologists continued to portray the Bolshevik Revolution as having been the greatest catastrophe for the country.¹¹³ Nevertheless, thanks to the 1999 so-called secret deal between the CPRF and Unity, the intensity of anti-Communist propaganda decreased and became a ritual rather than a component of real political infighting. However, the fact that 2004 saw November 7 (October 25 according to the old Julian-style calendar), October Revolution Day, a national holiday in the Soviet Union, stripped of its status as the anniversary of the October Revolution, while November 4 (the anniversary of the people of Moscow's victory against Polish-Lithuanian invaders in 1612) was established as the Day of National Unity instead, illustrated the state's overall negative attitude toward the October Revolution.

The Red narrative of the Great Socialist Revolution played itself out in fresh colors when the CPRF began to play an important role in the increasingly rapid rapprochement between post-Soviet Russia and Communist China. In 2004, Putin's small territorial concessions to the People's Republic of China (PRC) influenced the signing of the Sino-Russian border demarcation agreement two years later, which opened the floodgates for closer cooperation with China. Since then, Russian politicians' amicability toward Beijing has grown proportionally with the hardening of their anti-Western rhetoric. Beijing, for whom perestroika and the dissolution of the USSR was the same painful surprise as the Khrushchev thaw had been for Mao Zedong, has closely cooperated with the CPRF. According to Gennady Zyuganov, the Russian "continuators of Lenin and Stalin's immortal cause are always welcomed in the great socialist country of China."¹¹⁴ The programs for every visit by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders to Russia have included meetings with Zyuganov, and the CPRF general secretary has been invited to every Sino-Russian official event and meeting. Primakov, who according to the Russian Foreign Ministry rekindled the geostrategic partnership between the two countries, was also welcomed.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Zyuganov met Xi Jinping several times when the latter was still serving in the capacity of vice president.¹¹⁶

The historical narrative of Sino-Soviet cooperation "under the flag of the Great October Socialist Revolution" and their "mutual struggle for the revolutionary

111 "Vystuplenie Predsedatelya Pravitel'stva Rossii Vladimira Putina na zasedanii Pravitel'stva RF," *Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, October 1, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081007141507/http://www.government.ru/content/governmentactivity/mainnews/archive/2008/10/01/1254237.htm>.

112 Vladimir Putin, "Poslanie Federal'nomu sobraniu April 25, 2005," Kremlin website, Prezident Rossii, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.

113 Vladislav Surkov, "Napustsvie nachinaishchemu liberalu," *Teksty* (Moscow: Evropa, 2008), 18–23.

114 Gennady Zyuganov, "Kitai—kluch k novoi tsivilizatsii," [China is the key to a new civilization], interview by Aleksandr Drabkin, *Pravda*, May 28, 2010, <https://kprf.ru/international/79627.html>.

115 "Vystuplenie Sergeia avrov ana vechere pamiati Yevgeniia Primakova," *Novye izvestiia*, March 28, 2007, <https://newizv.ru/news/politics/28-03-2007/66521-kitajcy-v-kremle>; Kirill Barskii, "E. M. Primakov i 'vostochnyi vector' vneshei politiki Rossii," in *Politik, diplomat, uchionyi*, ed. by Vladimir Kazimirov (Moscow: Vest-Konsalting, 2019), 105.

116 Zyuganov, "Kitai—kluch k novoi tsivilizatsii."

ideals”¹¹⁷ constitutes the ideological foundation for this close partnership. Both former Chinese President Hu Jintao and his successor Xi Jinping have condemned “attempts to falsify history”¹¹⁸ and praised Soviet support for the CCP and the Sino-Soviet alliance during World War II; in turn, the CPRF has never missed an opportunity to recall that China’s success was due to “applying Soviet experience of the Leninist-Stalinist modernization.”¹¹⁹ Even United Russia has discussed the Communist past shared by China and the USSR: in his speech celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP in 2021, the party’s leader, former President and former Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, observed that Soviet Russia had supported Chinese Communists, and in 1928, the sixth Congress of the CCP had been held in Pervomaiskoe village, near Moscow.¹²⁰ The CPRF has declared the results of China’s socialist market reforms to be an “outstanding amalgamation of socialist ideas with modern technologies, and cultural traditions of the nation with its five-thousand-year-old history.”¹²¹ Another of the CCP’s ideological allies is A Just Russia, whose leader Sergei Mironov claimed that his party’s social-democratic ideology matched the CCP doctrine better than the White and Red conservatism of United Russia and the CPRF, respectively. The authors of Mironov’s party’s program referred to China as “the socialist country that was able to achieve incredible success in the fight against poverty.”¹²²

These panegyrics intensified in 2008 when, according to the CPRF program, “the comprador, aggressive, and speculative Western capital ... provoked another global financial economic crisis, one of those that had already triggered the two world wars.”¹²³ According to the CPRF leadership, China had functioned as the locomotive that pulled the entire world out of the crisis, while “the aggressive West lusted for power and would not mind igniting a new world war.”¹²⁴ Under the Communist Party’s leadership, China demonstrated the “superiority of socialism over corrupt liberal-speculative capitalism”¹²⁵ and became “the world’s leading power challenging the US and Western Europe.”¹²⁶ Russia, therefore, should not copy Western patterns but learn from Beijing, because Socialist China represented the key to the future civilization. To learn “the principles of the building of the CCP, the party staff training, and accomplishments of China’s socialist modernization,” CPRF mid-level managers

117 Gennady Zyuganov, “Kitai—eto lokomotiv, kotoryi vytiagivaet drugie strany iz ekonomicheskogo krizisa,” Rossiia i Kitai (website), December 27, 2014, <https://ruchina.org/china-article/china/574.html>.

118 Zyuganov, “Kitai—klich k novoi tsivilizatsii.”

119 Dmitry Novikov, “Kommunisty prizyvaiut učit’sia u SSSR i Kitaia,” Krasnaia liniia (television channel), March 10, 2021, <https://www.rline.tv/news/2021-03-10-kommunisty-prizyvaiut-uchitsya-u-sssr-i-kitaya/>.

120 “Predsedatel’ partii ‘Edinaia Rossiia’ Dmitry Medvedev otmetil vpechatliushchie dostizheniia KPK,” Xinhua News Agency, July 7, 2021, http://russian.news.cn/2021-07/07/c_1310046435.htm.

121 “90 let KPK: ‘Kruglyi stol’ v redaktsii gazety ‘Pravda,’” <https://kprf.ru/international/94550.html>.

122 “Zavershilsia visit Sergeia Mironova v Kitai,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta – Federal’nyi vypusk* 937, no. 5316 (October 20, 2010).

123 Zyuganov, “Kitai—klich k novoi tsivilizatsii.”

124 Zyuganov, “Kitai—eto lokomotiv, kotoryi vytiagivaet drugie strany iz ekonomicheskogo krizisa.”

125 “90 let KPK: ‘Kruglyi stol’ v redaktsii gazety ‘Pravda,’” May 7, 2005, <https://kprf.ru/international/94550.html>; “Interv’iu Gennadiia Zyuganova dlia ‘Pravdy’ o poezdke v Kitai,” CPRF website, January 10, 2010, <https://kprf.ru/international/83089.html>.

126 Gennady Zyuganov, “Ideinye printsipy u KPK i KPRF odinakovy,” Krasnaia liniia (television channel), June 28, 2021, accessed December 3, 2023, <https://www.rline.tv/news/2021-06-28-gennadiy-zyuganov-ideinye-printsipy-u-kpk-i-kprf-odinakovy/>.

visit the PRC on a regular basis.¹²⁷ The Russian Communists have promoted Chinese interests so enthusiastically that in 2021, the Motherland party appealed to Russia's Justice Ministry to investigate if the CPRF's leaders were acting as foreign agents.¹²⁸

As early as 1991, CCP analytical and research centers held consultations with former members of the Politburo, Soviet ministers, and the CPRF that resulted in reports on the factors that had caused the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party. Reportedly, the CCP used these reports to develop a wide range of overarching ideological concepts.¹²⁹ The results of this research were discussed at the international conference commemorating the 20th anniversary of the dissolution of the USSR, hosted in 2011 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, where Chinese and Russian sociologists agreed that the main reason for the collapse was not economic inefficiency but "Khrushchev's revisionism," as well as the perestroika-era anti-Communist propaganda campaigns.¹³⁰ Participants in the Second World Congress on Marxism in Beijing affirmed that the collapse had created a ripple effect causing the dissolution of the world socialist system and the degradation of social protection institutions in developing countries. A particularly strong emphasis was placed on the "negative impact of American hegemony on the current world order."¹³¹

The mobilization of historical representations of the Bolshevik Revolution in the late 2000s revealed a Janus-faced approach to illiberal foreign policy. While the party in power continued to portray the events of 1917 as a national catastrophe inflicted by Western liberal democracies' support for the treacherous pro-Western opposition, the CPRF promoted the Soviet narrative of the first-in-the-world socialist state and the Communist International to reinforce the emerging trend toward Sino-Russian rapprochement. As Zyuganov's Communist Party was steadily becoming an important component of the Russian political establishment, the Soviet illiberal narrative patterns were being incorporated into the state's quasi-ideology. In the end, the Kremlin endorsed the CPRF leadership's revolutionary rhetoric to facilitate the implementation of Primakov's plans to build a strategic partnership with China.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led to the rejection of the foundation myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution—a key component of Marxism-Leninism—but the Red Soviet manner of historical narration regained its influence shortly after the Soviet Union's collapse. The return of both the illiberal Soviet and far-right cultures of remembrance can be explained by the rise in popularity of antigovernment parties and movements resulting from mass discontent with Yegor Gaidar's liberal market reforms. Fighting for the preservation of the Soviet legislative bodies, and later disseminating election propaganda and participating in parliamentary debates over the reforms, the Communist opposition

127 "Gennady Zyuganov: 'Vstrecha s Predsedatelem KNR tovarishchem Xi Jingpinom- eto znakovoe sobytie,'" March 26, 2013, <https://kprf.ru/party-live/cknews/116858.html>; "90 let KPK: 'Kruglyi stol' v redaktsii gazety 'Pravda,'" May 7, 2005, <https://kprf.ru/international/94550.html>; "Kitai—eto lokomotiv, kotoryi vytiagivaet drugie strany iz ekonomicheskogo krizisa," Rossiia i Kitai (website), December 27, 2014, <https://ruchina.org/china-article/china/574.html>.

128 "Kompatriu Rossii obvinili v rabote na Kompatriu Kitaia," *Expert*, May 5, 2021, <https://expert.ru/2021/05/5/kompatriu-rossii-obvinili-v-rabote-na-kompatriu-kitaya/>; "Kitaiskii ukлон Zyuganova," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 10, 2021, https://www.ng.ru/vision/2021-06-10/100_100910062021.html.

129 "Interv'iu Gennadiia Zyuganova dlia 'Pravdy' o poezdke v Kitai."

130 "V Kitae proshla mezhdunarodnaia nauchnaia konferentsiia, posviashchennaia 20-letiiu raspada SSSR," *Renmin Zhibao*, April 25, 2011, <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7360395.html>.

131 "90 let KPK: 'Kruglyi stol' v redaktsii gazety 'Pravda.'"

maintained the official Soviet narrative of the Great October Revolution giving birth to the world's first socialist state and leading Russia out of crisis. Another hallmark of the use of history in the 1990s was the projection of the ongoing fierce political struggle backward onto the Russian Revolution and Civil War. After the adoption of the 1993 Constitution, which prohibited the adoption of a single official state political ideology, the Kremlin often referred to the initial February Revolution in order to legitimate its political authority and discredit the Communist opposition.

The formation of coalitions and alliances, as well as the emergence of new hybrid parties within the antigovernment opposition, led to an intermingled White and Red illiberal and anti-Western historical narrative that mixed previously ideologically irreconcilable interpretations. In this hybrid narrative, the Soviet version of the Great October Revolution interacted amicably with the right-wing White émigrés' conspiracy theories. By the end of the 1990s, the new Red-and-White style of illiberal narration of the birth and death of the USSR had been formed: tying together the events of 1917 and the 1990s, this hybrid illiberal narrative portrayed the liberal West as craving to plunder Russia's natural resources and having "genetic hatred" of Russia's sovereign statehood and religion. According to this narrative, regardless of the type of political system, ideology, or foreign policy Russia adopts, the greedy, treacherous, and hypocritical West will never cease its attempts to destroy the nation. Due to its amazing ideological flexibility, this new Red-and-White illiberal way of narrating Russia's history provided an inexhaustible source of "evidence" to support both the right wing's and the Communist opposition's struggles against President Boris Yeltsin and his liberal reformers.

In the process of incorporating illiberal historical narratives, Yeltsin's and later Putin's ideologists clearly preferred the moderate right-wing ones. At the turn of the millennium the urgent necessity of building a new national identity was conditioned by the all-encompassing crisis which threatened to repeat the Russian Civil War of 1918 to 1920. However, despite the achieved rapprochement with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, President Vladimir Putin and his main ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, continued to refer to the Bolshevik Revolution negatively. Yet, when the construction of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership began, the Soviet-style narrative of the Revolution, the Communist International, and Sino-Soviet cooperation took on renewed importance. Following the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West, the relatively moderate concept of "sovereign democracy" gradually incorporated more illiberal patterns, such as the West's "generic hatred" of Russia's nationhood and, to some extent, the idea of the imperialist West's aggressiveness.

My analysis of the rise of illiberal memory culture in post-Soviet Russia shows that the process of the illiberalization of politics and the culture of remembrance followed the scheme proposed by Rosenfeld conceptually: the perestroika boom in self-critical approaches to national history was replaced with a harsh illiberal backlash due to the growth in popularity of illiberal politicians. Taking advantage of the mass discontent with Yeltsin's reforms, the populists weaponized both Red and White remembrance cultures to attack their opponents. The political environment between the mid-1980s and the early 2010s, not Putin or his ideologists' ideological preferences, is what shaped Russia's road to illiberalism and anti-Westernism.

Tracing the changes in political discourse, I found that the rise of illiberal memory in Russia does not fit the timeline that Rosenfeld proposed. First, the Russian boom in liberal remembrance continued for not longer than five to seven years, approximately

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from late 1980s to mid-1990s, and from its very beginning sparked an immediate protectionist reaction from CPSU counter-reformers and conservatives. Second, while the self-criticism boom reached its height and went global in the 1990s, Russia faced an unfolding illiberal backlash caused by mass discontent with the liberal market reforms and the brutal crackdown on the “mini-October Revolution” of 1993. Third, the process of the government takeover of illiberal memory culture began as early as the late 1990s and accelerated significantly after Putin was first elected president in 2000. Fourth, by 2008, the illiberal Red-and-White narrative had already been taken over by the government, and the 2008 financial crisis only hardened the Kremlin’s already illiberal domestic and foreign policy line.

The rise of illiberal remembrance in late Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia were shaped by two factors. First, to undermine the Soviet Communist Party ideology and delegitimize the formation and existence of the USSR, leaders of the anti-Communist opposition successfully mobilized militantly nationalistic White narratives. The ideological differences between these narratives were only a matter of degree in terms of their anti-liberalism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many right-wing and even far-right politicians and groups remained in the same political camp with Boris Yeltsin, and influenced the formation of the official narrative. I concluded that this was the reason why, between 1985 and 2000, the confrontation of traumatic historical injustices often headed in the right-wing direction. Another important factor that shaped the political environment of the process was the return of the Communist Party as a credible political party, caused by the mass discontent with the results of the liberal market reforms. That is why, despite the rejection of the Soviet foundation myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the illiberal Red style of historical narration regained its influence shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.