

Russophobe Myths

This is a list of common Russophobe myths about Russia and its people compiled by Anatoly Karlin at the blog SublimeOblivion.com in July 2009. Please be sure to check the supporting notes at the bottom before dismissing this as neo-Soviet propaganda.

1

MYTH: Life has only improved for a few oligarchs, while the poor and everyone outside Moscow remain impoverished.

REALITY: During Putin's Presidency, poverty rates more than halved and wages nearly tripled, fueling an on-going consumption boom shared across all regions and social groups.

2

MYTH: Russia is in a demographic death spiral that has gotten worse under Putin and which will soon sink its economy.

REALITY: The birth rate has increased, the death rate has fallen and mortality from murder, suicide and alcohol poisoning has plummeted. Projections of Russia's future dependency ratios are no worse than for China or the G7.

3

MYTH: Putin abused human rights, personally murdered 200 journalists and returned Russia to its totalitarian past.

REALITY: Too bad that only 3% of Russians agree, despite having easy access to such views via the press, cable TV and the Internet. The number of journalists killed under Putin (17) is less than under Yeltsin (30), and only five of them can be definitively linked to their professional work. Elections have been mostly free and fair.

4

MYTH: Russia's economy is one big oil bubble, and the severity of Russia's recession in 2009 confirms this.

REALITY: The extractive industries contributed a negligible amount to Russia's real GDP growth during the Putin Presidency and the big collapse in output at the end of 2008 was mostly due to Western banks cutting off the credit flows on which many Russian companies had unwisely come to rely upon during the boom years. Russia exports few manufactured goods because its comparative advantage lies in resource extraction.

5

MYTH: Heroic Americans with their British sidekicks won World War Two, while the Russians just threw billions of soldiers without rifles in front of German machine guns and raped every last Prussian wench when they finally arrived in Berlin.

The vast majority of German soldiers were killed, taken POW or otherwise incapacitated on the Eastern front. The Soviet to Axis loss ratio was 1.3:1 and the USSR outproduced Germany in every weapons system throughout the war. The number of alleged rape victims is vastly inflated for propagandistic purposes, and in any case does not come close to the scale of German barbarism which resulted in the deaths of fifteen to twenty million Soviet citizens.

This popular myth appeared because self-serving former Wehrmacht officers wanted to rehabilitate the German Army after World War Two and their goals were shared by American policy-makers in the strained atmosphere of the Cold War.

6

MYTH: Russia brutally invaded Georgia, a beacon of freedom and democracy in the Eurasian darkness.

REALITY: Hours after President Saakashvili promised friendship to the Ossetian people, his forces were invading South Ossetia and raining down indiscriminate rocket fire on sleeping Tskhinvali. Russia's retaliation was a just and proportionate response to the murder of its citizens and UN-mandated peace-keepers.

The beating of opposition protesters and the shutdown of anti-regime TV networks are serious blemishes on Georgian democracy.

7

MYTH: Russian liberals are altruistic campaigners for justice and the true voice of the oppressed Russian people.

REALITY: The Russian "liberals" (or liberasts, as they are often called) get low single-digit approval ratings from the Russian population, which is not at all surprising given their reputation for mendacious hypocrisy, Bolshevik-like rhetoric and dogmatic support for the West regardless of Russia's national interests.

8

MYTH: Russians are sexists and xenophobic racists who hate the West.

REALITY: Russian women live longer and are better educated than men, enjoy full abortion rights and participate extensively in the economy. Few Russians are predisposed against the US and there are far fewer anti-Semitic incidents in Russia than in France, Germany and the UK.

9

MYTH: Russia is an aggressive state which is hated by its neighbors.

REALITY: Unlike some superpowers, the Russia Federation has yet to invade another country unprovoked. Most of its neighbors view Russia favorably and a plurality of Ukrainians would be happy to join it.

10

MYTH: The barbarous state of Muscovy arose in the sixteenth century when Ivan the Terrible climbed out of the trees.

REALITY: The more than 1000-year old civilization of Kievan Rus' was literate, affluent, governed by a legal code that abhorred cruel and unusual punishments (including the death penalty) and accorded women extensive property and inheritance rights.

11

MYTH: Russia is soon going to see a sub-Saharan AIDS epidemic, causing mortality rates to soar further.

REALITY: These “pessimistic” models rely on assumptions that HIV transmission patterns in Russia will be similar to those prevailing in Africa. This is patently ridiculous given even a cursory acquaintance with differences in their host populations and epidemic dynamics.

The percentage of pregnant women testing HIV positive reached a plateau in 2002 and tended down ever since. Furthermore, since few Russians are malnourished they have greater immune resistance than Africans. Unlike the case in sub-Saharan Africa, in Russia medical equipment tends to be sterilized and having many sexual partners is socially unacceptable.

12

MYTH: Russians are a pack of uncultured illiterates.

REALITY: Russia leads the world in literacy, level of tertiary attainment and the quality of its mathematicians and programmers. It possesses a world-class literary, musical and artistic heritage and to claim otherwise is in fact to admit oneself ignorant and uncultured.

13

MYTH: A nation with European birth rates and African death rates cannot have a future.

REALITY: Sure it can. The post-Soviet collapse in fertility rates was a result of childbirth postponement caused by the transition shock, not a fundamental values shift, and as such can be expected to reverse itself in the next decade. Meanwhile, Russia's “hypermortality” primarily affects older Russian men who do not directly contribute to population reproduction.

14

MYTH: Russia has fallen to Tsarist levels of inequality and is plagued by endemic, African-level corruption. Both of these have become much worse under Putin.

REALITY: Russia's level of income inequality and of corruption is average by world standards. Under Putin, they have registered a slight deterioration and slight improvement, respectively.

15

MYTH: Chechnya's heroic freedom fighters deserve their independence and will soon get it, Insha'Allah!

REALITY: When they had *de facto* independence, the Chechens created a criminalized, Wahhabi state, practiced ethnic cleansing against local Russians and launched armed raids against border regions. Much as the Russophobes and jihadists may wish otherwise, it is difficult to see how Chechnya could repeat this considering that the region is stabilized, reconstruction is in full swing and the war officially ended in 2009.

16

MYTH: All Soviet space programs were developed by German prisoners of war, who are still kept in labor camps in Siberia.

REALITY: Sorry, but wrong country. All German leading hi-tech professionals, including rocket scientists, surrendered to the Americans and many worked on their space program.

17

MYTH: The Western media is accurate and objective in representing Putin as a ranting autocrat and Medvedev's puppeteer.

REALITY: Putin is frequently mistranslated, quoted out of context and censored by the Western press in its efforts to portray him as a neo-Soviet fascist overlord. The tandem's relationship is based on cooperation and they share a longterm goal of transforming Russia into a liberal, affluent society.

18

MYTH: Chinese settlers are taking over the rapidly depopulating Russian Far East and the region is under increasing threat from the People's Liberation Army.

REALITY: A few hundreds of thousands of Chinese seasonal labor migrants pose no demographic threat to the more than five million Russians in the region. Even if China abandons its traditional focus on south-east Asia and the unthinkable happens, a Chinese conventional attack on Russia will be repelled by tactical nuclear weapons.

19

MYTH: Russia's industrial base is hollowed out and obsolete, and the stationary bandits who rule it have no interest in making long-term investments into areas like hi-tech. As such, it is doomed to remain a resource appendage of the West.

REALITY: Russia has seen healthy manufacturing expansion aided by a weakened ruble, the creation of special economic zones and a robust industrial policy geared towards gradual import substitution. State funding for education, nanotechnology and other hi-tech ventures has soared in recent years.

20

MYTH: The Soviet Union was doomed to collapse because of its internal contradictions and dependence on oil exports.

REALITY: Theoretical work shows that the Soviet system was fundamentally stable, albeit stagnant. Output collapse was precipitated by Gorbachev's abandonment of central planning in the absence of evolved market mechanisms, which simply led to ruinous insider plunder and political crisis.

21

MYTH: Russia has proven itself uncooperative and untrustworthy as a Western partner.

REALITY: Bearing in mind its record of broken promises and undisguised aggression towards Russia coupled with arrogant dismissal of Russian protestations (as seen on Kosovo, NATO expansion, Georgia's aggression, missile defense, color revolutions, Jackson-Vanik, etc), perhaps the question of just who is uncooperative and untrustworthy should be reconsidered.

22

MYTH: Russia's youth is liberal and pro-Western, and will soon kick Putin and his KGB goons out of the Kremlin.

REALITY: The most pro-American section of the Russian population are the middle-aged. Russian children and youth are at least as skeptical as their grandparents, despite that – and *because* – they are the most sophisticated and globally-minded age group.

23

MYTH: New schoolbooks aim to rehabilitate Stalin, steeping the next generation of Russians in the glories of sovereign democracy.

REALITY: The controversial textbook in question had a very limited print run and is in any case one of a huge number of other permitted textbooks. Nor does it leave out Stalin's repressions and liquidation of entire social classes. Its main "sin" is that it also dares to point out Stalin's positive achievements and refuses to unequivocally condemn him in the belabored, moralizing way commonly expected of such textbooks.

24

MYTH: Ethnic Russians invent grievances about how they are being discriminated against in Estonia and Latvia,

REALITY: Many human rights organizations have documented that the Russophone minority in Estonia is subject to severe language and citizenship laws. This results in the disenfranchisement of around a quarter of their populations and discrimination against Russophones in employment and education. SS veterans proudly march through the streets of Riga while anti-fascist conferences and protests are brutally broken up.

25

MYTH: Ten million Ukrainians died from the organized famine-genocide of 1932-33, which Russia continues to deny. Understandably most Ukrainians yearn to break free from Russia's baleful orbit.

REALITY: The famine was caused by the misguided collectivization campaign and aggravated by poor harvests. Though there were around two million excess deaths in Ukraine, overall losses in the Soviet Union were twice as high because South Russia, the Volga region and Kazakhstan were also badly affected. Russia's position is that the famine was directed against the kulaks (the social class) and not Ukraine (the nation), which is an academically valid point of view; Ukraine on the other hand illiberally criminalizes "Holodomor denial".

The hardline position on Russia and the Holodomor is exclusively pursued by the discredited Orange elites. In stark contrast, the vast majority of Ukrainians like Russia and Putin would probably win if he could run for the Ukrainian Presidency.

26

MYTH: Russia's military technology is obsolete, its doctrines are outdated and its armed forces are increasingly decrepit. It will get crushed if it goes to war with China or NATO.

REALITY: Russia is developing fifth-generation capabilities in fighters, surveillance, electronic warfare, information warfare and precision weapons. Upgrading old Soviet platforms with modern electronic technology multiplies their effectiveness. It has major strengths in asymmetric counters like air defense, anti-ship cruise missiles and submarines. Russia retains its Soviet-era military-industrial complex, massive mobilization capacity and huge nuclear forces.

27

MYTH: Stalin killed 62 million innocent souls, making him a far worse tyrant than Hitler.

REALITY: During the entire 1921-53 period, some 4.1mn people were condemned for counter-revolutionary activities, of them 0.8mn to death and 1.1mn of whom died in camps and prisons. After adding the 3.5-5.0mn excess deaths from the collectivization famines, it is hard to see how Stalin could have been responsible for more than ten million deaths at the absolute maximum. Figures in the tens of millions have no basis in physical evidence or demographic plausibility.

Even in just the occupied territories of the USSR, there were there were 13.7mn deaths due to Nazi reprisals, labor requisitioning and famine. Even excluding the vast war casualties, the deaths of about 20mn Slav civilians, 6mn Jews, 3-4mn Soviet POWs and up to a million Roma can be attributed to the Nazis during the far shorter period 1941-45. If Nazi plans had come to fruition, then all the Slavs of eastern Europe would have been exterminated, helotized or driven into Siberian exile. As such, it is hard to see how the latter could be construed as being worse except by the most diehard Russophobes and fascists.

28

MYTH: Putin instigated a vicious clampdown on judicial independence and assaulted Russian civil society with restrictive NGO laws.

REALITY: Under the Putin administration the number of plaintiffs seeking redress through Russian courts increased sixfold and acquittal rates soared from 0.8% to 10%, mainly thanks to the introduction of jury trials, and claimants win 71% of cases against the state. There is now a system of free legal aid, more privacy protections and increased accountability.

The infamous NGO laws merely required the registration of all NGOs, simplified the registration process and extended their rights against bureaucratic interference.

29

MYTH: People have been saying Russia will be great in the future for nearly a thousand years. And every year, Russia keeps getting worse.

REALITY: Popular perceptions of Russians were always bifurcated in the West between optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints, with little room for nuance. However, Russia tends to perform best soon after Russophobe rhetoric reaches its peak and it has indeed improved by almost all meaningful metrics since the late 1990's.

30

MYTH: Because of the above, Russia is doomed to continued stagnation culminating in collapse and disintegration.

REALITY: Only in your dreams...and in the *Economist's*, which predicted fifteen of the past zero Russian collapses.

It is far more likely that its impressive human capital, macroeconomic rationalism and energy windfalls stand Russia in good stead for convergence to First World living standards by the 2020's.

31

MYTH: Khodorkovsky was a progressive entrepreneur who is being prosecuted by the evil siloviks for pursuing transparency and democracy. Even if he did steal state assets in the 1990's, every other oligarch was doing the same so this is selective political persecution.

REALITY: Khodorkovsky transgressed against Putin's early deal with the oligarchs to leave their ill-gotten fortunes alone in return for halting their meddling in the country's politics. He bribed Duma members and tried to stack it with his own people in an effort to lower his taxes, which he was already evading on a massive scale. He subverted Russia's security by insisting on his own pipeline route to the east, maintaining close contacts with Washington neocons and trying to merge his oil company YUKOS with Exxon. There is strong evidence that Khodorkovsky's employees murdered those who got in his way.

32

MYTH: Yeltsin was a heroic democrat and hero of the people.

REALITY: He might have posed on a tank after checking the hardline Communist coup in 1991, but just two years later those same tanks were bombarding a Duma which dared object to his corrupt privatizations and assault on social welfare. He prosecuted a criminally incompetent war in Chechnya, used administrative resources to win the 1996 elections and surrounded himself with nepotistic cronies. Despite this – or more likely *because* of this – he was praised and supported by the West.

33

MYTH: Russia uses energy blackmail to intimidate its neighbors and exploits its energy clout to project political influence.

REALITY: It has full rights to charge its neighbors whatever it pleases for its gas, so this is not blackmail. The second part is true enough, but ignores that this is common to all Great Powers – as demonstrated by Western control of international trade and finance organizations and energy imperialism like the Iraq War.

34

MYTH: The Russian Empire was a backward despotism populated by illiterate peasants.

REALITY: Not really a myth, but this perception was becoming increasingly dated during the last years of Tsarism. By 1913 Russia had near universal primary schooling enrollment, a (rapidly growing) literacy rate of 41% and the fastest industrial growth rate in Europe.

35

MYTH: Thomas Edison invented the light bulb and Guglielmo Marconi invented the radio.

REALITY: Actually it was Alexander Lodygin and Alexander Popov, respectively.

36

MYTH: Russia will become an Islamic Caliphate by 2050.

REALITY: Ethnic Russians still account for 80% of the Federation's population, and since the fertility rates of all major Muslim ethnic groups have declined to below replacement-level rates it is certain that Russians will retain a firm majority into the foreseeable future. And even if Russians and Tatars magically swap demographic places, almost nothing will change because vodka has long since dissolved away the Koran in Russia.

37

MYTH: Stalin wrecked the Red Army by purging all its officers, did not anticipate his buddy Hitler's attack and blundered by concentrating his forces on the Soviet borders instead of conducting defense in depth. This resulted in the huge casualty disparities between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army in 1941.

REALITY: Though the purges were detrimental to the Red Army, the main reason it experienced officer shortages was its massive expansion from 1.2mn to 5.0mn men during 1938-41. Stalin fully anticipated an eventual German attack, but Soviet intelligence was far from unambiguous about its timing.

Defense in depth at the strategic level would have led to defeat in detail and catastrophe; the policy of mounting constant diversionary attacks on the German flanks, though costly, distorted the shape and sapped the strength of Barbarossa. This ultimately saved Moscow and averted total defeat in 1941.

Though heavily skewed, Red Army loss ratios in 1941 were no worse than those of the Poles or the French when pitted against the Wehrmacht.

MYTH: By teaming up with Nazi Germany in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Russians were just as culpable for the outbreak of World War Two as the Germans.

REALITY: Munich. The USSR had been pressing for an alliance with the Western democracies to contain Hitler as early as the 1930's, but they repeatedly sold it down the river – most notably by betraying Czechoslovakia in 1938, which was partitioned between Germany, Hungary and Poland soon after.

Realizing the West was most interested in having Germany and the USSR duke it out between them, Stalin stalled for time by cautiously cooperating with Hitler while rapidly building up Soviet military-industrial potential.

MYTH: Unlike Germany's reconciliation with its Nazi past, Russia has never apologized for its Soviet past.

REALITY: Why should modern Russians apologize for policies pursued by the small clique that ruled them a long time ago, and many of whom were non-Russians to boot?

No European state has made much effort to fully account for its imperial legacies; the main feature of German exceptionalism was that you were supposed to confine your genocides to colored peoples in hot, sticky places, and in any case a) the Nazi regime was not morally comparable to the Soviet Union and b) even so the only reason Germany apologized so much was because it was occupied. Turkey criminalizes affirmation of the Armenian Genocide, Japan brushes off complaints about its brutal conduct in China during the Second World War and the Baltic states whitewash their involvement in the Holocaust.

Speaking of whom, apologies imply acceptance of responsibility and unleash demands for reparations... Latvia has already set up a commission to calculate a bill for "Soviet-era losses" to present to Russia, which ironically had to be disbanded recently because of the economic crisis.

And yet *despite* all this, Russia did apologize profusely under Yeltsin. The main difference under Putin is that he dares to chart a more objective course on historical truth, acknowledging past wrongs but refusing to one-sidedly smear Russia's proud Soviet legacy, unlike his alcoholic predecessor in the Kremlin.

MYTH: The difference between a "russophobe" and a "russophile" is that while both "love" Russia, they define "love" differently: the "russophile" does everything he can to destroy the country, while the "russophobe" does everything he can to save it from destruction.

REALITY: The difference between a "Russophobe" and a "Russophile" is that while both "love" Russia, they define "love" differently: The "Russophobe" does everything she can to smear and condemn the country and those who defend it from within her own blinkered frames of reference, while the "Russophile" does everything she can to understand Russia on its own terms.

41

MYTH: Berezovsky is a heroic crusader for democracy.

REALITY: General Lebel said of him, “Berezovsky is the apotheosis of sleaziness on the state level: this representative of the small clique in power is not satisfied with stealing—he wants everybody to see that he is stealing with complete impunity”. He died in a plane crash.

The journalist Paul Khlebnikov christened him, “Godfather of the Kremlin”. He was gunned down on the streets of Moscow.

Berezovsky was involved in multiple scams during the 1990’s and there are strong links tying him to several unresolved murders in the 1990’s. With friends like these, the Russophobes need no enemies.

42

MYTH: The FSB goon Lugovoi assassinated the heroic dissident Litvinenko in the heart of London using ultra-rare polonium only produced in a few reactor cores in Russia. Putin’s refusal to extradite Lugovoi makes him complicit in nuclear terrorism.

REALITY: There are many, many things that don’t fit in this kitschy feel-good (for Westerners) account. Usual claims to the contrary, plutonium is not that rare and is usually a major byproduct in early nuclear weapons development programs. Nonetheless, it would have been much more convenient, easy and reliable to kill him with a gun or knife.

There is also evidence that Litvinenko was in prolonged contact with polonium before the fatal ingestion. One of his associates, the shady Italian, Scaramella, became contaminated before meeting Lugovoi or Kovtun, the two main suspects. Hence only Litvinenko could have contaminated him. (Scaramella was later imprisoned in Italy for attempting to plant incriminating evidence on a suspected nuclear-component smuggler). Russian requests for actual evidence as to the guilt of Lugovoi were stonewalled by the British, who nonetheless arrogantly insisted on extradition in contravention of the Russian Constitution.

Litvinenko could have been an MI6 pawn tasked with investigating a nuclear smuggling ring. Or he could have been complicit himself, either for profit or to incriminate certain Russians. There are many possible interpretations and the James Bond-like version of evil FSB spies silencing dissent abroad expertly spun by Berezovsky and his acolyte Goldfarb is far from the most likely one.

43

MYTH: Human rights abuses and authoritarian trends in Russia are transmitted top down from the Kremlin.

REALITY: If anything, Putin is more liberal than 70% of the Russian population. Russia is a post-totalitarian society with many features of the old order still hanging around in institutions like the police, the penal system and the bureaucracy. It is fully capable of evolving its own brand of democracy, but that requires time and a measure of political consolidation.

44

MYTH: Russia is Mordor.

REALITY: Scratch a Russophobe, and you find a talentless fantasy writer. Sorry to disappoint you folks, but there aren't billions of orcs beneath the Ural Mountains preparing the final phase of their assault on the West. Not as far as I know, anyway.

45

MYTH: Rising up against the crony pro-Moscow Communists who rigged the elections in Moldova, masses of heroic young democrats tried to Tweet their their nation back into the light of Western iCivilization.

REALITY: The Communists enjoy a broad level of support across all age groups, run a fully democratic country and always steered a course between Moscow and the West. Of their biggest electoral opponents, one was a pro-Romanian nationalist and admirer of fascist dictator Antonescu, and the other had a reputation as the biggest thief in Moldova. The unruly protesters were an unholy mix of Romanian nationalists, common hooligans, and liberast provocateurs with shadowy connections to Atlanticist "pro-democracy" outfits.

46

MYTH: The Kremlin supports Hamas and aids Iran in its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

REALITY: Putin has never met with Hamas and Foreign Minister Lavrov made it clear they would be treated as "undeveloped teenagers" until they recognize Israel. Russia's relations with Iran are complex – on the one hand, it strongly opposes nuclear enrichment on Iranian soil and refuses to rule out economic sanctions. On the other hand, Iran's gas reserves pose a substantial long-term threat to Russian energy influence in Europe and it is in Russia's interests to keep tensions between Iran and the West high.

47

MYTH: A radar and ten interceptor missiles in central Europe will have absolutely no chance of stopping Russia's huge nuclear arsenal, so it's just using the issue as a bargaining chip to further its imperial ambitions.

REALITY: Should the US acquires the capability to decapitate Russia's leadership and destroy its decaying nuclear arsenal in a first strike, then even a small ABM system could mop up any Russian retaliation. Furthermore, once the basic Air Defense Ground Environment is built up, massively expanding the system becomes much cheaper. Though this is a paranoid way of looking at things, only the paranoid survive. Especially in the military.

48

MYTH: Nations that have embraced the West like Georgia and Ukraine are much more economically dynamic than Russia, which proves the bankruptcy of the Kremlin's economic model.

REALITY: Since Georgia and Ukraine are much poorer than Russia and collapsed farther after the dissolution of the USSR, they are *supposed* to have higher growth rates. But they actually don't. Ukraine's growth rate of 7% was similar to Russia's during the boom years from 2000-2008 and its year on year GDP collapsed by a stunning 20%+ in Q1 2009. Though Georgia's growth rate of 9-10% under Saakashvili's market fundamentalism was substantially higher, it started from a much lower base and was accompanied by rising social iniquity, deindustrialization and the removal of the social safety net.

49

MYTH: Since most Russians are lazy, irresponsible and submissive sovok sheeple, they will remain backwards and under the thumbs of Kremlin thugs for a long time to come.

REALITY: Ushering in the new era of legality, markets and social activism is the so-called Putin generation, which has vastly differing values from those of older generations – initiative, boldness, hierarchy, individualism, cosmopolitanism and patriotism. Furthermore, many Soviet-era values like love for the Motherland, confidence in tomorrow, community spirit, social justice, courage, tolerance and skepticism remain highly respectable.

50

MYTH: Russians are extremely pessimistic, unhappy and spiritually doomed. A people who don't believe in a better tomorrow can't have one.

REALITY: After a long period of disillusionment, at the end of 2006 more people began to believe Russia was moving in a positive than in a negative direction, and from early 2008 more people felt confident in tomorrow than not. Though the economic crisis dented confidence, social morale is still far higher than during the Time of Troubles in the 1990's.

Notes:

1. According to [Rosstat](#), from 2000-2007 poverty rates have more than halved (from 30% to 14%). In real terms during 2000-2007, pensions have grown by a factor of 2.3 and wages by a factor of 2.6 (while the Gini index of inequality has remained roughly steady). A consumption boom has seen soaring automobile ownership, greater average living spaces and cell phone and Internet penetration by 2008 exceed 100% and reach 28%, respectively.

2. From 2000-2008 per thousand people, the birth rate has increased from 8.7 to 12.1, while the death rate has fallen from 15.3 to 14.8 – thus, natural population growth has improved from -6.6 to -2.6. Similarly, infant mortality has tumbled from 15.3/1000 to 8.5/1000. (In fact, increased migration meant the total population fall in 2008 was just -0.09%, i.e., virtually flat and not substantially different from Japan, Germany or just about any central-east European nation). During the same period, mortality from alcohol poisonings, suicide and murder has nearly halved.

However, all of this misses the point that in economics what matters isn't the population or its growth rate per se, but the dynamics of the working age population as a percentage of the whole population – in this respect, Russia's projected decline is no more severe than that in the G7 or China (see [pg.8 of this Goldman Sachs report](#)). Fiscal problems will occur only if a) the old-age dependency ratio is high and b) old age social security systems are too generous or improperly structured. [Russia's old-age ratio is not projected to get excessively high](#) even by 2050, while the World Bank believes [long-term fiscal sustainability](#) will be assured if the primary non-oil budget deficit remains below 4.7% of GDP.

3. The Western notion that Putin has strangled Russia's nascent democracy is not one shared by the silent Russian majority. 64% of Russians think Putin has had a positive influence on democracy and human rights, while only 3% think it was 'very negative' (see [recent BBC World Service poll](#) and [Fedia Kriukov's excellent commentary on it](#)). The data on journalists is taken from the [Committee to Protect Journalists'](#) database and [Fedia Kriukov's audit of it](#). See also Nicolai Petro in [Russia through the looking glass](#) and [Russian democracy: a reply to Mischa Gabowitsch](#).

No election watch-dog has been able to point out anything other than vacuous allegations that I'm aware of. For instance, on the topic of the 2008 Presidential elections, please consult the response of independent Russian election monitor GOLOS ([here](#)):

GOLOS Association observed that the Election Day was held in a relatively quiet atmosphere in contrast to the State Duma election day. Such large-scale violations observed then as campaigning next to polling stations, transporting of voters, intimidation of voters and others were practically non-existent. Polling stations were better prepared and the voting process was better organized. At the majority of polling stations voters' lists were properly bound, there were fewer representatives of administration at inside polling stations. In general the process of opening of the polling stations went well without any major incidents.

4. To take 2007 as an example, Russia's economy grew by 8.1%, driven by construction (16.4%), retail (12.0%), finance (10.4%) and manufacturing (7.9%) and weighted down by the extractive industries (a meager 0.3%) ([source](#)). This pattern has held since 2005, and even in the [2000-2004 period only a third of growth was due to increasing hydrocarbons production](#) according to Rudiger Ahrend of the OECD. See also the Economist Intelligence Unit's (which unfortunately the Economist itself ignores) [Russia's booming economy](#), which illustrates the bankruptcy of several conceptions about Russia's economy, including a) its hydrocarbons dependence and b) supposed stagnation in investment and manufacturing. Continuing increases in oil prices during 2003-2008 masked volume growth in non-hydrocarbons exports. Before the crisis, Russia had a healthy current account surplus, 600bn \$ in foreign currency reserves and healthy budget surpluses intended to break even at 65\$ / barrel oil.

For an insight into the vital importance of Western intermediation towards funneling credit into the Russian economy and its problems stemming from lacking an indigenous financial system, check my [The Importance of Self-Sufficiency](#).

During the fat years, Russia bought up foreign currency reserves (e.g. T-Bills, US state-guaranteed mortgage securities, etc) to prevent an excessive ruble strengthening, which would have hurt manufacturers and exporters. However, this starved the local market of capital, thus forcing the domestic corporate sector to access foreign debt finance – therefore the rapid rise in official reserves were matched

by a corresponding rise in private indebtedness, albeit the latter proceeded at a slower pace and allowed Russia to remain a large net creditor nation. This was a conservative and pricey choice, since the interest on the borrowing was substantially greater than the yields on Russia's sovereign assets, thus forcing Russia Inc. to pay a 'very substantial "spread" between the yield on its assets and the cost of the private debt in return for this foreign intermediation'. In light of the global credit crunch, it ended up providing only an 'illusory degree of security' for a 'hefty price'. This is because now **the Russian corporate system faced a triple whammy as credit availability dried up, existing creditors demanded repayments and and the commodity prices on which their balance sheets depended plummeted.**

5. This can actually be said to encompass four myths, which I comprehensively refuted in [The Poisonous Myths of the Eastern Front](#). I will quote summaries; please see the post for supporting notes:

MYTH I: Heroic Americans with their British sidekicks won World War Two, while the Russian campaign was a sideshow.

REALITY: Although Western Lend-Lease and strategic bombing was highly useful, the reality is that **the vast majority of German soldiers and airmen fought and died on the Eastern Front throughout the war.**

MYTH II: The Russians just threw billions of soldiers without rifles in front of German machine guns.

REALITY: The vast majority of German soldiers were killed, taken POW or otherwise incapacitated on the Eastern front. **The Soviet to Axis loss ratio was 1.3:1 and the USSR outproduced Germany in every weapons system throughout the war.** [For comprehensive stats on the matter, check out Colonel-General G. F. Krivosheev's authoritative book [Soviet casualties and combat losses in the twentieth century](#); another good source / summary is Sergei Fedosov's article [победа или Победа: как мы воевали](#)].

MYTH III: Though the Wehrmacht fought with honor and dignity on the Eastern Front, the Russians killed all the German POW's and raped and looted east Germany when they conquered it.

REALITY: The Great Patriotic War was an absolute war that was more brutal than anything seen in the West by orders of magnitude throughout its entire length. The hundreds of thousands German civilian and POW deaths at Soviet hands, though tragic, pale besides **the up to 15-20mn Soviet civilian dead and the 60% mortality ratio of Soviet POW's in German camps.** Set against these numbers, the Red Army rapes in east Germany seem almost irrelevant. [See Fedia Kriukov's [refuting comment about the validity of "megarape" estimates attributed to the Red Army](#)].

MYTH IV: The mainstream Western narrative on the Eastern Front during the Second World War was formed by academic historians and is fundamentally fair and objective.

REALITY: The exigencies of the Cold War, coupled with traditional US anti-Communism, meant that many Americans sympathized with the German narrative of the war. In particular, the Wehrmacht officers talked, networked and wrote about how the German military was not complicit in Nazi war crimes so as to cement West Germany (not to mention their own careers) into the Western alliance on equal terms. The complexities and compromises of military involvement in genocide in the East was whitewashed into a kitschy image of the German soldier as a patriot braving the odds to defend family and Heimat from the Bolshevik hordes. The US military and politicians were just fine with this, because they faced an ideological struggle and possible land war with the Soviet Union. Though there is serious and reasonably objective Western academic work on the Eastern Front, popular culture is still dominated by German memoirs and a-historical romanticizers.

6. There is a wealth of evidence for the position that Georgia initiated the 2008 Ossetia War – see the section on Georgia in [Da Russophile Core Articles](#). For a summary, see *Spiegel's* [A Shattered Dream in Georgia: EU Probe Creates Burden for Saakashvili](#): Other key articles include my [The Western Media, Craven Skills for their Neocon Masters](#); [How to Scrup up a War Story](#) by Mark Ames; and this BBC documentary about the evidence of [Georgian atrocities – What really happened in South Ossetia?](#)

There are many articles even in the Western media covering Saakashvili's strong-arm tactics against the opposition, though the difficult issue of Western complicity (through silence) in it – especially when contrasted against the howls and cries whenever an unsanctioned protest in Russia is broken up – is rarely raised. Because it would reveal the moral bankruptcy behind the West's support for Saakashvili, of course.

7. See the **Liberasts** section in [Best of Da Russophile](#), and read [Russia's Limousine Liberals](#) (Anatol Lieven) and [Why Russian Liberals Lose](#) (Nicolai Petro).

8. For abortion laws, see [Wikipedia](#). For other stats, see the WEF [Gender Gap Index 2007 Russia](#) section, according to which women are better educated, healthier and constitute 38% of decision-makers and 64% of professional workers. (Admittedly, the political subsection isn't as good, though it should be noted that since the last Duma elections, the percentage of women in parliament [has increased from 10% to 14%](#) and two women have entered the Russian Cabinet). [Only 8% of Russians view Americans very negatively](#) (an attitude not shared by most people in Latin America and the Middle East). In 2006, a typical year, there were 136 violent anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, 97 in France, 74 in Canada, 38 in Germany and 34 in the Ukraine, compared to just 30 in Russia (according to the [Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism](#)).

9. 81% of Ukrainians, 78% of Bulgars, 59% of Slovaks and 54% of Chinese view Russia favorably (in each country, that's more than those who view the US in a positive light). These opinion polls are from the 47-nation PEW survey [Global Unease with Major Powers](#). (Ok, admittedly the same cannot be said for Poles and the Czechs). Some 54% of Ukrainians are positive about joining the Union of Russia and Belarus, while only 24% are negative (see [this poll](#)). More Ukrainians would prefer to join the Union of Russian & Belarus (43%) than the European Union (30%) (see Levada poll [here](#)), and this is still the case as of 2009 – see [Would the real Ukraine please stand up?](#)

A Ukrainian public opinion study recently published by the Kiev-based Research and Branding polling institute found that top Russian politicians, including Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, enjoy sky-high public approval ratings—much more impressive than those of their Ukrainian counterparts. Moreover, the number of Ukrainians who want a union state with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan is greater than the number of those rooting to join the European Union.

According to Gallup polls in recent years, all the former Soviet countries except Armenia and Georgia [massively approve of the Russian leadership](#) and in all post Soviet nations except Azerbaijan [pluralities want at least an economic union](#).

Though some might quibble with the assertion that Russia has not invaded any sovereign states in the post-Cold War period, citing Georgia. This is unfair and disingenuous – please see Myth #6.

10. Read the [Kievan Rus' wiki](#) and consult its sources for confirmation and more information. Just to pre-empt any confrontations, I am aware that some Ukrainian nationalists consider the history of Rus' to be exclusively theirs, dating the emergence of the Russian state to the late medieval expansion of Muscovy. This is a ridiculous viewpoint. Firstly, Kievan Rus' also covered modern-day Belarus and most of European Russia west of the Volga. Secondly, even Muscovy can trace its ancestry from the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal', which was nearly as old as Kiev or Novgorod.

11. See my article [Myth of the Russian AIDS Apocalypse](#):

In 2007 [Russian government anti-AIDS crusader] [Pokrovsky believed](#) that there were “as many as 1.3mn” people infected with AIDS, very far from the multi-million rates he was predicting just five years ago, and not a catastrophic increase from “[expert estimates](#)” of 0.8mn in 2000. [Comprehensive] [Russian government data](#) shows that the percentage of pregnant women testing HIV positive reached a plateau in 2002 and tended down ever since. The models used by Eberstadt and co. are themselves critically flawed,

because according to the international research program [Knowledge for Action in HIV/AIDS in Russia](#), they assume that “the epidemic would be essentially heterosexual in nature and follow trends observed in sub-Saharan Africa”, which is “not borne out by current surveillance data from Russia”. (They are also not borne out by the slightest acquaintance with comparative development and sociology. [Few Russians are malnourished](#) and hence have greater immune resistance, their medical equipment tends to be sterilized and it is socially unacceptable for them to have many partners or engage in anal sex; [all this cannot be said for sub-Saharan Africans](#)).

12. Russia has universal literacy (see [World Bank](#)). Statistics on the percentage of the population with tertiary education from the [OECD](#). In [PIRLS 2006](#) (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), Russia came first in the world on the average combined reading literacy score. In mathematics, 17% of all Fields Medal winners (and 36% since the RF came into existence) have been Russian/Soviet nationals (see [Wikipedia](#)). Programming prowess is indicated by articles such as these ([The next Silicon Valley: Siberia](#)) and reflected in things like [Maths Olympiad](#) and [programming competition](#) results.

13. See the Population & Demography Section in [Best of Da Russophile](#), in particular the short intro [Through the Looking Glass into Russia's Demography](#).

...First, fertility expectations today are little different from those of the late Soviet era, when the TFR was still relatively healthy. According to numerous surveys since the early 1990's, Russians consistently say they want to have an average of 2.5 children. This is broadly similar to respondents from the British Isles, France and Scandinavia, who have relatively good TFR's of around 1.7-2.1. This suggests Russia's post-Soviet fertility collapse was caused by “transition shock” rather than a “values realignment” to middle-European norms, where people only want 1.7-1.8 children.

Second, a major problem with the TFR is that it ignores the effects of birth timing. A more accurate measure of long-term fertility is the average birth sequence (ABS), which gives the mean order of all newborn children. If in one fine year all women in a previously childless country decide to give birth for some reason, the TFR will soar to an absurdly high level but the ABS will equal exactly one. In Russia the ABS remained steady at 1.6 children per woman from 1992-2006, little changed from Soviet times, even though the TFR plummeted well below this number. This indicates that many women were postponing children until they settled into careers and improved their material wellbeing – a hypothesis attested to by the rising age of mothers at childbirth since 1993. Though this may be a false positive if many women remain childless, the 2002 Census indicated that only 6-7% of women did not have any children by the end of their reproductive years. This indicates that childlessness is not in vogue and worries about widespread sterility are overblown.

Third, a new confident conservatism has recently taken hold in Russian society. After two decades of disillusionment, at the end of 2006 consistently more Russians began to believe the nation was moving in a positive than in a negative direction. It is likely no coincidence that the TFR began to consistently rise just then – from 1.3 in 2006 to about 1.5 in 2008, though generous new child benefits helped.

...

High mortality rates only have a direct impact on replacement-level TFR when significant numbers of women die before or during childbearing age, as in Third World countries. Russia's infant mortality rate of 8.5 / 1000 in 2008 is close to developed-country levels and not statistically significant. Though tragic and unnecessary, its “hypermortality” crisis mainly affects older men and as such has negligible direct effects on fertility.

For a more in-depth explorations of these issues, consult my [Rite of Spring: Russia's Fertility Trends](#) (recommended by Thomas PM Barnett), [Russia's Demographic Resilience](#) (what the economic crisis means for Russia's demography) and [Faces of the Future](#) (my own models of future Russian demography).

14. Russia's [income Gini coefficient](#) (a standard measure of income inequality) of around 41.3 as of 2007 is high only by the standards of socialist European countries. It is lower than in the US, China and the vast majority of developing

countries. It has remained almost completely constant from 1994–2003, and by projection, to 2007 (see [HDR05 RF: Rusia in 2015, p.33](#)). Only 17% of Russians paid a bribe to obtain a service in 2007 (see Transparency International's [GCB](#)) – putting them into the same quintile as Bulgaria, Turkey and the Czech Republic, i.e. slap bang in the middle of world corruption rather than at the end. Even according to the [World Bank](#) (control of corruption 16.5 in 2000; 24.3 in 2006) and [Transparency International](#) (CPI of 2.1 in 2000; 2.3 in 2007), which crucially rely on *foreign perceptions* of corruption in Russia, transparency has slightly improved under Putin. I have already discussed issues of inequality and corruption (in particular the problem with CPI) [here](#) and [here](#). To quote [A Normal Country](#) (Andrei Shleifer & Daniel Treisman, *Foreign Affairs*, Mar/Apr 2004) *in extenso*:

Yet what about sources less dependent on the perception of outsiders? In the summer of 1999, the World Bank and the EBRD conducted a survey of business managers in 22 postcommunist countries. Respondents were asked to estimate the share of annual revenues that “firms like theirs” typically devoted to unofficial payments to public officials “in order to get things done.” Such payments might be made, the questionnaire added, to facilitate connection to public utilities, to obtain licenses or permits, to improve relations with tax collectors, or in relation to customs or imports. Respondents were also asked to what extent the sale of parliamentary laws, presidential decrees, or court decisions had directly affected their businesses, in the hope of measuring the extent to which policymakers were co-opted by business.

On both the “burden of bribery” and “state capture” dimensions, Russia ranked right in the middle of its postcommunist peers. On average, Russian firms reportedly paid 2.8 percent of revenues on bribes, less than in Ukraine and Uzbekistan, and far less than in Azerbaijan (5.7 percent) and Kyrgyzstan (5.3 percent). The percentage who said it was “sometimes,” “frequently,” “mostly,” or “always” necessary for their firms to make extra, unofficial payments to public officials in order to influence the content of new laws, decrees, or regulations was also about average: 9 percent, compared to 24 percent in Azerbaijan, 14 percent in Latvia and Lithuania, and 2 percent in Belarus and Uzbekistan. In both cases, Russian responses were very close to what one would predict given Russia's relative level of economic development.

How does corruption in Russia affect individuals? The UN conducts a cross-national survey of crime victims. Between 1996 and 2000, it asked urban residents in a number of countries the following question: “In some countries, there is a problem of corruption among government or public officials. During [the last year] has any government official, for instance a customs officer, a police officer or inspector in your country asked you, or expected you, to pay a bribe for his service?” The percentage of positive responses in Russia was about average for the developing and middle-income countries surveyed. Some 17 percent of Russians said they had been asked for or had been expected to pay bribes in the preceding year, fewer than in Argentina, Brazil, Lithuania, or Romania. Again, Russia's relative position was almost exactly what one would expect given its per capita income.

15. Check the **Chechnya** section from my old article [What we Believe](#).

16. See [Brother Karamazov's comment](#) from the original *Top 10 Russophobia Myths* post:

All German leading hi-tech professionals, including rocket scientists, surrendered to Americans. Many of them were working in the USA; for some time as half-prisoners, e.g. Wernher von Brown's team. Wernher von Brown was placed in charge of American space programmes in the end of 50s in order to close the gap with the soviets. He successfully completed the task by landing Americans on the Moon. In contrast, soviet space research was lead by ethnic Russian Sergei Korolev. Boris Raushenbakh, the highest ranked ethnic German in the soviet rocket program, was born to an ethnic German family settled in Russia well before the revolution. He grown up and was educated entirely in the USSR. He was imprisoned in a soviet labour camp in the very beginning of his professional career during the war alongside with many other ethnic Germans who lived in the USSR, similar to the detention of ethnic Japanese in the USA.

17. See [The Unfathomable Depths of Western Hypocrisy](#) and [Is CNN Getting Kicked Out of Russia?](#) by Yasha Levine for the full story of CNN's odious censorship of its Putin interview. Basically, it transformed his coherently argued points about the historical origins of the Georgian-Ossetian antagonism, the justice of Russian intervention and inconvenient questions about US involvement in the affair, to seem like a crazy rant about global neocon conspiracies and embargoes on dead chickens (in contrast Saakashvili got regular 5-10 min slots at CNN, *unedited*).

Another good example is the famous Putin speech from 2008 stating that, “[крушение Советского Союза было «крупнейшей геополитической катастрофой века»](#)”, which translates as “[the greatest geopolitical disaster of the century](#)”. True enough. But now for *the all-vital context*: Putin was acknowledging the fact that there was some good in the USSR (e.g. values of fairness, idealism, etc), and that its collapse was brought about in corrupt and incompetent ways that ended up making the whole thing catastrophic for many folks (as confirmed by a myriad of socio-economic statistics). Yet during that 2005 speech he also stressed that “the development of Russia as a free and democratic state to be our main political and ideological goal”, and praised the steps taken towards that even amidst the chaos and disintegration of the Yeltsin era. So this is hardly the ravings of a Russian chauvinist dead-set on resurrecting the Soviet empire. Another example – the (in)famous Munich speech in 2007, in which his (rather measured and rational) [criticism of US military unilateralism](#) was [reinterpreted to sheer absurdity](#) by the neocons.

Re-Putin and Medvedev, their old relationship is one of Putin the mentor and Medvedev the protege. As such it is not surprising that it is generally still Putin who takes the international limelight, but this will presumably change as Medvedev finds his own feet – much as Putin remained in the shadow of the oligarchs in the first few years of his Presidency. More sources about the dynamics at the heart of the Putin circle include [The Great Transformation: How the Putin Plan altered Russian Society](#) and [The Medvedev Moment](#) by Nicolai Petro and Eric Kraus' [critique of ideas that Medvedev is a stooge / threat to Putin](#).

So in conclusion, it pays to be extremely wary of Western media reports on anything Putin, or Russian officials in general, say.

18. See my [Myth of the Yellow Peril](#).

19. Russia saw a vigorous manufacturing revival during the 2000's, with soaring domestic production of consumer goods substituting those previously imported. The ruble was kept artificially weakened, special economic zones were created and foreign firms carrying out assembly work in Russia were given incentives to draw their supplies from domestic producers. Automobile production rose from 1.2mn in 2000 to 1.8mn in 2008 ([OICA](#)), the company Power Machines (Силовые машины) is one of the world's leading producers of turbines and the country has successfully joined in supplying the regional jet market with the [Sukhoi SuperJet](#).

Though it is undeniable that there is still a large degree of unproductive rent-seeking and corruption in the Russian economy (that it has its share of “stationary bandits”, to use Mancur Olson's terminology), it is folly to deny the obvious progress in manufacturing production made and the improvements in the business climate that made it possible. After all, unlike the “roving bandits” of the 1990's, their stationary counterparts actually have incentives to improve their assets and profit from them, instead of stripping them down and making with the proceeds to Miami Beach or Londongrad. Furthermore, as proved by successful emerging markets like South Korea such economic policies can indeed work (see [Putvedev is Russia's White Rider](#)). Finally, if there's one thing that the economic crisis revealed is that Westerners should not be so complacent about the absence of rent-seeking and corrupt parasites in their own economies.

To gauge the seriousness with which Russia is pursuing an innovation economy, check out [Russia's Nanotechnology crash program](#) and [this forum thread about Russian nanotechnology investments, developments, etc.](#) Though one can argue this is a waste of state resources, the historical evidence suggests that some level of state support is necessary for incubating successful hi-tech industries. This is especially the case in Russia which has traditionally pursued state-backed modernization programs.

20. See [Are command economies unstable? Why did the Soviet economy collapse?](#) by Mark Harrison.

21. Just a few examples would include: NATO broke its early guarantees disavowing eastern expansion in return for German reunification; criminally attacked and dismembered Serbia on false pretenses of genocide without listening to Russian concerns; encouraged enmity against Russia throughout the post-Soviet space; possibly allowed Georgia to go

ahead with its criminal assault on South Ossetia; [unilateral abrogation](#) of the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty in 2002; financial and moral support for color revolutions throughout the post-Soviet space; pushing a Russophobic agenda from the highest political levels; pushing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO, despite the fact that Georgia has outstanding territorial claims and most Ukrainians are firmly opposed to joining NATO, the retainment of the Jackson-Vanik amendment penalizing trade with Russia despite the fact that it is no longer a Soviet Union which restricts Jewish emigration, the blocking of WTO entry, etc, etc, etc...

That said Russia can certainly cooperate with Washington in an atmosphere of mutual respect, e.g. work towards containing nuclear proliferation, combating terrorism in Central Asia (Moscow recently allowed transport of goods, including military goods, across its territory to support military efforts in Afghanistan).

22. The social group most disillusioned with the West are young Muscovite university-educated men. Susan Richards in [Russians don't much like the West](#):

The obvious response to these findings is that attitudes will change over time, as people get richer. But this study appears not to bear out these hopes. For where you might have expected young Russians to like the West more than their parents, in fact, the opposite is true. The youngest respondents (20-year-olds) showed the same degree of dislike of the US as their grandparents, while the 35-45 year olds were less hostile to the US.

This is not, however, because of Putinist brainwashing – contrary to what one might believe. Nicolai Petro in [Russia's New Cyberwarriors](#):

...unlike their elders who were uncomfortable dealing with the outside world, today's young Russians are not about to let insulting stereotypes about their lives and their values pass totally unchallenged. To earn their respect, one has to give it.

Until recently, Russians rarely ever saw what was said about them in the Western media. When they did, language barriers and scarcity of internet access meant they had no way to respond in a timely manner, and to set the record straight.

But now that a quarter of the population has regular internet access, they can read what is being written about their country in real time on Russian translation sites, and they are finding out, as Daniel Thorniley, Senior Vice President of the Economist Group recently put it, that it is "95 percent rubbish" (true, he was talking about business—an area where the coverage is still relatively favorable).

For the first time in history, the global reach of the internet is allowing large numbers of Russians (and others within the former Soviet Union) to talk to the West directly, rather than only through the filter provided by visiting journalists and pundits. This means the free pass given by Russians to those who write about them, something that most of us here have long taken for granted, is rapidly coming to an end. We already see the first signs of the new era in the blistering comments from outraged Russian readers that now appear regularly on the web sites of major British newspapers...

[There attitudes are becoming prevalent even amongst Russian schoolchildren](#), but unfortunately the West has no-one but themselves to blame (see #21).

23. See my translation of the controversial chapter in question [The Case of the "Stalinist" Textbook](#), as well as a summary of my arguments about the textbook and the Western media's malevolent approach to it in [Manipulating Russia's Manipulation of History](#).

24. According to the Amnesty International report [Estonia: Linguistic Minorities – Discrimination must end](#), Russophones who arrived after Estonia's incorporation into the USSR, and their children, were denied citizenship except upon the completion of strict language proficiency exams. This is unrealistic for the many older folks who arrived in the 1950's- 1960's and helped build up the Estonian industrial economy, who have now been discarded as worthless detritus. They are unable to vote in national or European elections. Unemployment is two to three times

higher amongst Russophones than ethnic Estonians, and many of the former have left to find work in other countries of the EU or returned to Russia. All public sector jobs and the vast majority of non-manual private sector jobs, even in almost completely Russian cities like Narva, require certificates of language proficiency in Estonian. There is a lot of petty discrimination against Russians on the part of ethnic Estonian nationalists. The ominously-named outfit the “Language Inspectorate” goes about making unannounced visits to workplaces to check up language skills and fine employers and fire workers who do not show the requisite Estonian-language abilities. The [Polity IV project](#) has given Estonia a democracy score of 6/10, making it only marginally democratic by their definition. The LSE study [Discrimination against the Russophone Minority in Estonia and Latvia](#) characterizes the two Baltic states as “ethnic democracies” who place “extensive policy regimes of discrimination” based on restrictions on Russophones under three policy pillars – citizenship, language, and participation. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of Baltic Russians, perhaps naively in terms of their own interests, supported the independence of their newly-adopted nation, not knowing that it would refuse to reciprocate the favor.

Nicolai Petro in [Russian rights and Estonian wrongs](#):

...The government’s discriminatory policies have included: the passage of laws requiring that all political meetings and private businesses be conducted by “fluent” speakers of Estonian, the removal of the popularly elected mayor of the town of Sillamae for not speaking Estonian well enough, the prosecution of elected officials in the town of Narva under hate-crimes statutes for taking part in a World War II memorial service under the slogan “Narva is against fascism!” and the abrupt cancellation of all 25 Russian television channels by cable operators in the capital, Tallinn (watched by a quarter of city’s population).

In the early ’90s it was deemed more important to encourage the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Later, in the mid-’90s, during the debates over expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, it was said that security concerns should be paramount. At the turn of the century, European Union expansion was given precedence. At each turn, non-native residents were assured by Western leaders that Estonia’s inclusion in these organizations would soon take care of all their problems. Instead, however, Estonian leaders have taken approval of membership in Western organizations as proof that they can safely ignore the civil rights of their non-native minority...

Given this history, it is scarcely surprising that minority sensitivities registered so little with the government that a monument to the fallen of World War II was dismantled nearly on the eve of Victory Day, the one holiday universally revered by former Soviet citizens of all nationalities.

...How can anyone take human rights seriously if Western politicians scream bloody murder at the detention of a few score demonstrators in Moscow, but then try to sweep the arrest of more than 1,000 and the injury of several hundred in Estonia quietly under the rug .

These issues came to the fore when the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dismantled, resulting in vigorous Russophone protests against discrimination that were brutally crushed. To add insult to injury, Russia was also baselessly accused of conducting “cyberterrorism” against Estonia and a NATO cyberwar center is being built in that country.

[Latvia also prosecutes “economic saboteurs”](#) who suggest it may have to devalue its currency.

25. Serious estimates of Ukrainian deaths range from 3.0-3.5mn ([Stanislav Kulchytsky](#)), who is championed by those claiming it as genocide (thus 3.5mn is the absolute upper limited). A more modern estimate is 2.2mn ([Jacques Vallin](#)). Declassified Soviet statistics indicate excess deaths in Ukraine from 1932-33 numbered 1.5mn, out of 3.2mn deaths across the whole Soviet Union – though they have problems of reliability. The statistical distribution of famine’s victims among the ethnicities closely reflects the ethnic distribution of the rural population of Ukraine. Though Ukraine was undeniable one of the regions most affected, areas like Southern Russia, the Volga region and Kazakhstan also suffered greatly. As such, there is no grounds for calling this a Russian-chauvinist organized famine-genocide against Ukrainians (especially since Russians were even not that prominent amongst the Soviet leadership, e.g. Stalin and Beria were both Georgians).

In 2008, Russia condemned the Soviet regime's "disregard for the lives of people in the attainment of economic and political goals", along with "any attempts to revive totalitarian regimes that disregard the rights and lives of citizens in former Soviet states." yet stated that "there is no historic evidence that the famine was organized on ethnic grounds." This is a valid position to take that is not at odds with academic views on the subject; on the other hand, Ukraine's criminalization of "Holodomor denial" by "a fine of 100 to 300 untaxed minimum salaries, or imprisonment of up to two years" – pushed through the Rada by a slender-thin majority in 2006 – is extremely anti-historical and ideological in nature.

In reality the Holodomor was caused by willful negligence, poor climatic conditions and an ideological fervor against kulaks in the midst of the collectivization campaign which aimed to produce a food surplus to fund industrialization. That said, though I should say that it was overall ineffective since it was followed up by a halving of livestock numbers, losses of the most experienced farmers and a 66% fall in grain exports in 1933-34 from 1931-32, which kind of defeated its purpose of increasing foreign currency earnings to fund industrialization (though it was partially made up by increasing electrification and mechanization by the late 1930's).

As for the alleged Ukrainian dislike of Russia, please see Myth #9.

26. New Russian versions of [Integrated Air Defense Systems](#) are able to counter all aircraft in the US fleet except the F-22 Raptor and B-2 heavy bomber, which are reliant on prohibitively expensive stealth features, and are highly mobile and survivable; in any case, even they will become increasingly vulnerable. [Russia is rapidly developing / stealing / implementing stealth technologies](#), resulting in that [upgraded Russian fourth-generation fighters](#):

the notion that contemporary production Russian fighters are inferior in technology, performance and overall capability to their US/EU peers is largely not correct, and predicated on assumptions about Russian technological capabilities which ceased to be true a decade or more ago.

On the high seas, US aircraft carriers – the bedrock of US maritime supremacy – are [under increasing threat](#) from new developments in supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, silent diesel submarines armed with supercavitating torpedoes, UAVs / drones, and modernized fourth-generation fighters like Flankers. Not only can Russia manufacture and use these things itself, but it can also sell them on to unfriendly nations like Iran. In the long run this may spell the end to global US military hegemony.

It is true that Russia is hobbled by a lack of a professional, motivated army, organizational inefficiencies and the lack of great power projection capabilities. Nonetheless, it is in the middle of [major military reforms](#) that aim to address these problems by decreasing the numbers of officers in the ranks, moving to a brigade rather than divisional system and instituting a state of permanent readiness amongst its military units.

Russia continues to have one of the world's two greatest nuclear arsenals and fully independent military-industrial complexes (along with the US). Should there be severe international tensions, it can return to the permanent war mobilization footing of the USSR, for it retains a "dormant structurally militarized potential" (*Russia in the 21st Century: The Prodigal Superpower*, Steven Rosefielde). Though no-one will win, it will destroy its enemies at least as thoroughly as it is destroyed itself in the case of a nuclear war.

27. Archival evidence [here](#). Note also that a) not all sentences were carried out due to the system's inefficiency and b) the death rate in the Gulag labor camps never exceeded 10% a year except in the dearth years of 1934 and 1943-44 – so in total out of the c.3.3mn imprisoned, around 1.1mn or a third died.

As for the scale of Hitler's democide, consult Myth III in [The Poisonous Myths of the Eastern Front](#).

28. See [Russia through the looking glass](#) and [The Great Transformation: How the Putin Plan altered Russian Society](#) by Nicolai Petro. Note that the high conviction rates are not unique to Russia: Japan is infamous for forced confessions and [99%+ conviction rates](#). As for the NGO laws, see [Russia through the looking glass](#) (Nicolai Petro):

For example, registration can no longer be denied on the whim of local officials; and without one of four specific reasons, registration has to be granted within thirty days. The proposal also limits review of NCO [activities](#) to once a year, and stipulates that any administrative actions have to be done under court supervision. The much-touted issue of the closing of foreign organisations is a red herring, since the proposed legislation specifically deprives bureaucrats of the ability to act on their own in this regard.

29. A few quotes to illustrate the point.

At present, all we see is chaos, struggle, economic collapse, ethnic disintegration – just as the observers of 1918 did. How could they have foreseen then that a decade or so later the USSR would have begun to produce chemicals, aircraft, trucks, tanks, and machine tools and be growing faster than any other industrialized society? By extension, how could Western admirers of Stalin's centralized economy in the 1930's know that the very system contained the seeds of its own collapse? [Preparing for the Twenty First Century, Ch. 11, 'The Erstwhile USSR and its Crumbled Empire', pp. 249, Paul Kennedy (1993)]

And from John Scott in *Behind the Urals*, who spent a few years living and working in the USSR during the 1930's:

In talking with people in France and America I was impressed by the interest in the Soviet Union and the widespread misinformation about Russia and all things Russian. Everyone I met was opinionated [aren't we all lol!]. The Communists and their sympathizers held Russia up as a panacea...Other people were steeped in Eugene Lyons' stories and would not concede the possibility that Russia had produced anything during recent years except chaos, suffering and disorder. They dismissed the industrial and material successes of the Russians with an angry wave of the hand. Any economist or businessman should have been able to see that the tripling of pig-iron production within a decade was a serious achievement, and would necessarily have far-reaching effects on the balance of economic and therefore military power in Europe.

30. Re-*The Economist*, from [Press Review: Press Review: The Economist's Three Stooges](#) by Kirill Pankratov:

Of course, its Russian coverage is far from the only of magazine's bloopers. The list is long. There's the famous March 1999 cover story predicting an "endless era of cheap oil," which appeared the same week that oil prices began their steady ascent from the lowest point in a quarter century. Perfect timing! Then there were *The Economist's* strident editorials in favor of Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

First up is Edward Lucas, the Moscow correspondent who in the annual glossy "The World in 1999" issue, issued this prediction for Russia, at once gloating and apocalyptic:

"1999 will be the year of Russia's disintegration... Trade between Russia's regions will plunge at least until they hit on a stable, trusted currency in which to do business. That is hardly likely to be the rouble, and the planned coupons and currencies which some regions have been planning look equally unattractive substitutes... foreign invasion, albeit of a peaceful and benevolent kind, is exactly what Russia's regions should want... The probable decline in Russia's wealth in 1999 will be around 10%... expect yet another bleak and miserable year".

For why I am bullish on continuing high growth in the future, see my own article [Kremlin Dreams sometimes come true](#) and [Goldman Sachs thinks that Russia is the only member of the BRICs \(Brazil, Russia, China, India\) with the potential to reach Western levels of GDP per capita in the foreseeable future](#).

31. Lots of sources on this on the Internet. Re-murders, I'd mention [Former YUKOS Security Chief Gets 20 Years for Murder](#). Also from Russia Blog in [10 Western Media Stereotypes About Russia: How Truthful Are They?](#)

YUKOS was practicing tax evasion on a massive, multi- billion-dollar scale. A deeper investigation is now underway, and Khodorkovsky's aides face charges of murder and attempted murder in the process of conducting company business. They were also charged with unlawful business practices, such as tax evasion, fraud and money laundering. In addition, Israeli lawyers are working with Russian prosecutors to extradite Khodorkovsky's former partner Leonid Nevzlin, as many political circles in Israel find his presence harmful to their country's image. Israeli lawyers are investigating allegations that Nevzlin fraudulently obtained his Israeli citizenship in 2003 after Russian prosecutors indicted Mikhail Khodorkovsky. In March 2005, Alexei Pichugin, the former chief of security for YUKOS, was sentenced to prison time for multiple counts of murder. Many oligarchs do face prosecution, but not because of their political beliefs; rather, they face punishment for actual crimes they have committed

32. E.g. see [Remembering Yeltsin](#) for a hard look at Yeltsin's real, anti-Russian character. He won the 1996 elections despite losing a war and having approval ratings in the single-digits, which were immediately endorsed by Western election observers like OSCE. See [Who Killed The OSCE?](#) by Alexander Zaitchik and Mark Ames.

Well, that's one way of looking at it. Another way is that the recent Russia-OSCE door-slammng episode is the inevitable outcome of years of cynical Western manipulation of an organization that once held enormous promise and impeccable credentials, but is now with good reason considered a propagandist tool for the West.

If that last sentence sounds like the paranoid rant of a Putin-era silovik revanchist, then think again. It's the view held by none other than the man who headed the OSCE's 1996 election mission in Russia, Michael Meadowcroft. "The West let Russia down, and it's a shame," said Meadowcroft, a former British MP and veteran of 48 election-monitoring missions to 35 countries.

In a recent telephone interview with The eXile, Meadowcroft explained how he was pressured by OSCE and EU authorities to ignore serious irregularities in Boris Yeltsin's heavily manipulated 1996 election victory, and how EU officials suppressed a report about the Russian media's near-total subservience to pro-Yeltsin forces.

"Up to the last minute I was being pressured by [the OSCE higher-ups in] Warsaw to change what I wanted to say," said Meadowcroft. "In terms of what the OSCE was prepared to say publicly about the election, they were very opposed to any suggestion that the election had been manipulated." In fact, he says, the OSCE and the West had made its mind up about how wonderfully free and fair Boris Yeltsin's election was before voting even started.

Though it is true that Putin also probably abuses administrative resources to win elections – though the extent and scale are small and should not be exaggerated, as I point out in [Lying Liars and their Lies](#) and [More Reflections on Election Fraud](#), a) OSCE and the West now condemn him for this because Putin is not their stooge and b) it doesn't matter nearly as much because Putin has the overwhelming support of the people and would win in any case.

33. Yes, Russia uses (at times underhanded) means to tie up world energy sources and uses its energy clout to exert economic and political pressure. But [the US and all other Great Powers do the exact same thing](#), in ways ranging from the Iraq War to support of economically-subordinate theocratic or authoritarian regimes like Saudi Arabia to the Chiquita Banana case. Note that the counter-refutation to the Iraq War as energy imperialism thesis – that US companies did not particularly benefit from new contracts – doesn't really hold water, because the whole point was to unlock Iraq's oil supplies into the world market and to establish a firm military presence in the critical (for energy) Middle East region.

34. Re-education, see [National Literacy Campaigns](#) (By Robert F. Arnove, Harvey J. Graff). Re-industry, the fast rate of late Tsarist growth is pretty well known to economic historians.

35. See [Sergei Fedosov's site](#).

36. Consult the Myth of Dhimmitude part of my [Rite of Spring: Russia Fertility Trends](#) article.

37. See [this post and comments](#) at Fedia Kriukov's blog.

Re-army purges, there are revisionist arguments that they did not have a major effect in absolute terms, e.g. from [this book review](#) (although it is true they contributed to greater rigidity in military thought prior to the war, which would have been damaging – that said, its effects should not be overstated):

Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers makes two fundamental points about the history of the Red Army, as well as several important observations. The first fundamental point is that the impact of the political terror of the 1937-38 was, in absolute and relative terms, less than it is generally taken to have been. **A number of newly uncovered sources, notably General E.A. Shchadenko's report of May 1940, make it possible to conclude that net losses of officers and commissars (taking into account reinstatements) was**

some 23 000. Reese also reassesses the size of the total officer corps, making it 150 000 in 1937.

Previous historians have estimated higher losses and assumed a much smaller officer corps, and Reese convincingly shows a smaller percentage loss.

The second fundamental point is related to the first. The basic reason why the Red Army fought so badly in 1941. Reese argues, was not the purges. **What really mattered was the army's incohesiveness, which resulted from shortcomings across the interwar years, but especially the too rapid expansion in the late 1930s.** The crucial weaknesses of the Red Army were inadequately trained junior officers and poor platoon-level organization. Both weaknesses were accentuated by a lack of career NCOs. This general point is developed especially well by Reese in an archivally based case study of the Kiev military district.

Re-unanticipated attack of Hitler. Stalin did not dismiss intelligence reports. Note that **Soviet intelligence did not unambiguously predict the German attack** – there were many contradictory reports and sophisticated German disinformation. He was understandably cautious about trusting British sources given their past duplicity and latent interest in drawing the USSR into the war. Second, **Stalin finally erred on the side of caution** and authorized the forward deployment of the second operational echelon around June 17, which however did not reach their destinations when the war broke out. “Moreover, on June 21 Stalin signed a directive (which later came to be known as Directive No 1) authorizing all formations deployed along the border to take up defensive positions (in effect, partially implement covering plans). Unfortunately, when the war started, this directive was still stuck being decrypted somewhere at the MD and army level.”

Re-defense in depth. It's a somewhat overused cliché nowadays.

First, we need to look at what it is exactly. At the tactical level, it means creating a cluster of strong-points separated by gaps filled with mines, dragon's teeth, and other obstacles, such that enemy would be channeled into assaults on the strong-points one by one. But the Red Army of 1941 was too unwieldy and unprepared for this, and the question of why? should be directed more towards the military establishment than to Stalin.

And not only for them, but to the militaries of all countries. No rifle formation of the time, the Wehrmacht included, had the ability to repulse a single Panzer division concentrated on a narrow front. It would inevitably be sliced up and the (slow) remnants enveloped and destroyed by mobile enemy forces (i.e. the ones which spearheaded Barbarossa – though it is true as you say that the bulk of the German army was relatively immobile, it was still much more so than the Soviet in 1941 and its mobile elements were extremely well trained with plenty of RL experience).

This was the major bane of Soviet forces which was only significantly reversed in Kursk, two years into the war, when the Soviet Army reached a level of competence and organization an order of magnitude higher than was the case in 1941. (it should be noted also that it was only after 1943 that Axis-Soviet losses on the Eastern Front equalized).

But if you're talking of the operational level (which is a question that relates more directly to Stalin's role), “defense in depth” is utterly bankrupt since the depth to the defense can only be provided at the tactical level, and trying this on the operational scale implies splitting up your divisions and suffering defeat in detail.

“Against such an army, trading space, defending in depth, was the appropriate method. Eventually the Soviets learned this, and implemented it at Kursk in 1943.”

And from above, we see it would have led to utter disaster in 1941 and it is to their credit that the Soviet military leadership recognized this (unlike all prior German opponents). Thus they instead pursued an “active defense” based on constant initiative-seizing counterattacks, which although predictably a failure on the tactical levels distorted the shape and flow of Barbarossa by forcing the Germans to reinforce their flanks at the cost of their points – and was a much better idea than simply throwing rifle division after division against armored spears that would just effortlessly slice through them.

At the time, encirclements were inevitable because the German Panzer divisions were quicker than Soviet rifle divisions, and stopping them was hopeless (no country had managed that before, and it was not until 1943 that the Soviets first managed to contain a German armored assault). **The idea rather was to launch constant counter-**

offensives to blunt and divert the overall German attack, which though a failure at tactical and operational levels succeeded at the strategic level.

“Stalin effectively did the same thing by massing near the border. It was necessary to trade space for time. Space was what the USSR had in abundance.”

On this point, I would repeat the above point that a) intelligence was highly contradictory about German intentions, especially since the latter mounted a well-planned disinformation campaign, and b) most fortifications near the border were in the stage of construction – again, because the Soviet leadership genuinely believed that Hitler was not ready to attack until 1942 at the earliest (and more likely the mid-1940’s) and c) you can’t really say they were that massed at the border, when the earliest really big encirclements took place in Minsk / Kiev (places which are gateways to the Soviet heartlands and really needed to be defended for strategic and political reasons).

I would also note that even with constant Soviet counter-attacks and diversions, the Germans still managed to reach the gates of Moscow, and again got uncomfortably close to cutting off the Caucasus oil supply in 1942. Russia’s has a lot of space but it’s not infinite.

38. See [here](#) at Sergei Fedosov’s site for a full account of the diplomatic events in the run-up to World War Two.

39. No European state has made much effort to fully account for its imperial legacies; the main feature of German exceptionalism was that you were supposed to confine your genocides to colored peoples in hot, sticky places (e.g. the Belgians in the Congo, the “Victorian Holocausts” under the British Raj, the Irish Potato Famine which was no different from the Holodomor except that the ideology that it was conducted under was laissez-faire capitalism...)

The Baltic states whitewash their involvement in the Holocaust, Turkey criminalizes affirmation of the Armenian Genocide and Japan brushes off complaints about its brutal conduct in China during the Second World War. The only reason Germany apologized was because it was occupied, and in any case the Nazi regime was not morally comparable to the Soviet Union. And apologies imply acceptance of responsibility and demands for reparations... Latvia had already set up a commission to calculate a bill for “Soviet-era losses” to present to Russia, which ironically had to be disbanded because of the economic crisis.

One example of Russia’s apologies: “When President Yeltsin visited the Czech Republic in 1993 he was not speaking just for himself, he was speaking for the Russian Federation and for the Russian people. Today, not only do we respect all agreements signed previously – we also share all the evaluations that were made at the beginning of the 1990s...I must tell you with absolute frankness – we do not, of course, bear any legal responsibility. But the moral responsibility is there, of course.”

For Russian attitudes to their history under Putin, I recommend my article [Manipulating Russia’s Manipulation of History](#) and [Airbrushing History](#) by Patrick Armstrong.

40. See my [Responses to common Russophobe arguments](#) for an insight into the sheer intellectual bankruptcy of the Russophobe worldview.

41. See the seminal *Forbes* article [Godfather of the Kremlin](#) (Paul Khlebnikov) or read the book of the same name.

42. [The Specter that haunts the Death of Litvinenko](#) (Edward Jay Epstein) and [The Alexander Litvinenko Story Revisited](#) (David Habakkuk) are vital primers on the very murky circumstances of his death.

Before the extradition dispute, Russian investigators, in theory, could have questioned relevant witnesses in London. Their proposed roster of witnesses suggested that Russian interest extended to the Russian expatriate community in Britain, or “Londograd,” as it is now called. The Litvinenko case provided the Russians with the opportunity for a fishing expedition, since Litvinenko had at the time of his death worked with many of Russia’s enemies, including Mr. Berezovsky; his foundation head, Mr. Goldfarb, who dispensed money to a web of anti-Putin websites; his Chechen ally Akhmed Zakayev, who headed a commission investigating Russian war crimes in Chechnya (for which Litvinenko acted as an investigator), and former owners of the expropriated oil giant Yukos, who were battling in the courts to regain control of billions of dollars in its off-shore bank accounts.

The Russian investigation could also have veered into Litvinenko’s activities in the shadowy world of

security consultants, including his dealings with the two security companies in Mr. Berezovsky's building, Erinys International and Titon International, and his involvement with Mr. Scaramella in an attempt to plant incriminating evidence on a suspected nuclear-component smuggler — a plot for which Mr. Scaramella was jailed after his phone conversations with Litvinenko were intercepted by the Italian national police.

The Russians had asked for more information about radiation traces at the offices of these companies, and Mr. Lugovoi had said that at one of these companies, Erinys, he had been offered large sums of money to provide compromising information about Russian officials. Mr. Kovtun, who also attended that meeting, backs up Mr. Lugovoi's story. Such charges had the potential for embarrassing not only the security companies that had employed Litvinenko and employed former Scotland Yard and British intelligence officers, but the British government, since it had provided Litvinenko with a passport under the alias "Edwin Redwald Carter" to travel to parts of the former Soviet Union.

The British extradition gambit ended the Russian investigation in Londongrad. It also discredited Mr. Lugovoi's account by naming him as a murder suspect. In terms of a public relations tactic, it resulted in a brilliant success by putting the blame on Russian stonewalling for the failure to solve the mystery. What it obscured is the elephant-in-the-room that haunts the case: the fact that a crucial component for building an early-stage nuke was smuggled into London in 2006. Was it brought in merely as a murder weapon or as part of a transaction on the international arms market?

There is little, if any, possibility, that this question will be answered in the present stalemate. The Russian prosecutor-general has declared that the British case is baseless; Mr. Lugovoi, elected to the Russian Parliament in December 2007, now has immunity from prosecution, and Mr. Scaramella, under house arrest in Naples, has been silenced. The press, for its part, remains largely fixated on a revenge murder theory that corresponds more closely to the SMERSH villain in James Bond movies than to the reality of the case of the smuggled Polonium-210.

After considering all the evidence, my hypothesis is that Litvinenko came in contact with a Polonium-210 smuggling operation and was, either wittingly or unwittingly, exposed to it. Litvinenko had been a person of interest to the intelligence services of many countries, including Britain's MI-6, Russia's FSB, America's CIA (which rejected his offer to defect in 2000), and Italy's SISMI, which was monitoring his phone conversations.

His murky operations, whatever their purpose, involved his seeking contacts in one of the most lawless areas in the former Soviet Union, the Pankisi Gorge, which had become a center for arms smuggling. He had also dealt with people accused of everything from money laundering to trafficking in nuclear components. These activities may have brought him, or his associates, in contact with a sample of Polonium-210, which then, either by accident or by design, contaminated and killed him.

To unlock the mystery, Britain must make available its secret evidence, including the autopsy report, the comprehensive list of places in which radiation was detected, and the surveillance reports of Litvinenko and his associates. If Britain considers it too sensitive for public release, it should be turned over to an international commission of inquiry. The stakes are too high here to leave unresolved the mystery of the smuggled Polonium-210.

43. Re-the first sentence. This is one rare thing on which Khodorkovsky and I are in perfect concord. See [Putin's political reforms need not be viewed as anti-democratic](#) by Vlad Sobell and Nicolai Petro's work on the subject for more.

44. This last myth is a bit tongue in cheek, although on the topic of Mordor [I've actually managed to find a Russophobe who makes the comparison explicitly](#).

But as time since 1991 passed and the two countries drifted in their development further and further away from each other, the city was increasingly attached to Estonia because of the dark presence of its evil twin, Russian Ivangorod (right). ...

Crossing the river bridge into Ivangorod makes those numbers quickly grow in flesh and obtain form in myriad of differences, which set Russia apart from Europe, starting with sickening public toilets and ending with the hopelessness in the people's eyes. This is why looking again at the crude limestone fortress almost invisible at night with only the howling of wild beasts giving away the presence of life on the other side of the vast body of water I can't help it but recollect the following verse:

...to bring them all and in darkness bind... in the land of Mordor, where the shadows lie.

I have a feeling that this attitude could be just one of several things uniting myself and many decent Narva inhabitants. And this feeling is good.

And then there's [this gem \(or rather, a Ring\) from dead old Ed Lucas](#), who explicitly compares Russia to Mordor, Putin to Sauron and the his silovik henchmen to the Orcs.

But as the skies darken once again over the European continent (or Middle Earth if you prefer), the temptation to find analogies in the Lord of the Rings trilogy is overwhelming. Mordor is clearly the Russian Federation, ruled by the demonic overlord Sauron (Putin). His email address, to give a contemporary note, might be sauron@gov.morder.me (the suffix is for Middle Earth). The threat from Mordor—symbolised by the Ring—is the combination of dirty money and authoritarian political thinking.

And Sauron's henchmen the Orcs are clearly the murderous goons of the old KGB. The new twist—the Uruk-Hai, is the mutation of the old Soviet intelligence service with organised crime and big business. Sauron's allies—the Nazgul—are the Siloviki, the sinister chieftains of the Kremlin's authoritarian capitalist system. Like the Nazgul, we seldom see their faces.

...Picking out the cast on the bad side runs the risk an encounter with England's ferocious libel laws. It is not too hard, however, to see candidates to be Wormtongue, the slimy propagandist for Mordor who weakens the will of the King of Rohan, Theoden. His kingdom could be almost any country in Europe, but had better be Germany. And it is easy to think who might count as Germany's foremost expert on Russia and a biographer of Sauron. Saruman is more difficult still—a hero of past wars who has switched sides to disastrous effect. He could be any one of the top West European leaders who have so disastrously forgotten the lessons of the Cold War and have been seduced by Mordor's dirty money

45. Read my article [Twitter Terror in Moldova](#) for insight into just how convoluted, murky and “virtual” the events in Moldova really were.

46. [Re-Hamas, see 10 Western Media Stereotypes About Russia: How Truthful Are They?](#) from *Russia Blog*. Re-Iran, see [The Medvedev Doctrine and American Strategy](#) from *Stratfor*. The US potentially faces a trade-off between “a hegemonic threat from Eurasia and instability and a terror threat from the Islamic world”, and the keys to these threats are Russia and Iran, respectively. It is in Russia's interests for the US to keep focused on the Middle East, so as to give itself a freer hand in Eurasia – and inflaming relations between Iran and the West is an excellent way to do it.

47. See the classic *Foreign Affairs* article [The Rise of US Nuclear Primacy](#) (Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press).

Re-Russian ICBMs would be launched over the North Pole, so central Europe wouldn't play a role argument. Not really, because the US has radar installations at Thule, Greenland, and has substantial numbers of ground based interceptor missiles at Fort Greely, Alaska. It also has rapidly increasing sea-based ABM capabilities. This is not to say that the US has plans to launch a debilitating first strike on Russia or other strategic competitors, but ABM is certainly a destabilizing force in world security and risks unleashing an arms race in which countries like Russia are

forced to upgrade the penetration capabilities of their nuclear delivery systems.

48. The nations of the former USSR are still very much economically integrated with Russia, meaning that they are subject to Russia's cycles; furthermore, almost all of them are significantly poorer so they should grow faster because of their greater potential for economic convergence.

See the [Georgian Economy under Saakashvili](#), which asserts that much of Georgia's growth was one-off based on state asset sale and government lay-offs, which were accompanied by accelerating deindustrialization, continued emigration and poverty, the destruction of all remaining safety nets and the pressure put by the government on independent businesses to provide "voluntary contributions" in return for not bankrupting them under prosecutions for corruption.

[Stats on growth rates taken from IMF.](#)

49. Ushering in the new era of legality, markets and social activism is the so-called Putin generation, which has vastly differing values from those of older generations – initiative, boldness, hierarchy, individualism and Westernized patriotism (consult [Economic Modernization and System of Values](#) by Evgeny Yasin for an interesting study that shows that the values of the new Russia differ much more from traditionalist / Tsarist and Soviet values, which are surprisingly similar).

Also as I once pointed out, [there are plenty of good sovok attributes...and even some of the bad ones aren't actually all that bad upon closer examination.](#)

50. I've aggregated Levada's measures of Russia's social mood since the late 1990's [here](#). My [letter](#) to the Moscow Times cites recent opinion polls, again from Levada, to disprove the contention that morale during this crisis has collapsed back to 1990's / pre-"oil boom" levels.