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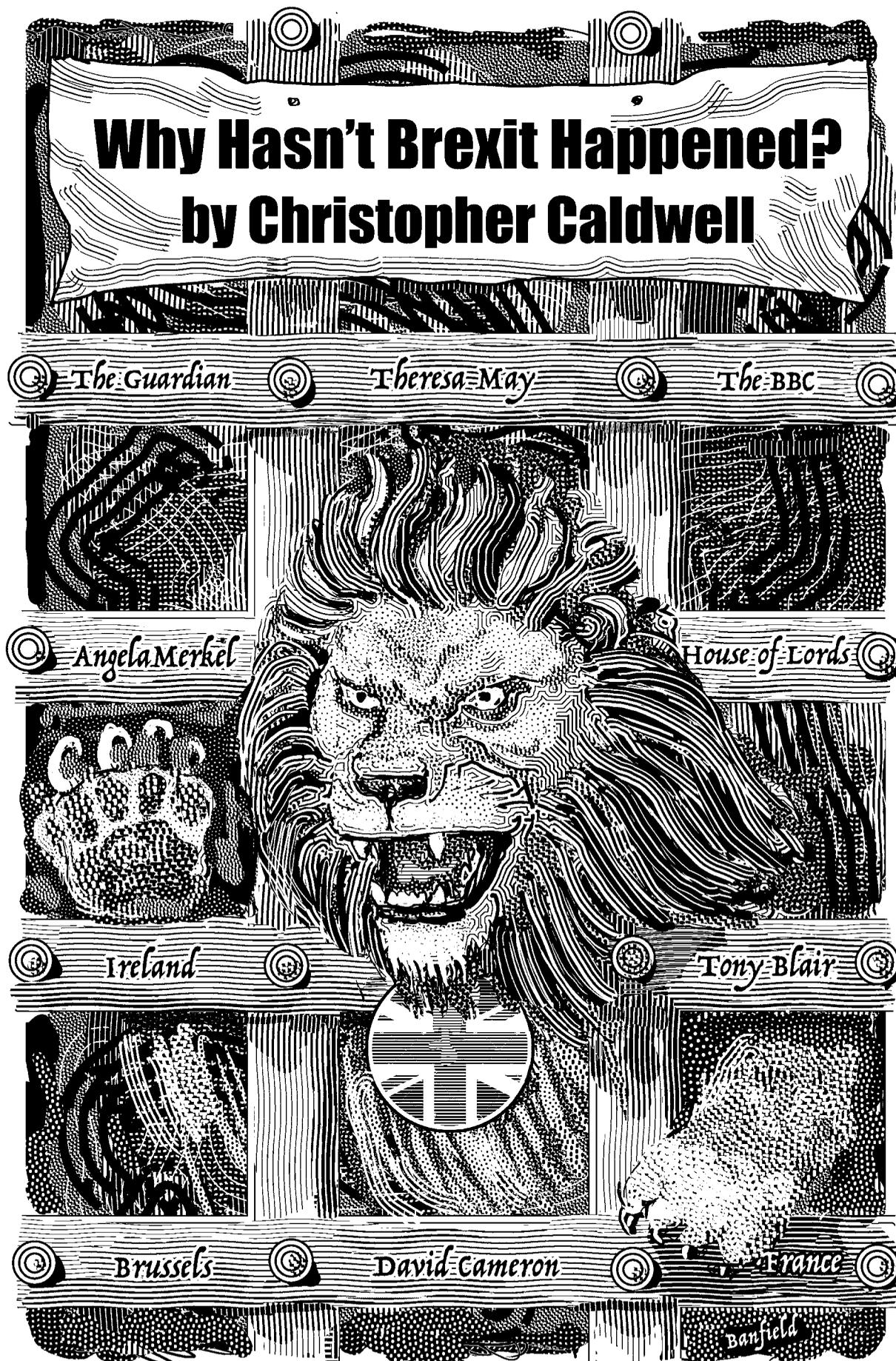
Angelo M.
Codevilla:
**Getting Real
About Russia**

Allen C.
Guelzo:
**U.S. History
After Zinn**

Robert R.
Reilly:
**Harry V.
Jaffa**

Carl W.
Herstein:
**Law & Man
at Yale**

Matthew
Continetti:
**All the News
That's Fit
to Slant**



William
Voegeli:
**The Woke Left
Against Israel**

John Daniel
Davidson:
**Ben Shapiro's
Western Civ**

Steven F.
Hayward:
**George F.
Will**

Victor Davis
Hanson:
**Tom Cotton's
Sacred Duty**

Michael
Anton:
**Bronze Age
Pervert**



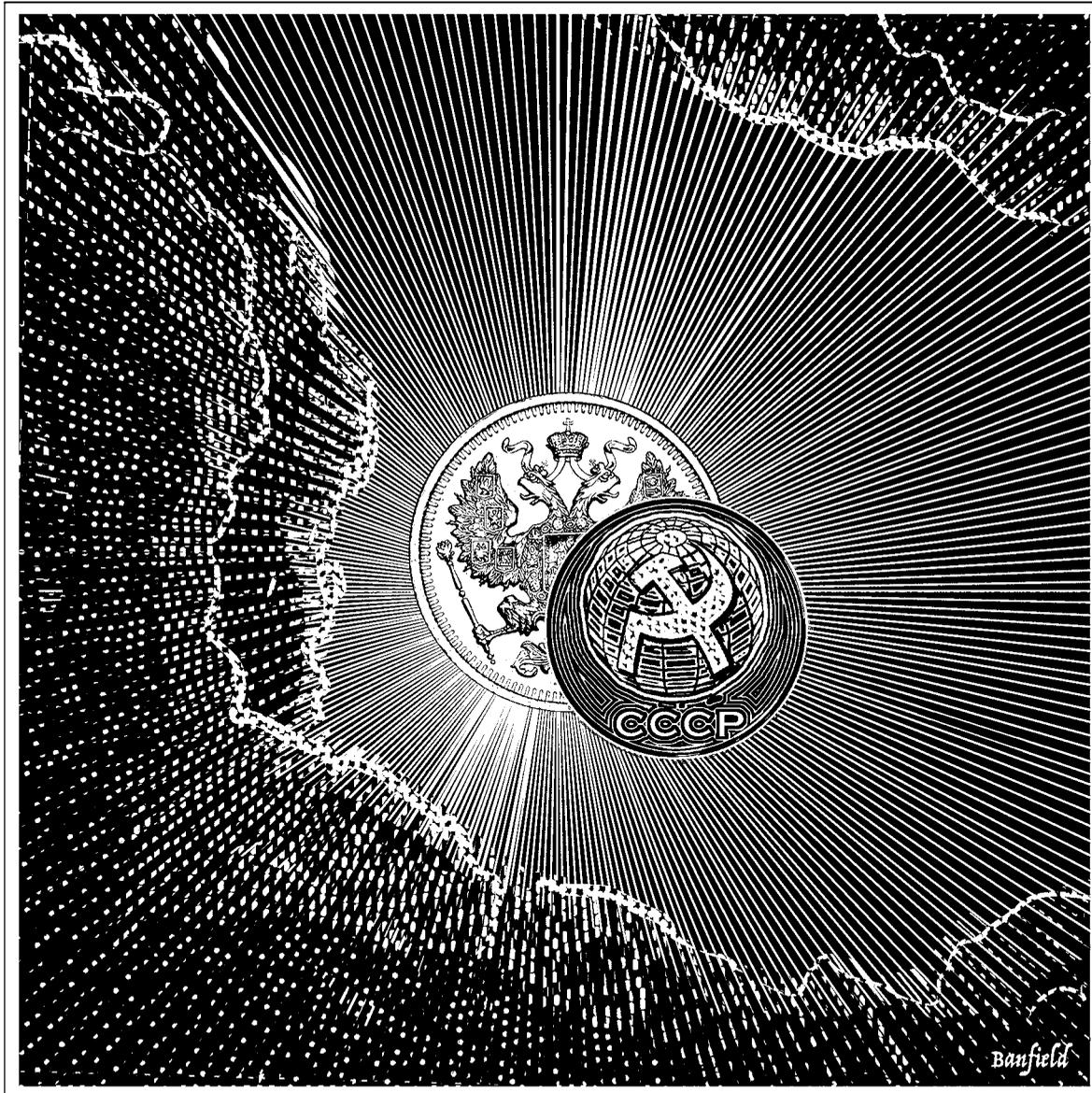
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Essay by Angelo M. Codevilla

WHAT'S RUSSIA TO US?



After the Eclipse

WHAT 21ST-CENTURY RUSSIA IS in itself, to its neighbors, and to America flows from the fact it is no longer the Soviet Union. As the red flag came down from the Kremlin on Christmas Day 1991, Russian president Boris Yeltsin, when asked what he thought of Communism, nearly wept as he replied: “I wish it had been tried somewhere else.” Vladimir Putin, who famously said that the USSR’s collapse had been a tragedy, nevertheless shares the Russian people’s consensus that their country was Communism’s first and foremost victim, and that no one knows how long it may take to live down its dysfunctions. To its neighbors, this Russia is a rebudding tsarist empire. To

Americans, it is a major adversary despite the lack of clashing geopolitical interests.

After Communism

THE REVOLUTION OF 1917 WAS possible because socialists, in Russia and throughout the Western world, believed that “present-day society,” as Karl Marx put it, is a jumble of “contradictions,” which could be resolved only by tearing down the pillars of the house. Once that was done, history would end: man and woman, farmer and industrial worker, producer and consumer, intellectual and mechanic—heretofore at odds—would live harmoniously, freely, and prosperously ever after.

Because they really believed in this utopian dream, the socialists gave absolute power to Lenin and Stalin’s Communist Party to wreck and reorganize—to break eggs in order to make a delicious omelette. But Communism, while retaining some of Marxism’s antinomic features (e.g., war on the family and on religion), became in practice almost exclusively a justification for the party’s absolute rule. For example, the economic system adopted by the Soviet Union and by other Communist regimes owed precisely zero to Marx, but was a finely tuned instrument for keeping the party in control of wealth.

The Leninist party is gone forever in Russia because, decades after its leaders stopped



believing in Marxism, and after Leonid Brezhnev had freed them from the Stalinist incubus that had kept them loyal to the center, they had learned to make the party into a racket. That, and the residual antinomian features, made Russia into a kakotopia. Russian men learned to intrigue and drink on the job rather than work. Shunning responsibility for women and children, they turned Russian society into a matriarchy, held together by grandmothers. In a thoroughly bureaucratized system, each holder of a bit of authority used it to inconvenience the others. Forcing people to tell each other things that both knew not to be true—recall that “politically correct” is a Communist expression—engendered cynicism and disrespect for truth. The endless anti-religion campaigns cut the people off from one moral system and failed to inculcate another. Alcohol drowned unhappiness, life expectancies declined, and fewer Russians were born.

The Russian people rejected Communism in the only ways that powerless people can—by passivity, by turning to anything foreign to authority, and by cynicism. Nothing being more foreign to Communism than Christianity, Russians started wearing crosses, knowing that the regime frowned on this feature of the Russia that had pre-existed Communism, and would survive it.

No sooner had the USSR died than Russia restored the name Saint Petersburg to Peter the Great’s “window on the West.” Even under Soviet rule, Russians had gone out of their way to outdo the West in Western cultural matters—“*nekulturny*” (uncultured!) was, and remains, a heavy insult in Russia. Moscow let countless priorities languish as it rebuilt in record time its massive Christ the Savior cathedral to original specifications. As the Russian Orthodox church resumed its place as a pillar of the Russia that had been Christianity’s bastion against the Mongol horde as well as against the Muslim Ottomans, golden domes soon shone throughout the land. Whatever anyone might think of the Russian Orthodox church, it anchors the country to its Christian roots.

Few Americans understood Vladimir Putin’s rise to power at the close of the 20th century as the reassertion of a bankrupt, humiliated, resentful people looking to make Russia great again. Since then, Putin has rebuilt the Russian state into a major European power with worldwide influence. Poverty and a resource-based economy notwithstanding, it is on a sounder financial basis than any Western country. Corruption is within historical limits. The leadership is appreciated by the vast majority, whose national pride

and solidarity dwarf those of Western publics. Nearly all Russians approve strongly of its absorption of Crimea. Russia effectively controls Ukraine’s eastern end, and has exposed the West’s incapacity to interfere militarily in the former Soviet empire. In the Middle East, Russia is now the dominant force.

In sum, the Russian bear licks its deep wounds as it growls behind fearsome defenses.

The Neighborhood

RUSSIA’S WESTERNISM IS NEITHER IMITATION nor love of the West. It is the assertion that Russia is an indispensable part of it. The Russians saved Europe from Napoleon, and from Hitler, too. That they did the latter tyrannically, as Soviets, does not, in their minds, disqualify them from their rightful place in Europe, or justify Europeans, much less Americans, trying to limit Russia’s rightful stature. Today’s Russian rulers are not gentler or nicer than the emperor who shook off the Mongol yoke—who wasn’t known as Ivan the Nice Guy. Like their forebears they are calculating Russia’s stature in terms of the limits—primarily in Europe—set by their own present power as well as by that of their immediate neighbors.

Russian writing on international affairs focuses exclusively on the country’s role as a member of the European system. By the 2030s, if not sooner, the Russian government will have filled such territory, and established such influence, as befit its own people’s and its neighbors’ realities, and will be occupied with keeping it. More than most, Putin is painfully aware of Russia’s limits. Its declining population is less than half of America’s and a tenth of China’s. Despite efforts to boost natality, its demography is likely to recover only slowly. Nor is its culture friendly to the sort of entrepreneurship, trust, and cooperation that produces widespread wealth. What, then, are Putin’s—or any Russian leader’s—national and international objectives?

As always, Ukraine is of prime interest to Russia because it is the crux of internal and external affairs. With Ukraine, Russia is potentially a world power. Without it, it is less, at best. But Putin’s pressures, disruptions, and meddlings have shown him how limited Russia’s reach into Ukraine is, and is sure to remain. Hence, Russia’s conquest of Ukraine east of the Don River signifies much less the acquisition of a base for further conquest than the achievement of modern Russia’s natural territorial limit in Europe. The 20th century’s events forever severed Ukraine and the Baltic states from Russia; even Belarus has become less compatible with it. Modern Russia is rec-

ognizing its independence, even as the Soviet Union at the height of its power effectively recognized Finland’s. As the Russian Federation’s demographic weight shifts south-eastward—and Islamism continues to gain favor there—the Russian government will have to consider whether to shift its efforts from keeping the Muslim regions within the federation to expelling and building fences against them.

As the decades pass, post-Soviet Russia will have to work harder and harder to cut the sort of figure in Europe that it did under the tsars. That figure’s size is the issue. The Russian empire’s size has varied over the centuries according to the ratios between its and its neighbors’ national vigor and power. In the past, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, the Hanseatic powers, Germany, all have shrunk or swollen Russia. Borders and spheres of influence have varied. There is no reason why this should not be so in the future. Russia will neither invade Europe nor dominate it politically because its people lack the political will, and its state the capacity, to do either. During Soviet times, this will and this capacity were the product of the national and international Communist Party apparatus, now gone forever.

A glance back at this gargantuan human structure reminds us of how grateful we should be that it now belongs to history. The Communist faction that resulted from the 1918 split in the international socialist movement—like the rump socialist faction that ended up governing Europe after 1945, but unlike the fascist one—already intended to conquer the world. (Fascism, Mussolini’s invention, recalled some of ancient Rome’s peculiar institutions and symbols—the *fasces* was the bundle of punishing rods carried by the consuls’ lictors—and added governing Italy through business-labor-government councils. It was not for export.) Communists worldwide came under the firm control of the Soviet Party’s international division run by formidable persons like Andrei Zhdanov and Boris Ponomarev, disposing of virtually unlimited budgets and, after 1929, of the services of countless “front organizations.” These, the party’s hands and feet and its pride and joy, reached out to every imaginable category of persons: union members, lawyers, teachers, journalists, housewives, professional women, students, non-students. Each front organization had an ostensible purpose: peace, through opposition or support of any number of causes. But supporting the “Soviet line” was the proximate purpose of all. Through tens of thousands of “witting” Communists, these fronts marshaled mil-

A RADICAL ANALYSIS

Discrimination and Disparities is a radical book, in the fundamental sense of going to the root of an issue. It challenges the very foundation of assumptions on which the prevailing “social justice” vision of our time is based. The first two chapters of *Discrimination and Disparities* present a new framework of analysis, and back it up with empirical evidence from around the world, before proceeding to demonstrate why and how so much of the “social justice” vision is a house of cards.



Some readers may find it surprising to discover what elementary fallacies provide the basis for many often-repeated assertions about the “top 10 percent,” “top one percent” or the “top 400” highest income recipients. The numbers behind such assertions may be valid *as of a given moment*, but most people’s lives last longer than a moment.

At some time during their lives, just over half of all Americans are in the “top 10 percent” in income. Internal Revenue Service data show that, over a 23-year period, there were 4,584 people in the “top 400”— and most of them were in that bracket just one year out of more than two decades. In many contexts, turnover is the ignored elephant in the room. *Discrimination and Disparities* points out many other elephants that have been ignored for far too long.

The fact that life has never been even approximately “fair,” in the sense of presenting equal chances for achievement to all individuals, groups or nations is undeniable. But that tells us nothing about the causes of particular skewed outcomes. Nor does it mean that we can reduce the causes to whatever fits a particular social vision, without putting that vision to the test of empirical evidence.

The alternative analysis and evidence offered in *Discrimination and Disparities* suggest that skewed distributions of outcomes are by no means improbable or unusual, whether among human beings or in natural phenomena beyond human control, such as tornadoes or earthquakes. This does not mean fatalistic acceptance of economic and social disparities. But it does suggest that much of what is said and done in the name of “social justice” is an impediment to creating greater opportunities for all.

Teachers who want their students to see more than one side of an issue may find *Discrimination and Disparities* especially appropriate for that role.

Basic Books
\$30.00 US
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Chapter 1: Disparities and Prerequisites
Chapter 2: Discrimination: Meanings and Costs
Chapter 3: Sorting and Unsorting People
Chapter 4: The World of Numbers
Chapter 5: The World of Words
Chapter 6: Social Visions and Human Consequences
Chapter 7: Facts, Assumptions and Goals



lions of *unwitting* supporters, helping to reshape Western societies. Soviet political control of Europe was eminently possible, with or without an invasion, because the Soviet domestic apparatus had marshaled Soviet society, and because its international department and front organizations had convinced sectors of European societies to welcome the prospect.

The tools that today's Russia wields vis-à-vis Europe are limited to commerce in natural gas, and to the opportunities for bribery that this creates—witness Russian Gazprom's employment of former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Not only do European governments not fear being invaded by Russia, they refuse to diversify their sources of natural gas, and generally oppose American sanctions imposed on Russia because of its actions in Ukraine. The notion among European ruling parties that the voters who are in the process of rejecting them for various "populist" and nationalist options, are pining for Russian-style governance or tricked by Russian wiles is a baseless attempt to sidestep the ruling parties' own failures.

Europe's rulers know that Russian military forces are not built to conquer the continent, because these forces lack the wherewithal for large-scale projection of power. Instead, they possess formidable capacity for what soldiers call "area denial." This fits Russian leaders' strategic goals, the people's sentiments, and material constraints. The wars that today's Russian military are built to fight are in areas that today's Russian military sees most threatened by the U.S. and NATO, on its borders with Poland and Lithuania (where Russia crushed the Wehrmacht in 1944-45), and in Ukraine, north of Crimea. Russia's military posture has ever been, and gives every sign of remaining, strategically defensive but operationally offensive. Now as before, when war seems imminent Russia's operational doctrine calls for taking the initiative in a preemptive manner.

Although Russian strategy would be to surround and seal off foreign troops by air and ground, for the first time in Russia's history, military manpower is scarce and precious. Economizing manpower is one reason why the country has fully integrated nuclear weapons in ordinary military operations, recalling nothing so much as President Dwight Eisenhower's doctrine in the 1950s of "more bang for the buck." To seal off the airspace, and to provide an umbrella for their ground forces, the Russians would use the S-400 air-missile defense system—the world's best, which is now deployed around some 300 high-value locations. Strikes (or the threat

thereof) by the unique Iskander short-range missile would preclude the foreign forces' escape, as Russian troops moved in with Armatas tanks, which carry the world's best reactive armor.

Possession of perhaps the world's best offensive and defensive strategic forces—comparable to America's and far superior to China's—is why Russia is confident that it can contain within limited areas the wars that it needs to fight. Because Russia has nothing to gain by military action against America or China, this arsenal is militarily useful only as insurance against anyone's escalation of border disputes, and as the basis for Russia's claim to be a major world player.

Priorities and Collusion

RUSSIA LOOMED SMALL IN U.S. FOREIGN policy from the time of the founding until the 1917 Bolshevik coup, because the interactions between America's and Russia's geopolitical and economic interests were few and mostly compatible. Given that these

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fundamentals have not changed, it would be best for both countries if their policies gradually returned to that long normal.

But for both countries, transcending the past century's habits is not easy. The essential problem is that neither side's desires, nor its calculus of ends and means, is clear to the other, or perhaps to itself. It seems that the main thing Putin or any other Russian leader might want from America is no interference as Russia tries to recreate the tsars' empire. Thus Russia's continuing relations with anti-U.S. regimes in Latin America can only be understood as Cold War inertia—the almost instinctive sense that what is bad for America must somehow be good for Russia. The U.S. government, for its part, while largely neglecting Russia's involvement in the Western hemisphere, tries to limit its influence in Europe while at the same time reaching agreements concerning strategic weapons—a largely Cold War agenda. The soundness of these priorities on both sides is doubtful.

Both Russia and the U.S. fear China, and with good reason. The crushing size of contemporary China's population and economy frightens the Russians. The fact that some Russian women marry Chinese men (disdaining Russian ones) embarrasses them and has made them more racially prejudiced than ever against the Chinese. Yet Russia aligns with China internationally and sells it advanced weapons, paid for with American money—money that China earns by trading its people's cheap labor for America's expensive technology. With these weapons as well as its own, China has established *de facto* sovereignty over the South China Sea and is pushing America out of the western Pacific. Nonetheless, the U.S. treats Russia as a major threat, including "to our democracy." For Russia and America to work against one another to their common principal adversary's advantage makes no geopolitical sense. But internal dynamics drive countries more than geopolitics.

Nowhere is this clearer than with the notion that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. election—a charge which has roiled American public life for the past two years and counting. Interference in American life? That is what the Soviet Union was all about. By contrast, current concerns about Russia are a tempest, albeit a violent one, in a domestic American teapot.

In America, the Soviets worked less through the Communist Party than they did in Europe. Here, they simply seduced and influenced people at the top of our society. Even in America prominent persons in the Democratic Party, academia, media, and intelligence services (or who would become prominent, e.g., future Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and CIA Director John Brennan), were Communists more or less openly. Far more important to the Soviets were persons convinced that Soviet and American interests were identical. Harry Hopkins, for example, who ran the U.S. government on President Franklin Roosevelt's behalf, considered Stalin's objectives to be so indistinguishable from America's that the KGB considered him to be effectively Stalin's agent. By contrast, Alger Hiss, an important State Department official, was one of many controlled Soviet agents within the U.S. government. But the compatibility between Hiss's views and those of many in the U.S. ruling class was striking. For example, even after Soviet archives confirmed Hiss's status as a Soviet agent, Robert McNamara, secretary of defense under Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, like many of his class, angrily insisted on Hiss's innocence.



The comradeship of American liberals and Soviet Communists lasted to the Soviet Union's end. In May 1983, for example, in an incident widely reported at the time and confirmed by Soviet archives, former U.S. senator John Tunney visited Moscow and, on behalf of his friend and classmate—and prospective Democratic presidential candidate—Senator Edward Kennedy, proposed to KGB director Viktor Chebrikov that Kennedy work with Soviet dictator Yuri Andropov to “arm Soviet officials with explanations regarding problems of nuclear disarmament so they may be better prepared and more convincing during appearances in the USA” because “[t]he only real potential threats to Reagan [in the 1984 election] are problems of war and peace and Soviet-American relations.” Kennedy promised “to have representatives of the largest television companies in the USA contact Y.V. Andropov for an invitation to Moscow for the interviews.” Collusion, anyone? Today, with the Soviet Union gone, its moral-intellectual imprint on our ruling class remains.

The contemporary notion of Russian interference, however, owes nothing to Russia. It began when, in June 2016, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) tried to explain how a trove of e-mails showing its partiality

for Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders got into the public domain, alleging that they had been hacked from its server by Russian agents. To this day, there is zero evidence for this, the DNC not having allowed access to that server by any law enforcement agency or independent party.

Throughout the rest of the 2016 campaign, this narrative merged with one from CIA Director John Brennan and other leaders of U.S. intelligence, who were circulating a scurrilous dossier, paid for by the Clinton campaign, that alleged Trump's connections with Russia. The Obama Administration used the dossier as the basis for electronic and human surveillance of the Trump campaign. Together, these narratives prompted a two-year investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, which found no basis for the dossier, or for a relationship between Russia and the Trump campaign. Nevertheless, the assertion of Trump's indebtedness to Russia became the pretext for #TheResistance to the 2016 election's result, led by the Democratic Party, most of the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the media.

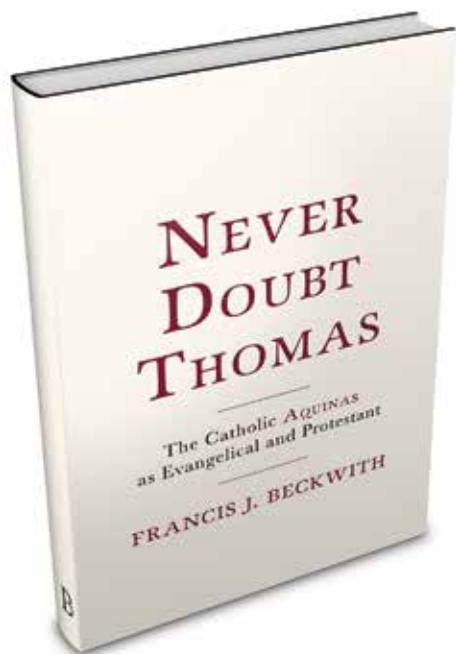
In Europe as well as in America, the establishment's protagonists have pointed to Russia to allege that their rejection by the voters is somehow “undemocratic.” Larry Diamond in the *Wall Street Journal*, following Robert

Kagan in the *Washington Post*, wrote that “in one country after another, elected leaders have gradually attacked the deep tissues of democracy—the independence [from sovereign voters] of the courts, the business community, the media, civil society, universities and sensitive state institutions like the civil service, the intelligence agencies and the police.” Voting against the establishment, you see, is undemocratic!

What Are Our Interests?

MAKING IMPOSSIBLE A RATIONAL public discussion of U.S. policy toward Russia is the very least of the damage this partisan war has wrought. American liberals believed the Soviet Union's dissolution was impossible; conservatives flattered themselves that they caused it. Few paid attention to what happened and how. Once the Soviet Union was gone, the West in general and Americans in particular presumed to teach Russians how to live, while helping their oligarchs loot the country. Russians soon got the impression that they were being disrespected. At least as Soviets, they had been feared. The Clinton Administration was confident that Russia would become a liberal partner in the rules-based international order. At the same time Clinton tried to load onto

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Russia the hopes that the U.S. establishment had long entertained about global co-dominion with the Soviets. In the same moment they pushed NATO to Russia's borders—a mess of appeasement, provocation, and insult. Long-suffering Russians, who had idolized the West during the Soviet era, came to dislike us.

As the George W. Bush Administration fumbled at the new reality, it tried to appease Russia by continuing to limit U.S. missile defenses in fact, while publicly disavowing the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; it formally objected to Russia's dismemberment of Georgia, while effectively condoning it. The incoming Barack Obama Administration tried to go further along the same self-contradictory line by withdrawing anti-missile support from eastern Europe, and quietly promising even more restraint. But when, in 2014, Putin seized Crimea, Obama imposed serious economic sanctions and agreed to place NATO and American troops in Poland and the Baltic States. Then, for the most tactical of domestic political considerations, the Obama Administration, and hence the U.S. establishment, decided to try explaining the course and results of the 2016 U.S. election campaign as "Russia's attack on our democracy."

What are the American people's interests in Eurasia, and how big are these interests? Although today's Russia poses none of the ideological threats that the Soviet Union did—and despite the absence of geopolitical or any other clashing interests—Russia is clearly a major adversary in Europe and the Middle East. Its technical contributions to China's military, and its general geopolitical alignment with China, are most worrisome. What, other than Soviet inertia and wounded pride, motivates the Russians? The U.S. maintains economic sanctions on Russia. To achieve precisely what? From both sides' perspective, it is difficult to see what good can come from this continued enmity.

Today's triangular U.S.-Russia-China calculus is not comparable to the Soviet-Chinese military confrontation of the 1970s and '80s, when both the U.S. and China feared Soviet missiles, and the U.S. best served its own interests by implicitly extending its nuclear umbrella over China. Today, the problems between Russia and China stem from basic disparities that U.S. policy obscures by treating Russia as, if anything, more of a threat

than China. The best that the U.S. can do for itself is to say nothing, and do nothing, that obscures these disparities. Without backhanded U.S. support for close Russo-Chinese relations, the two countries would quickly become each other's principal enemies.

Ongoing U.S. anxiety about negotiations with Russia over weaponry is nothing but a legacy of the Cold War and a refusal to pay attention to a century of experience, teaching that arms control agreements limit only those who wish to limit themselves. Russia violated the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty by developing the Iskander missile; the U.S. was right to withdraw from the agreement, but mistaken in ever expecting another country not to arm itself as it thinks best. In that regard, Americans should not listen to, never mind accommodate in any way, Russia's (or any other country's) objections to U.S. missile defenses. These are in our clear and overriding interest. Defending America as best we can—against missiles that might come to us from anywhere, for any reason—is supremely our business.

What then are America's legitimate, realizable demands on Russia?

Putin's Russia, by its 2015-18 intervention in Syria and its management of Turkey, achieved the tsars' historic desire for a warm water port. Although the former conquest is firm, keeping Turkey friendly to Russia must ever be troublesome. Absent a friendly Turkey, Russia's renewed control of Crimea and even the Syrian bases will be of very limited worth for any but defensive purposes. Whatever else might be said of its role in the Middle East, Russia has brought more stable balance to local forces than ever in this young century. Only with difficulty will American statesmen regret that our old adversary now deals with some of the problems that bedeviled us for a half-century.

The U.S. would be more secure geopolitically were Russia merely one of several European powers. But it has always been an empire, whose size has varied with time. An independent Ukraine has always been the greatest practical limitation on Russia's imperial ambitions. That is very much a U.S. interest, but is beyond our capacity to secure.

U.S. relations with Russia regarding Ukraine are analogous to U.S. relations with Europe 200 years ago. Our overriding interest then was to prevent the Europeans from holding any major part of the Western hemisphere.

By stating America's intention to guard its hemispheric interests while forswearing meddling in European affairs, the U.S. encouraged them to face that reality. Today's Russia realizes it cannot control Ukraine except for its Russian part, nor the Baltics, never mind the Visegrád states. The U.S. could lead Russia to be comfortable with that reality by reassuring it that we will not use our normal relations with Ukraine or with any of Russia's neighbors to try to define Russia's limits in Europe. We should realize that our setting such limits is beyond America's capacity, and that it undercuts the basis for fruitful relations.

The U.S. prefers the Baltic States, and especially Ukraine, to be independent. But we know, and should sincerely convey to Russia, that their independence depends on themselves, and that we regard it as counterproductive to make them into American pawns or even to give the impression that they could be. Ukraine's independence—and hence Russia's acceptance of it as inevitable—depends on Ukraine retrenching into its Western identity, rejecting the borders that Stalin and Khrushchev had fixed for it, and standing firmly on its own feet—as, for example, by asserting its Orthodox church's independence from Russia's.

Wise U.S. policy would remove sanctions that previous administrations placed on Russia on behalf of Ukraine. Fruitless strife has been these sanctions' only result. For example, they emboldened Ukraine to suppose it had U.S. support for presuming it had the same right to navigation in the Sea of Azov, passing under a Russian bridge, as it does in the Atlantic Ocean.

But in accord with the Monroe Doctrine, we should be willing to wage economic war on Russia—outright and destructive—on America's own behalf, were the Russians to continue supporting anti-U.S. regimes in the Western hemisphere. If you want economic peace with America, we would say, stop interfering in our backyard. We Americans, for our part, are perfectly willing to stop interfering in your backyard.

In sum, nothing should be geopolitically clearer than that the natural policy for both America and Russia is not to go looking for opportunities to get in each other's way.

Angelo M. Codevilla is a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute and professor emeritus of International Relations at Boston University.

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