

# Russia's Master Narrative

# Review :

- Ontological Security: Sovereign states are willing to suffer political, military and economic harm if necessary to maintain identity
- Why? Identity is a key source of legitimacy, but also framework for decision making
- Narratives/memories are key foundation to identities: identify what state role is in international context, how it got there
- Institutionalized memory narratives as sources of state/national identity
- Memory security dilemma: if one state regards memory crucial to stability, then a challenge from another state's narrative will cause problems of ontological security

# Three Post Cold War Narratives in Europe

- The “Western Narrative” —
  - Search for identity after cold war and EU expansion: Peace, Human Rights
  - “Negative” Narrative emphasizes World War II over Nazism and Holocaust
- The Central and Eastern Narrative—
  - Creating or reframing a national identity
  - World War II not a victory but dual occupation
  - Focus on Stalinism as communist regime
  - Holocaust not uniquely important
- TODAY: Continue on this point, then the Russian narrative, then look at memory wars between Russia and Estonia and Russia and Czechia

# Key Events

- Conversion to Orthodox Christianity (988)
- Vassalage to Mongol Horde (1247-1380)
- 1400s: “The Third Rome” after 1453
- Not fully part of international society until Peter I
- Napoleonic Invasion of 1812
- Crimean War 1856
- World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution
- Stalin’s Revolution from Above
- The Collapse of the USSR and the 1990s



# Persistent elements of Russian national Identity

- The role of the state (at least since peter the great)
  - GREAT POWER
  - The tie with Orthodoxy
- Feeling of relative weakness and backwardness towards Europe
  - Change from above
  - Peter the Great Tries to Copy Europe
  - Also seen as threat
- A struggle between Russian and European Identity
  - Westernizers and Slavophiles
  - What does Europe represent?
  - What does Russia represent?



# RUSSIA'S ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY SEEKING GREATNESS, NEVER A FULL MEMBER OF THE CLUB

Sergei Lavrov, 2016:

"There are different opinions, and doubts too, as to whether Russia assesses the international situation and its position in the world soberly enough. This is an echo of never-ending disputes between pro-Western liberals and the advocates of one's own unique path. There are also people, both inside and outside the country, who believe that Russia is doomed to constantly fall behind and catch up, or adapt to the rules invented by others, and therefore cannot claim a rightful role in international affairs."

# Russia After Soviet Collapse: Debate over National Identity Particularly Important



Political, Economic, Social Upheaval

A New State: New Borders;  
14 New Neighbors

A Superpower in Decline

New Demographics:

51% Ethnic Russians in USSR

81% Ethnic Russians in Russia

Millions of Ethnic Russians in  
former Soviet Republics



# Putin's Entry

The productive and constructive work that our Fatherland needs is impossible in a society finding itself in a condition of factionalism, domestic disunity.... In the past century Russia twice found itself in such conditions: after October 1917 and in the '90s.... A strong [krepkoe] state is not an anomaly for Russian citizens [rossiiane], not something they have to struggle with, but, on the contrary, a source and guarantor of order, the initiator and prime moving force in any transition.

Conclusion: Russia needs a strong state and a power vertical  
Guarantor against internal chaos, external invasion



# Putin's Chosen Narrative for Russia

- The Chosen Trauma—the 1990s
  - The weakness of the state
  - Anarchy, economic despair, factionalism
  - Global Humiliation
- The Chosen Victory—The Great Patriotic War

# The Great Patriotic War

- A Time of Great Suffering
- A Time of Great Unity—Divisions between classes, ideology lessened
- A Time of Great Victory
  - Soviet Union arises as a great power, influence extends from Vladivostok and Pyongyang to Prague and Berlin
  - USSR saves European civilization
- The Soviet Legacy from the 1970s
  - The Soviet Union gives up on communism, looks back
  - Creates an infrastructure of memory Putin can use
  - Differences: Not so much Soviet victory but Russian victory
    - Not so much a warning against war, a call for preparedness, but rather a trope of Russian Greatness



# The Evolution of Vladimir Putin

- 2000-2003: Managed Democracy: Russia is part of European Civilization, but not yet ready for normal democracy
- 2005-2009: Sovereign Democracy: Russia is part of European Civilization, but will always be different, respecting Russian history and culture
- An attempt to keep together three strands in Russian elites:
  - Urban economic liberals, the Orthodox Church, the state builders in secret services, military, regional leadership, etc.

# The Kremlin's "Civilizational" Narrative

- Massive Demonstrations in Moscow in 2011-12
  - Putin very afraid
  - Jettisons urban liberal idea for Russian nationalism
  - Relies more heavily on statist, Orthodox Church
    - Ecosystems of influence
- One –Thousand Year History
  - Russia Empire is separate from Europe: Multiethnic under Russian leadership
  - Lenin: Represents betrayal of Russian state
- The Redemption in the Great Patriotic War
  - And a curiously ambiguous attitude on Stalin

# Putin's Speech at the Wall of Sorrows Monument, Moscow, October 30, 2017

- It is very important that we all and future generations – this is of great significance – know about, and remember this tragic period in our history when entire social groups and entire peoples were cruelly persecuted, including workers, peasants, engineers, military commanders, clergy, government employees, scientists and cultural figures.
- Neither talent, nor services to the Motherland, nor sincere devotion to it could help avoid repression, because unwarranted and absolutely absurd charges could be brought against anyone. Millions of people were declared 'enemies of the people', shot or mutilated, or suffered in prisons, labour camps or exile.
- This terrifying past cannot be deleted from national memory or, all the more so, be justified by any references to the so-called best interests of the people.
- The history of our country, like that of any other country, has plenty of difficult and controversial stages. People argue about them, discuss them, offering different approaches to explaining various events.

# Putin's Speech at the "Wall of Sorrows"

## October 30, 2017

In closing, I would like to ask Ms Natalia Solzhenitsyna permission to quote her, "To know, to remember, to condemn. And only then to forgive." I fully agree with these words.

Indeed, we and our descendants must remember the tragedy of repression and what caused it. However, this does not mean settling scores. We cannot push society to a dangerous line of confrontation yet again.

Now, it is important for all of us to build on the values of trust and stability. Only on this basis will we be able to achieve the goals of our society and our country, which is one for us all.

# Securitization

- What is securitization? How do you decide what is a security threat
  - Securitization—process by which development perceived a threat not only to leadership, but to nation as a whole
  - Why desire to securitize an issue? Brings it to top of the agenda Makes sharp distinction between those who with us and those who without us
  - Russia: Securitizes memory
    - Russian historical society is head of foreign intelligence
    - Believes in “hybrid warfare”
    - Threat to foundational beliefs threat to regime as a whole
    - Making laws makes it worse, because state recognizes it as important

# Ukraine's Role

- It should be noted that Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood. And, therefore, in 1991 it opted for mindlessly emulating foreign models, which have no relation to history or Ukrainian realities.
- I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought.
- Lenin ... suggested making concessions to the nationalists, whom he called “independents” at that time. Lenin’s ideas of what amounted in essence to a confederative state arrangement and a slogan about the right of nations to self-determination, up to secession, were laid in the foundation of Soviet statehood.



# Memory Wars

- Russian Securitization
- Central and Eastern Europe efforts to build nation with chosen trauma of repression under Soviet rule
- Mnemonic Security Dilemma
  - The attempt by one regime to shore up its narrative is threat to ontological security of another
- Two different visions of how urban spaces should work

# Estonia: 2007

- Specific Sources of Tension

- Double Occupation

- The Nazis

- 4300 Jews in Estonia before war, 75% flee to Russia, about 1000 Estonian Jews killed
      - 6000 Estonians and 1000 Ethnic Russians

- The Soviets

- 20,000 deported arrested or executed in 1941

- Large Russian-speaking population

- Efforts by Estonians to limit citizenship through language, etc.

# The Bronze Soldier in Estonia

- Monument and Cemetery to Fallen Soviet Soldiers on “Liberators’ Square” in central Tallinn
  - Had been site of controversy after 1991, attempt by city to remove it
  - Election of nationalist party to power
- April, 2007: Statue relocated to cemetery outside the center
  - Graves also moved
  - Riots over two nights in Tallinn
  - Estonian Embassy besieged,  
Ambassador attacked
  - Site of annual demonstrations
- April, 2022: Statue vandalized



# Securitization on Both Sides

Estonia—Right-wing emphasizes National boundaries—language, etc.

Response to National Identity Issues mentioned before

Presence of Russians seen as potential threat

Proponents of move assume Russians in Estonia the same

Russians—See it as evidence that second-class citizens

Partly true, partly also sense of entitlement

Putin's Narrative--A denial of Putin's narrative's identity of Soviet soldiers as heroes

A desire to claim symbolic state on Estonian territory

# The Statue Wars in Prague: 2019-2020

- June 2019: Russia passes law naming soldiers in 1968 “war veterans”
- Konev Statue Removed in April, 2020
- Head of Řeporyje district announces construction of memorial to members of General Andrei Vlasov’s RLA who participate in Prague Uprising
- Mayor Zdeněk Hřib enables square of Russian Embassy to be renamed “Boris Nemtsov Square”
- Hřib also invites Beijing’s displeasure with gestures recognizing Taiwan autonomy



# THE RESPONSE

## RUSSIA:

Accusations that Czechs broke 1993 Friendship Agreement

April 7: Duma passes law criminalizing desecration of monuments to Soviet soldiers

Criminal Investigation of Hřib and Kolár

## Czech National Government:

Pro-Russian President Miloš Zeman supports Russia's objections in principle, calls the removal "underhanded" and "morally unjust"

Czech Ministries support legality of removal and criticize Russian interference in internal affairs

Even Zeman critiques Russia's overreaction to "stupid actions of otherwise insignificant politicians!"

