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Celebrating Red October: A Story of the Ten Anniversaries of the Russian Revolution, 1927–2017

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to shed light on how the constantly evolving Soviet system shaped and reshaped the myth of Red October and how post-Soviet ruling elites treated the memory surrounding the 1917 Russian Revolution while pursuing political ends. At the center of the analysis are the politics of history and commemorative practices of the past ten decades, with the demise of communist ideology and the breakup of the Soviet Union serving as clear rupture points. Through its focus on revolutionary jubilees, the essay traces the trajectory of attitudes towards the Revolution over the past one hundred years – from treating Red October as a foundation myth for the entire Soviet era to viewing it as an inconvenient event that does not fit easily into the essentially counter-revolutionary official narrative of contemporary Russia.

KEYWORDS Russian Revolution; Soviet festivals; commemoration; politics of history

0. Introduction

When armed uprisings are being staged, it is mostly the guns that “speak.” Yet if rebellions are successful and subsequently rechristened as “revolutions,” there is no end to discussions in which various interpretations of revolutions as either glorious or ruinous events are being advanced. Revolutions’ jubilee years present particularly attractive opportunities for all kinds of (re)appraisals. This essay seeks to investigate the vicissitudes of memory surrounding the 1917 Russian Revolution and to explore how Soviet and post-Soviet ruling elites approached the October myth while pursuing political ends. At the center of my analysis are ten revolutionary jubilees – from the tenth anniversary in 1927 to the 2017 centennial. Although the Bolshevik Revolution constituted the foundation myth for the entire Soviet era, with Communist believers treating Red October as “pious Christians” did “the Gospel story” (Keep 1977), each jubilee was part of a unique historical context. Celebration

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scenarios reflected the evolution of the political regime, giving a specific spin to past events by highlighting or ignoring certain episodes of the revolutionary saga and by revising the main cast of October's heroes and villains. The essay discusses the politics of history and commemorative practices of the past ten decades, with the demise of communist ideology and the breakup of the Soviet Union serving as clear rupture points. It would appear that by the Revolution's hundredth anniversary, the commemoration of Red October has come full circle. As one perceptive commentator put it, "the history of Soviet and post-Soviet revolutionary jubilees can be schematically imagined as a cardiac function curve that registers a gradual weakening of revolutionary heartbeat" (Kalinin 2017, 12). It is this "curve's" fluctuations over the past hundred years that I will focus on in the next sections of this essay.

1. Forging the myth of Red October

Two distinct features of the Russian Revolution make it stand out among the other "grand revolutions" in world history. One striking aspect is that it was the first revolution carried out according to the specific precepts of an elaborate (Marxist-Leninist) theory of revolution. Its second outstanding characteristic is that it has been a rather protracted affair. The Russian Revolution, as some historians advocating the broad perspective have long argued, should be understood not as a fleeting moment of the overthrow of the monarchy (in February) or of the provisional government (in October) and the subsequent "ten days that shook the world," but rather as "the entire transition from the Old Regime to the new, from the Revolution of 1905 to Stalin's 'revolution from above' and Purges of the 1930s" (Malia 2006, 254). In the Russian case, Martin Malia (2006, 256) pointed out, this thirty year-long political turmoil makes "revolution" seem to be "less an event than a regime." For such an "institutional revolution" or a "revolution-as-regime," commemorations of its founding moment – the "October uprising" – became a vital aspect of the legitimation of the Soviet political system. The nascent revolutionary regime's need to set up a new pattern of social time, assert its distinctive identity and construct a legitimizing genealogy explains the striking difference between the "anti-ritualistic" and "matter-of-fact" Marxist movement of the mid-19th century (as described by Eric Hobsbawm) and the Bolshevik system of highly "ritualistic" ceremonial (Binns 1979, 585).

1.1. 1927

The first post-revolutionary decade was an absolutely crucial period during which the main foundations of the revolutionary myth were laid. "The October Revolution did not first occur, only later to be written about,"

Frederick Corney notes correctly. “It occurred in the process of writing” (Corney 1998, 407). Immediately following the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks abolished nine Orthodox festivals and set up their Red calendar with its own annual cycle of revolutionary holidays: January 22 (Memorial day for Bloody Sunday 1905), March 12 (overthrow of the autocracy), March 18 (Paris Commune Day), May Day, and November 7 (October Revolution). The new yearly ceremonies were meant to sacralize the new regime’s genealogy – the young revolutionary state’s history and pre-history. Simultaneously, Soviet authorities established a whole array of institutions charged with the task of remembering and telling the story of October: the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Communist Party (Istpart) (1920–1928), the Institute of Lenin (est. May 1924), and the Commission on the Tenth Anniversary of October (1926–27).

On the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, wrote Nikos Kazantzakis, who witnessed the festivities in Moscow on November 7, 1927, “official Soviet Russia gives a report on what has been accomplished so far and what great and difficult tasks remain to be done” (1989, 189). Indeed, the jubilee was designed as “a kind of World’s Fair of socialism” (Corney 2004, 175) to advertise Soviet achievements. Contrasting the backwardness of the Old Regime with the shining modernity of the youthful Soviet system was at the center of the festival’s program. Beyond making a favorable comparison between the rising “realm of freedom” and the old-world “realm of necessity,” the jubilee’s celebrations sought to forge the October myth by making use of three key media: historical scholarship, cinema, and revolutionary ceremonies. By the end of their first decade in power, the Bolshevik leadership intended to give the masses a coherent story of the revolution and of the party’s role in its preparation and “making.” The need to streamline the narrative appeared all the more urgent given the historiographic activities of the Left Opposition. The programmatic essays of the Opposition’s principal leaders – Grigorij Zinov’ev’s *Leninism* and Trockij’s *Lessons of October* – came under vicious attack: both authors were said to have united “on the basis of negating the socialist character of the revolution.” The victorious Stalinist faction’s response to the “anti-Bolshevik” interpretations of the Revolution was the book *The Party of Bolsheviks in 1917* by Emel’jan Jaroslavskij. It was published in 1927, just in time for the jubilee celebrations, and told the tale of October and the Bolsheviks that enjoyed the imprimatur of the Party’s Central Committee.

Arguably, cinema, with its evocative visual language, provided the Soviets with a more powerful form of storytelling. In the jubilee year, Communist authorities commissioned a number of films (such as Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *End of St. Petersburg*, Boris Barnet’s *Moscow in October*, and Ėsfir’ Šub’s *The Great Way*) that shaped the canonical image of Red October. None, though, was as influential as Sergej Ėjzenštejn’s *October*. Its staged scene of the storming of the Winter Palace created the Revolution’s most enduring

representation – an iconic picture that would soon come to be seen as documentary footage. The first screening of *October* took place on November 7, 1927; yet later that day Ėjzenštejn had to edit out all scenes with Trockij, following the suppression of the Opposition's "counter-demonstrations" in Moscow and Leningrad (Tichonov 2017, 98).

The ten-year jubilee has also shaped the canon of Soviet revolutionary ceremonial. Unlike earlier mass *zrelišča* (spectacles) and *inscenirovki* (dramatizations) of the first post-revolutionary years (such as the famous 1920 reenactment "Storming of the Winter Palace" staged by Nikolaj Evreinov and involving thousands of participants and spectators), Soviet festivals since the mid-1920s became more ritualized and centralized. State ceremonies were supposed to convey a sense of might, discipline and hierarchy (Binns 1979, 598; Rolf 2013, 83–89). Kazantzakis who stood on Red Square on November 7, 1927, produced a classic vignette of the new-look "October" parade with its two characteristic features that would persist until the end of Soviet Communism: a clear distinction between rulers (who stood atop the Lenin mausoleum) and ruled (who marched past the leaders' central podium, demonstrating their loyalty to the Party line), and the Lenin cult. Following the tradition that originated during the Civil war years, the Red Army units opened the celebration. "Suddenly the trumpets sound and the parade [...] begins," Kazantzakis wrote in his fascinating travelogue:

Wave after wave of soldiers break ranks in front of the Lenin Monument; then they scatter and disappear and the new waves energetically follow [...] After the armed forces follows the astonishing and interminable parade of the peoples of the Republics, all passing in front of Lenin. From the other three sides of the immense square, three deep red rivers of humanity pour forward [...] Hours pass. The streets keep pouring crowds into the square [...] Deep into the night, the three inexhaustible red rivers pass in front of Lenin and salute him like worshipping pilgrims. (Kazantzakis 1989, 191–93)

1.2. 1937

One should not underestimate the significance of the 20-year jubilee of Red October – that was the advice of Joseph E. Davies, US ambassador in Moscow, which he included in a dispatch to his superiors in Washington. What is particularly significant about the event, he went on, was that the Bolshevik regime managed to survive over the last 20 years. Let's not forget, he added, how jubilant Lenin was when, 90 days after the October takeover, he realized that the Russian Revolution had already outlived the Paris Commune (Davies 1942). There was more to the significance of this festive date, though. In the year of the Revolution's 20th anniversary, the Soviet society was quite different from what it had been a decade earlier. During those intervening years Soviet people witnessed turmoil, economic dislocation and social

change on a scale arguably exceeding that of 1917. The main result of this dramatic transformation, the country's leadership solemnly declared, was the "full victory of socialism" in the USSR – a fact that was underscored by the adoption in 1936 of the new Soviet Constitution. This new Soviet "socialist society" was the product of ruthless policies launched by Stalin in the late 1920s. "Declaring himself the 'Lenin of Today', he carried out a new October through the Great Break of his 'revolution from above' of 1929–1933" (Malia 2006, 285–86). There was now the need to properly showcase and celebrate the achievements of this "second Russian revolution" as well as praise the great wisdom and resoluteness of its ultimate leader. The latter himself famously announced in 1935, "Life has become better, Comrades. Life has become more joyous" (Petrono 2000)¹ thus encouraging the broad masses to adopt a festive mood. Soviet ceremony (including the 1937 jubilee celebrations) duly reflected the tremendous societal changes as well as the emerging cult of Stalin: the history of the Revolution and the Party was rewritten, the Red calendar adjusted, and new propaganda films made.

As a realization of the vision of "building socialism in one country," Stalin's "new October" caused a recalibration of the October myth forged during the previous decade. With the "triumph of socialism" in the USSR, it was maintained, Soviet peoples as well as the global proletariat obtained their "fatherland" – to which they owed their allegiance and which they had to defend against capitalist predators. Celebrating the economic achievements and military might of the first socialist *state* thus deemphasized the notion of "world revolution" (that was associated with Trockij) and at the same time encouraged the growing sentiment of Soviet patriotism. This patriotic orientation, coupled with the resurrection of the carefully chosen episodes and protagonists of the pre-revolutionary Russian history, clearly marked the emergence of what some scholars call the National Bolshevik ideology (Brandenberger, 2002). Georgi Dimitrov, General Secretary of Comintern's Executive Committee, nicely captured this rising statist-nationalist mood in his diary entry from November 7, 1937. After a demonstration on Red Square, Dimitrov attended a festive dinner party that Marshal Kliment Voroshilov threw for a select group of Bolshevik dignitaries. In the middle of a lavish feast Stalin proposed a curious toast. "Russian tsars did many bad things," he said,

They waged wars and seized territories in the interests of landowners. But we should give them credit for they had also done one great thing: they created an immense empire that stretches all the way to Kamčatka. We inherited this

1 Notably, a year later, one of Stalin's closest lieutenants, Anastas Mikojan, echoed the "Boss," while warning against festive excesses and advocating civilized drinking habits. "Before the revolution we drank to get drunk and to forget our unfortunate lives," Mikojan said in 1936. "*Now life is happier ... Life is now better* and that means: We may drink in measure." (Mikojan quoted in Rolf 2013, 135. Emphasis added).

empire. And we, Bolsheviks, have for the first time strengthened this [imperial] state, making it one and indivisible [...]. (Dimitrov, 2003)

Commemorating the Russian Revolution's 20-year jubilee, crowds across the Soviet Union cheered Red October not so much as the "beginning of a new world but as a new period of the great Russian history and the history of the peoples of the USSR" (Tichonov 2017, 100). "Only in the light of the past does our glorious present rise in all its greatness," *Pravda* editorialized in 1937. "The great socialist revolution was carried out by remarkable peoples who, in the past centuries of their lives, showed an indomitable will to fight for their national independence, in the struggle against all exploiters" (Editorial 1937).

One important aspect of highlighting historical continuity was the rehabilitation of the thesis emphasizing the historical role of heroic leaders, whereby the builders of the strong Russian state such as Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible and Aleksandr Nevskij were portrayed as Stalin's precursors. Ėjzenštejn's film *Aleksandr Nevskij* – a political allegory based on historical subject matter – made in 1937–38 presents a perfect example of this trend. Eisenstein himself appeared keen to draw a direct parallel between the image of the valiant medieval Russian prince and the omnipotent Soviet leader. "If the power of the people's spirit managed to defeat the enemy at the time when [our] country was languishing in the shackles of the Tatar yoke," wrote the filmmaker in his contribution to a volume devoted to the problems of historical movies, "then there is no such force that could crush this [Soviet] country, which broke all chains of exploitation, the country, which had become our socialist Motherland, [and] which is being led towards epic victories by the greatest strategist of world history – Stalin" (Ėjzenštejn 1939, 19; Uhlenbruch 2002). Another aspect was the "Stalinization" of the revolutionary myth. Incessantly trumpeting Stalin's "victories" and declaring him the "best disciple" and "true heir" of Lenin, the Soviet propaganda machine eventually made him appear, by the mid-1930s, as "the Lenin of Today." This "transfiguration" was reflected in, among other things, some curious changes in Soviet commemorative practices: "It was notable that, while Lenin's *death*-day was observed, Stalin's *birthday* was increasingly celebrated" (Binns 1979, 603). One way to symbolically elevate Stalin was to project his present prominence back into the past and style him as Lenin's right-hand man during the momentous days of the "October uprising." This was done most graphically in Michail Romm's film *Lenin in October*, commissioned for the Revolution's 20th anniversary and first screened at the grand reception at the Bol'shoj Theater on November 6, 1937. In Romm's telling of the story of October, Trockij was not present at all, while Zinov'ev and Kamenev (who, by the time of the film's release, were executed following a Moscow show trial) were represented as traitors. Overall, Romm's film, as Maja Turovskaja noted

(2001), was an example of how the Lenin myth was artfully woven into the emergent Stalin myth. “The film was very good,” wrote Ambassador Davies in his November 15 cable to the State Department. Of course, he continued, everything was shot through with propaganda, and Stalin figured prominently in the whole story, with the main objective being to demonstrate how close and friendly the relations between Lenin and Stalin had been (Davies 1942). In Romm’s portrayal of the two leaders’ relationship, Lenin was constantly in contact with Stalin: he sought his younger comrade’s advice, sent him letters and repeatedly met with him. After Lenin came back to Petrograd from his hiding place in Finland, his first meeting was with Stalin. (By contrast, Lenin’s spouse, Nadežda Krupskaja, got only a short written note.) A report in *Pravda* provides us with an evocative description of Romm’s version of that rendezvous: “[Their] encounter lasts four hours. It was at the dead of night that [Vladimir] Il’ič and his great comrade-in-arms parted [...] Stairs in a wooden house, dim light. Lenin and Stalin. A beautiful manly embrace” (Bordjugov 2007a, 33).

Late at night on November 7, after the Kremlin dinner party, the Soviet leaders watched the Lenin movie again. It would appear, though, that the main ideological message that Romm’s film sought to convey had already been neatly encapsulated in Dimitrov’s toast at the Vorošilov banquet. “Stalin,” Dimitrov said, “continued Lenin’s cause in such a steadfast and genius way that, despite all the sharp turns, the victory of [Bolshevik] cause was secured. It is impossible to speak about Lenin without linking him with Stalin! (Everyone raises their glasses!)” (Dimitrov 2003).

2. Postwar: the rise of a dual myth

2.1. 1947

“Each year is remarkable due to its own events and has its own glory,” reads the opening paragraph of the Soviet children’s calendar *Kruglyj god* (All year round) for 1947.

There were war years – the hard, difficult years. And then came 1945 – the year of Victory. Afterwards came 1946 – the first peaceful year. For us, it was an agreeable year. Victorious warriors came back home, and the people started working in order to quickly rebuild everything that was burned, wrecked and destroyed by villainous enemies [...] This year a great holiday awaits us – the world has never seen such a festival: this year [our] Soviet country turns thirty. (Dobrenko 2002, 115)

The calendar’s phrase referring to the “hard, difficult” war years has in fact masked a far more brutal reality. The magnitude of the war, the scale of devastations and the horrendous death toll proved to be absolutely overwhelming for the Soviet people. At the same time, their pride in defeating the

formidable enemy – the seemingly invincible Wehrmacht war machine – coupled with the personal experiences of millions of Soviets who contributed to the country's war effort both on the front and in the rear constituted a powerful ingredient of an emerging new foundation myth – one that would gradually eclipse the myth of Red October. Yet it took several decades for the Victory myth to start crowding out the myth of the Revolution. It is worthwhile to remember that in the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1965 V-Day was not even a day off, nor was its celebration accompanied by a military parade during the two decades following the famous Red Square Victory parade on June 24, 1945. It would appear that the somber and restrained commemoration of the "Great Patriotic War" characteristic of the first postwar decades fits nicely into the overarching narrative about the Soviet revolutionary project. Both the October and Victory myths seemed to be mutually reinforcing: the Soviet communist system, forged in the crucible of the Revolution, Civil war, and Stalin's Great Break, proved its viability in the victorious war against Nazism. The triumph over Hitler in May 1945 vindicated the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917: "After 1945, the Seventh of November became the day of a dual myth: the date of the founding of the Soviet regime in general and the date of victory in the Great Patriotic War. The anniversary of the October Revolution was linked to the propaganda narrative that, as of the 1960s, increasingly interpreted it as the Soviet Union's victory over Hitler's fascism, which in turn legitimized the Soviet regime" (Rolf 2013, 181). According to Amir Weiner (2001, 8), the war indicated "the climax in the unfolding socialist revolution." Reminiscing about the immediate postwar years, the memoirist and author Mariëta Šaginjan compared the solemn mood of the late 1940s with the stern atmosphere of "those special October [1917] days."

However, the war also reinforced a different ideological trend – a National-Bolshevik one – that was already highly conspicuous in the mid-1930s. The Soviet state's struggle to the death with Nazi Germany forced the Bolshevik leadership to seek broader legitimacy and prompted them to continue selectively resurrecting images and themes pertaining to Russia's pre-revolutionary era: tsarist military uniforms, ranks and orders, Russian imperial war heroes, "progressive" enlightened autocrats as well as the very idea of Russian/Soviet patriotism. According to Konstantin Simonov (1988, 183), under the new circumstances, "it was necessary to emphasize the strength and significance of the national feeling in history, and thus also in modern times – that was the crux of the matter." "In this rehabilitation of national glory there are some boundaries, some ineradicable sense of communist decency," perceptively noted Georgij Fedotov (1990a, 154). And yet, he argued, for the Kremlin ideologues, "the matter was no less than how to combine Marx with Aleksandr Nevskij, Stalin with Peter the Great" (1990b, 156).

It is thus instructive to compare two 1947 celebrations: one marking the event that was at the heart of the Soviet state's foundation myth and the other commemorating the 800th anniversary of the city of Moscow. The festivities honoring the 30th jubilee of October appeared to be somewhat muted and unassuming, if not downright subdued. Unlike on previous occasions, this time around neither a special organizing commission was formed, nor were the "Theses" prepared by the Communist Party's Central Committee published. Moreover, eyebrows were raised when Stalin skipped the November 6 "solemn session" of party and government dignitaries devoted to the main revolutionary holiday and did not show up the next day at the traditional Red Square parade and demonstration (Tichonov 2017, 102; Bordjugov 2007a, 34). By contrast, precisely two months earlier Soviet people witnessed the exuberant extravaganza in honor of a different – non-revolutionary – kind of jubilee: Moscow's 800th anniversary. The program of two-day festivities included all sorts of activities beginning with a grand meeting of the Moscow Soviet that took place at the Bol'šoj Theater on Saturday, September 6, and ending with a festive salute of 20 artillery salvos. Remarkably, Moscow celebrations were crowned by a highly symbolic move: the ceremony of laying the monument to the city's putative founder Prince Jurij Dolgorukij (Naročnickij 1980). Arguably, it was the first time since the overthrow of the Tsarist regime that Soviet authorities took a decision to commemorate a Russian historical figure that had nothing to do with Leninist ideology or the communist movement, using the means previously employed to exclusively champion flaming revolutionaries – monumental propaganda.

3. Ottepel', zastoj, and perestrojka

3.1. 1957

One year after Stalin's death, three young Soviet poets were having a heated debate. "The Revolution is dead and its corpse is stinking," Junna Moric, 17, said to Evgenij Evtušenko, 21. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," another teenage prodigy, Bella Achmadulina, 17, retorted indignantly. "The Revolution isn't dead; the Revolution is sick, and we must help it." According to Evtušenko's own confession, he instantly fell in love with Bella following her passionate defense of Red October's legacy (Evtušenko 1964, 106). This remarkable conversation has reflected a signal social phenomenon: the coming of age of a new Soviet generation – the energetic and optimistic "children of the 20th Party Congress." By nature, the notions of "youth" and "optimism" are closely intertwined, and the postwar Soviet society consisted mostly of young people. At the end of the 1950s, due to the gigantic wartime losses that thoroughly reshaped Soviet demographic landscape,

only 10% of the country's population were older than sixty, while those aged 30 and younger constituted 55% (Zubok 2009, 121).

And in the late 1950s, for this demographic cohort there were more than enough reasons to be optimistic, besides being young and vigorous. One year prior to the Revolution's 40th anniversary, the new Soviet leader Nikita Chruščev denounced Stalin's wrongdoings in his "secret speech" at the Communist Party's 20th Congress. In June 1957, the "antiparty group" – a clique of Stalinist stalwarts that was hell bent on thwarting destalinization – was suppressed, and thus the process of contrasting the "cult of personality" with the image of "humane" and "modest" Lenin was allowed to continue. In July-August, Moscow saw a flamboyant carnival like no other – the World Youth Festival. After the previous quarter century during which the Soviet Union was basically closed to foreigners, Soviet people all of a sudden witnessed a virtual "foreign invasion": 34,000 guests from 130 countries descended upon Moscow, Leningrad and several other large cities. At the time, the festival was seen as an ebullient "Kremlin all-nighter": the ancient fortress of Russian tsars and later home of Stalin's commissars "flung its doors open to the youthful crowds, and thousands danced at 'Kremlin parties'" (Zubok 2009, 104). Last but not least, in October 1957, just one month prior to the Revolution's jubilee, the first Soviet Sputnik was launched. This event was loaded with powerful symbolism, going far beyond its indisputable technological and military significance. Following the denunciations of Stalin, limited liberalization and a cautious opening to the outside world, "for a Soviet person," one astute commentary noted, "outer space was also a symbol of total emancipation [...] Exit into space seemed to be a logical completion of the emancipation process and the logical beginning of the period of freedom" (Vail' and Genis 1998, 25).

The CPSU Central Committee's Theses "Towards the 40th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution" seemed to reflect this groundswell of optimism within Soviet society, particularly among Soviet youth, and sought to set forth new and inspiring objectives. The Party declared the process of building socialism to have successfully been completed and put forward a new daunting goal: the construction of communist society. Within the next fifteen years, the USSR was supposed to catch up and overcome the United States in terms of industrial production volumes (Tezisy 1957).

A "Thaw" in Soviet political and cultural realms appeared to be instrumental in the revitalization of the revolutionary myth. The new daring political objectives advanced during Red October's forty-year jubilee were congenial to the prevailing sense of optimism of the immediate post-Stalin era. It would appear that in the late 1950s, many Soviet people were ready to repeat after the protagonist of *Thaw*, Il'ja Ėrenburg's short novel: "The future, of course, belongs to the Soviet Union" (Ėrenburg 1965, 52).

3.2. 1967

In summer 1967, the renowned American journalist Harrison E. Salisbury returned to the USSR (where he was the *New York Times*' Moscow bureau chief in 1949–1954) to observe and report on the celebrations of Red October's 50th anniversary. Being essentially middle-aged, the Bolshevik Revolution, Salisbury suggested, resembled a person nearing retirement – “a bit wheezy, inclined to sit back in an easy chair, turn on the TV and watch a good light program. No speeches, please. No party exhortations!” (Salisbury 1967, 28). At first blush, it would appear that Salisbury correctly diagnosed the dynamics of the Revolution's life cycle. Indeed, starting in the mid-1960s, it was the seemingly more vigorous war myth that began eclipsing the October myth in the grand narrative of the Soviet state. Notably, on May 9, 1964, Chruščev was not even in Moscow, choosing instead to go on a visit to Nasser's Egypt. Yet next year, following Chruščev's ouster, the 20th anniversary of the Victory in World War II was celebrated with pomp, and in 1967 – the year of the revolutionary jubilee – the Soviet leadership sponsored the opening of a massive memorial complex devoted to the Battle of Stalingrad and lit the Eternal Flame at the Tomb of Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin wall.

At the age of fifty, the Revolution, however, did not appear to be in the mood for early retirement. The political and intellectual atmosphere created by the “Thaw” was conducive to rekindling revolutionary fervor, symbolically linking the 1960s struggle to give socialism a “human face” with the creative spirit and bold experimentations of the early 1920s. Another factor that helped sustain revolutionary enthusiasm in the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s was the Cuban revolution. It was a “curious peculiarity of Russia's destiny that even the greatest event in its history – the Revolution – it has gotten back in the 60s as an import from a small island in the Caribbean” (Vail' and Genis 1998, 52). Cuba, with its tropical exoticism, romantic bearded revolutionaries and lofty anti-imperialist slogans, became a metaphor for both Red October and the liberalizing trends of the “Thaw.” Fascination with exciting events in Cuba revived a strong interest in Russia's revolutionary past among many Soviet citizens. Nowhere was this interest reflected better than in the social and artistic program of *Sovremennik* (the Contemporary), a Moscow theater, and its director Oleg Efremov. In the jubilee year, Efremov staged a trilogy telling a story of the main stages of Russian revolutionary movement, beginning with the Decembrists and ending with the trials and tribulations of the fledgling Bolshevik regime during its first year in power. Mikhail Šatrov, the author of the trilogy's last play, *The Bolsheviks*, “used every means at his command to try to prove that the wellsprings of the Revolution were crystal clear and it was only Stalin and his satraps who had muddied them and brought Lenin's ideas into

disrepute" (Smeliansky 1999, 24–25). This vision was shared by the bulk of the 1960s "progressive" Soviet intelligentsia. *The Bolsheviks* became an instant hit with sophisticated Moscow urbanites. In his diary entry from November 7, 1967, the scriptwriter Georgij Elin (1967) wrote: "The apex of Oleg Efremov's directing [was] making the audience join the actors in singing 'The Internationale.'" On the poster for *The Bolsheviks* premier performance that the *Sovremennik* Theater gave to the playwright Šatrov as a gift, Efremov scribbled: "Miša, let's keep on glorifying the Bolsheviks" (Bordjugov 2007b, 99). The young Moscow crowds who flocked to his theater would not disagree with this agenda: in 1967, "they speak in the language of Hemingway but also believe in the promises of Lenin and the values of the Revolution" (Zubok 2009, 185).

3.3. 1977

In September 1977, Anatolij Černjaev, a senior apparatchik at the Central Committee's International Department, was sitting in his office struggling with writer's block. His superiors had commissioned him to write the Address to the peoples of the world on the occasion of Red October's 60th anniversary. "My head is empty," Černjaev admitted in his diary entry. He understood full well that his bosses in Politburo were interested only in florid rhetoric – not in the new and bold ideas. "However," he continued, "I cannot even come up with some fresh and fancy words, because all these words had already been uttered a thousand times, bored everyone stiff and cause only irritation or smirks, or at best – complete indifference." The main problem, Černjaev concluded sadly, was that "we have nothing of substance to say to the world. And the world wants neither to follow nor emulate us" (Černjaev 2008, 296). The bottom line of Černjaev's reflections was simple and unequivocal: the myth of Red October has long been in a state of decline. These musings of a senior party intellectual did not mesh well with the pompous and grandiose manner in which the Revolution's 60th jubilee was celebrated. "The victory of October is the main event of the 20th century," trumpeted the jubilee report delivered by the Soviet leader Leonid Brežnev. "We are the first who have created a developed socialist society on this planet, and we are the first who are now building communism" (Brežnev 1977). One month before the jubilee celebration, a new Law of the Land – the "Constitution of the developed socialism" – was adopted with much pomp and fanfare.

Yet the overwhelming majority of Soviet people remained unmoved by this empty rhetoric. In the increasingly stuffy atmosphere following the suppression of the Prague Spring, creeping re-Stalinization, and a clampdown on political and artistic dissent, there was no place left for optimism, enthusiasm and revolutionary romanticism of the previous decade. As the Soviet

economy continued to stagnate, real incomes and living standards decreased substantially, thus creating social conditions conducive to the growth of cynicism and conformist attitudes among Soviet citizens. The Kremlin leadership appeared desperate to portray the Revolution at 60 as a vigorous force for social change. “Lenin is young again! And the youthful October’s ahead!” was the refrain of a popular song that was blaring at every nook and corner of the country during the jubilee festivities. However, these cheerful words contrasted sharply with the collective image of gerontocratic rulers of the Soviet Union. The progressive senility of the Politburo “elders” – most visible, noted Černjaev (2008, 350), in Brežnev’s growing feebleness – presented a particularly “ugly and comic” picture. At the august age of sixty, the Revolution, far from being a force for change, appeared to be a spent force.

3.4. 1987

Ten years on, with Michail Gorbačev and other representatives of *šestidesjatkini* (men of the 60s) at the helm, the revolutionary romanticism that many thought was the thing of the past seemed to be back with a vengeance. The “architects of perestroika” sought to “re-revolutionize the Revolution” (Corney 2014, 322) in order to thoroughly revamp the lethargic Soviet socialist system. They could not think of any better historical metaphor to legitimize their political cause than the myth of Red October. “The deep revolutionary process that we have launched,” Gorbačev forcefully argued at the Politburo meeting in late September 1987, “will help socialism get a second wind” (Černjaev 2008, 725). Remarkably, his jubilee report on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Revolution was tellingly entitled “October and Perestrojka: The Revolution Goes On” (Gorbačev 1987) while the liberal-minded Moscow historian Jurij Afanas’ev invited his Soviet compatriots to reflect on “why we associate perestroika with revolution and compare its historical significance with that of October Revolution” (Bordjugov 2007b, 101).

Anatolij Černjaev who became one of Gorbačev’s top advisors, noted in his diary that the Kremlin leader’s intent was to turn the Revolution’s anniversary into a useful symbolic resource for his transformative policies (Černjaev 2008, 739). By portraying perestrojka as a return to Lenin’s concept of building socialism, Kremlin ideologues cast the efforts to restructure the moribund Soviet state as a continuation of revolutionary process. Yet the ambitious endeavor aimed at reviving the spirit of October has failed miserably. Perestrojka’s ideological focus on the early 1920s as the era of bold experiments and innovations only served to highlight the brevity of this vibrant period within the overall sweep of Soviet epoch. Furthermore, Gorbačev’s constant invocations of Lenin’s dictums and his treatment of the Bolshevik leader’s pronouncements as canonical jarred with his own (and Lenin’s) intent to rely on

the “spontaneous creativity of the masses.” At the same time, *glasnost* (openness), a key aspect of perestrojka policies, helped radicalize the process of filling in the “blank spots” of Soviet history, with an ever greater number of people raising the question: “Have we ever had [true] socialism and do we really need it (even that ‘with a human face’)?” (Černjaev 2008, 739). Ultimately, Gorbachev’s efforts to make effective use of the October myth foundered because the Kremlin leadership had only a dim idea of how the Soviet system really worked. As Aleksej Jurčak persuasively demonstrated, Gorbachev’s public acknowledgment that the Communist Party did not know answers to every single question led to the situation whereby in the eyes of millions of Soviet citizens the notions of *party*, *Lenin*, and *communism* lost their status of “master signifiers” within Soviet authoritative discourse. The leadership’s admission that it needed advice from outside the authoritative “party lore” brought about “the erosion of the external, independent and indisputable *truth* – one that served as a basis for the entire ideological system of socialism. The Soviet symbolic system lost a [crucial] external pillar and its collapse became inevitable” (Jurčak 2014, 581).

4. October in postcommunist era

4.1. 1997

“No one cares much any more” about celebrating the anniversary of October in post-Soviet Russia, Martin Malia noted with unmistakable satisfaction soon after the USSR’s implosion (Malia 1992, 9). Indeed, the meaning of the Russian Revolution was radically reinterpreted within the official discourse of the militantly anticommunist El’cin regime. A historic event that over the previous 74 years was regarded as one that ushered in the “new world” and made Russia the vanguard of humankind, was now portrayed as national catastrophe that derailed the country from the path of “normal” historical development (Malinova 2015, 40). The anticommunist attitudes that were dominant among Russia’s new governing elites, however, did not prevent certain political ideals associated with the myth of October from remaining popular among Russia’s “new lower classes” that emerged from under the rubble of radical economic reforms of the early 1990s. These underdogs became the main political base for the reemerged communist movement: in February 1992, its grassroots organizations in Russia came together and formed a new political association – the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Under new circumstances, Russia’s communists significantly revised their ideological toolkit. The CPRF sought to merge socialist and nationalists ideals, and its modernized political discourse upheld both proletarian internationalism and Russia’s great power status. The party’s leadership portrayed October as the triumph of Russia’s toiling masses but also as a crucial moment in the

perennial civilizational confrontation between Russia and the West. The Revolution, they maintained, helped Russia escape an imminent colonization by Western powers and set it on the path of alternative modernity, distinct from the West's (Zjuganov 1995). The CPRF soon became the core of "left opposition" – an alliance of leftwing and patriotic organizations – that acted as the principal political opponent of the "El'cin democrats." Following the December 1993 elections, communists formed the largest faction in the State Duma and in 1996, one year prior to October's 80th anniversary, their leader, Gennadij Zjuganov, challenged El'cin in Russia's presidential race.

It was the specter of "communist revanche" that largely defined Russia's official commemorative practices in the run up to the Revolution's jubilee in 1997. In the immediate aftermath of El'cin's controversial election win, two approaches toward the "main revolutionary holiday" emerged. In an article published in the government newspaper, former Politburo member Aleksandr Jakovlev advocated a total clampdown on communist ideology and symbols. In his op-ed with a telltale title "If Bolshevism Does Not Surrender" Jakovlev warned that Russia's "path to freedom" might be interrupted any moment if "misanthropic" political philosophy of communism was not outlawed. He suggested that Russia's law enforcement bodies launch criminal probe into "Fascist-Bolshevist ideology and its carriers" (Jakovlev 1996). A more moderate line of action was proposed by Anatolij Čubajs, El'cin's chief of staff, who suggested, at a Kremlin meeting in October 1996, to rename the November 7 holiday. In the context of the 1990s, the Revolution proved to be a highly divisive event, so the idea was to introduce a holiday that would help unite a badly split Russian society (Sokolova and Jakovleva 2004). El'cin followed this advice and on November 7, 1996 he renamed the October holiday the Day of Reconciliation and Accord and announced 1997 a Year of Reconciliation (El'cin 1996). The government's critics of all political stripes heaped scorn on the El'cin move, saying it was silly to believe that renaming the revolutionary holiday would be enough to heal Russia's socio-political cleavages. The presidential decree immediately became the butt of many jokes. A day after it was published, the liberal-minded *Nezavisimaja gazeta* ran a mock decree, which proposed, among other things, "to change the name of Revolution Square to Accord Square, Red Square to Tricolor Square, New Square to Old Square, and Slavic Square [the former Old Square] to the Square of Proletarian Internationalism [...] to rename the Federation Council the Presiding Senate and the Security Council the Politburo" (Smith 2002, 84). When the Revolution's 80th jubilee arrived, El'cin studiously refrained from making any meaningful political commentary. In his radio address, the Russian president advised his fellow citizens to avoid taking part in festive events sponsored by left opposition and focus instead on more mundane matters: making pickled cabbage, insulating windows and getting ready for the winter season (Dragunskij 1997).

4.2. 2007

In contrast to the chaotic 1990s, the beginning of the new millennium saw the streamlining of Russia's symbolic politics under President Vladimir Putin. His outlook was once aptly characterized as a "doctrine of total continuity," whereby disparate historical phenomena belonging to the Tsarist, Soviet, and postcommunist periods of Russia's history are merged in an ad hoc manner in a whimsically eclectic synthesis (Malinova 2015; Torbakov 2016). At the heart of this synthetic historical tableau lies an *étatist* ideal of a strong Russian state that rests on three key pillars: the ideas of Russian great power-ness, political stability and societal consolidation around the figure of the national leader. Revolutions disrupt stability and weaken the power of the state, thus from the Kremlin's viewpoint, symbolic suppression of revolution is an absolute must.

Prior to October's 90th anniversary, the Russian government opted for a seemingly "simple" solution: in 2004, it swapped the November 7 festival (Day of Reconciliation and Accord) for a newly invented nationalist holiday on November 4 – National Unity Day, which commemorated the expulsion of Polish occupation forces from Moscow in 1612. Curiously, this decision coincided with the publication of a book, titled *Sociosophy of Revolution*, by Igor' P. Smirnov, a Russian literary scholar based in Germany. In his study, Smirnov (2004) offered a highly unorthodox interpretation of False Dmitriy's reign and the Time of Troubles, contending that it was Russia's first revolution. It is unlikely that the Smirnov study had any impact on the Kremlin's politics of memory, but the routing of the Poles, and the establishment of an autocracy in the form of the Romanov dynasty's 300-year rule obviously seemed like a good thing to celebrate. However, the new holiday idea proved to be highly unpopular, and the Kremlin leadership, unnerved by "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, shifted its approach in a clear attempt to bring subversive revolutionary ideology into public disfavor. On February 27, 2007, the government daily *Rossijskaja gazeta* published Aleksandr Solženicy'n's *Reflections on the February Revolution*. For Solženicy'n, a conservative-monarchist, February 1917 was nothing more than a ruinous prelude to the catastrophic October. So his essay (originally penned in the early 1980s) unambiguously cursed the entire revolutionary period and mourned the loss of stability, sovereignty and the statehood of "historic Russia" (Solženicy'n 2007). More important, some of Solženicy'n's main conclusions seemed very pertinent and were obviously shared by the bulk of Russia's governing elites. Solženicy'n put the blame for the 1917 political turmoil at the feet of the Russian liberal intelligentsia; he forcefully defended the right of the central government to use force against subversive revolutionary elements; and he energetically argued that steady development and historical continuity are incompatible with revolution. In 2007, the Kremlin, spooked by the

specter of revolution in Russia's former imperial backyard, could not agree more with such a brazen anti-revolutionary outlook. Taking his cue from Solženicyn, who famously deplored the "dirty" color of February, followed by the "filthy" color of October, Vjačeslav Nikonov, a Kremlin-connected historian, head of the Russian World Foundation, and lawmaker, contended in his op-ed that "February 1917 is not the kind of date that is worth celebrating. In the space of several days *Russian statehood was destroyed, and with it, a great country*" (Nikonov 2007).

4.3. 2017

In the afternoon of May 4, 2017, a solemn ceremony took place within the red-brick Kremlin walls. President Vladimir Putin, Patriarch Kirill and scores of other Russian dignitaries gathered in the little park by the Nikolskaja Tower to unveil a monument to Grand Duke Sergej Aleksandrovič. A senior member of the Russian royal family (he was Tsar Nicholas II's uncle) and former governor-general of Moscow, Grand Duke Sergej was assassinated on February 4, 1905 by a revolutionary terrorist. A monument – a memorial cross – was soon set up on the spot where he was murdered. This cross was demolished in 1918 in the revolutionary campaign against the symbols of the *ancien régime*, and has now been restored. The killing of a Russian royal by a terrorist's bomb, Putin said in his short remarks at the ceremony, "was one of the harbingers of the dramatic events, turmoil and civil war that would engulf Russia, bringing tremendous losses, genuine national catastrophe, and threatening the existence of Russia's very statehood." At the same time, the monument's restoration appears to indicate that "Russia's history is regaining its unity," the Russian president suggested. "We treasure each page in this history, no matter how difficult. These are our national spiritual roots." And the restored cross, he went on, is meant to be "a symbol of the price we had to pay for hatred, division and hostility [...], [it] reminds us that we must do everything we can to preserve our people's unity and harmony" (Putin 2017).

Everything that Putin said in his comment – as well as what he chose not to mention – is particularly remarkable, especially given the fact that this commemorative event took place in the year that marked the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Russian Revolution. As Moscow governor-general, Grand Duke Sergej was widely held responsible for hundreds of victims of the catastrophic stampede during the 1896 Moscow coronation ceremony of Nicholas II. Russian public opinion also blamed him for the violence the autocratic regime used on Bloody Sunday, when troops opened fire on unarmed crowds seeking to submit a petition to the Tsar on January 9, 1905. Following the Bloody Sunday massacre, the Combat Organization of Russia's Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries gave the Grand Duke a death verdict, which was

carried out by the SR Ivan Kaljaev who threw a bomb into a royal carriage on that fateful winter day in 1905. These consequential incidents in the beginning of the year became a prelude to what became known as the 1905 Revolution – a political upheaval that eventually led to the establishment of the quasi-constitutional regime in Russia and which Trocki famously characterized as the “dress rehearsal” of 1917. All this was left unsaid in Putin’s remarks. It is noteworthy that the very word “revolution” was uttered only once, hastily and in passing; in key passages it was replaced by such euphemisms as “dramatic events,” “turmoil” and “national catastrophe.” For Putin – and for the political system he presides over – the main symbolism of the memorial cross lies in the very fact of its *restoration*: revolutionary radicals destroyed it hundred years ago and the authorities of present-day Russia raised it again, thus *restoring* “the unity of Russian history.” The whole ceremony presented a clear “counter-revolutionary” metaphor: revolutionary violence brought about the collapse of Russian statehood, social disunity and the rupture with age-old national tradition – severe wounds that would take decades to heal.

The centennial of the Russian revolutionary events of 1917 presented the Kremlin with a difficult dilemma. Arguably, President Putin would love nothing more than to be seen as the heir to the power and glory of the halcyon days of the Romanov dynasty toppled back in 1917. Yet, the polity that Putin presides over, in its shape and form, is more of an outgrowth of Soviet system than a link to Russia’s tsarist tradition. This dichotomy is the primary reason why Kremlin ideologues found themselves in an awkward position in 2017: in the historian Mark Edele’s words, the tumultuous events of 1917 could “neither be fully embraced, nor fully disowned” by today’s Kremlin (Edele 2017). Indeed, the Kremlin simply could not ignore one of the key points of Russian history, and yet it struggled to fit the story of 1917’s political upheaval into its preferred historical narrative, which puts a premium on stability and continuity. “Post-Soviet Russia needs a usable past, but it is hard to see how the Russian Revolution can contribute,” notes Sheila Fitzpatrick. “In contrast to Stalin, who has an obvious place in the post-Soviet national story as a nation-builder, Second World War winner and superpower leader, Lenin and the revolution do not fit easily into the narrative” (Fitzpatrick 2017, 826).

There is enough evidence to conclude that Russia’s governing elites considered the question of how the 1917 centennial was observed to be a matter of national security. In late 2016, media outlets reported that experts on the scientific committee at Russia’s Security Council discussed the centennial, and determined that the government needed to take steps to control the narratives, driven by a belief that outside forces were intent on intentionally distorting the revolutionary era, as well as other important periods of Russian history. The committee reportedly concluded that historical

memory becomes an object of “deliberate destructive actions on the part of foreign government agencies and international organizations which seek to pursue their geopolitical interests through conducting the anti-Russian policy.” Besides the Russian revolutions of 1917, the Security Council’s experts identified several other significant historical themes as vulnerable to falsification and in need of protection. These are the nationalities policy of the Russian Empire and of the Soviet Union; the Soviet Union’s role in the defeat of Nazi Germany; the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; and the Soviet reaction to the political crises in the GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other former East bloc countries. It is eminently telling that the Russian General Staff drafted the key presentation at the Security Council’s session on the national security implications of the manipulation of history (Nagornych and Chamraev 2016).

The securitization of Russia’s politics of history is also reflected in the fact that the Russian Historical Society (RIO, an organization with pre-revolutionary pedigree that was reestablished in 2012) is headed by Sergej Naryškin, currently director of Russia’s External Intelligence Service (SVR). RIO was instrumental in elaborating a unified “historic-cultural standard” on the basis of which new historical textbooks have to be written. It was within these newly forged guidelines defining the way the so called “difficult questions” need to be treated that the notion of the “Great Russian Revolution” was introduced. It would seem that a new interpretation has first emerged in historians’ professional milieu. Following the lead of some prominent Western scholars such as Martin Malia, a number of Russian historians have started arguing in favor of a broad historical perspective, whereby the Russian Revolution is interpreted as a protracted nation-wide sociopolitical confrontation, in which social forces intent to protect the fundamental institutions of the *Ancien Régime* were pitted against those seeking their total destruction. As the struggle unfolded, the fighting became more multi-sided, ultimately engulfing the former empire into a fiery whirlwind of civil war and multiple ethnic conflicts. According to this view, the dismantling of the institutions of the Russian Empire began in February–March 1917, with revolutionary upheavals continuing up until 1922 – the year that marked the end of the revolutionary process, the emergence of the new state, the USSR, and the beginning of a new historical epoch – the Soviet one (Šubin 2017; Šubin 2014).

RIO’s leadership as well as the ranking members of the Organizing Committee for the preparation of the 1917 centennial appeared to have seized upon this interpretation and given it a pronounced étatist twist. According to Anatolij Torkunov, head of the Organizing Committee, RIO’s co-chairman and rector of the prestigious Moscow Institute of International Relations, the most consequential result of the protracted revolutionary process in Russia was the “creation of a powerful state – the USSR, which became the successor to historical Russia. The state became the organizer and all-pervasive force of

modernization, which was carried out in a specifically Russian way. The state rallied all [Soviet] peoples, mobilized all resources, and subsequently, with the support of the Allies, won the greatest victory over fascism" (Torkunov 2017). Natalija Naročnickaja, a nationalist historian and fellow member of the Organizing Committee, has been even more explicit in championing Stalinist "stabilization" and contrasting it with revolutionary turmoil. In her view, "it is necessary to distinguish the idea of Revolution, the Bolsheviks' fiery hatred of all that was Orthodox and Russian ... from the philosophy and mentality of the postwar Soviet Union. The spirit of May [19]45 has neutralized the antihistorical pathos and adventurism of the Old Bolsheviks" (Naročnickaja 2017). Jurij Petrov, director of the Institute of Russian History, appears to have neatly summarized RIO's leadership's prevailing perspective on the "Great Russian Revolution." "We neither praise the Revolution nor curse it," said Petrov at one of the Organizing Committee's discussions. "We perceive it as a national tragedy that led to a new revival of the state and our people" (Petrov 2017).

There is no question that, from the perspective of present-day Russia's powers-that-be, the "Great Russian Revolution" constituted an "inconvenient past," which was better to keep under wraps. Yet in the year of Red October's centennial, the government simply could not turn a blind eye to how the Revolution's jubilee was celebrated, lest its symbolic capital be (mis)used by political forces inimical to the Kremlin. In early 2017, the Organizing Committee approved the *Schedule of main events connected to the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia*. The document lists 118 items, including numerous exhibitions, art shows, films, conferences, roundtable discussions, lecture courses, etc. (Plan 2017). Paradoxically however, throughout the year, Russian observers registered complete "stillness, emptiness, silence, the absence of any kind of reaction from the Kremlin to the revolutionary jubilee" (Andreev and Bordjugov 2017). "The Kremlin has been avoiding an ethical assessment of the revolution all through the year," noted a liberal-minded Russian analyst. The country's top leadership appeared to be utterly reluctant "to say something truly meaningful, assess the [Red] terror, the Civil War, not to mention forgiveness and repentance" (Archangel'skij 2017).

5. Conclusion

One saying goes that revolutions are started by politicians, but it is historians who end them. Myths often shroud revolutions, and it is left to historians to peel away the layers of fable to expose facts that can disturb long-held assumptions. This was the case with the French Revolution: François Furet, an outstanding 20th-century French historian, challenged revolutionary myths in a series of highly influential books, and famously liked to proclaim that "the French Revolution is over." It also holds true for the American

Revolution. The understanding of the American rebellion against King George III has undergone a vast shift in the past 50 years, thanks to historians like Bernard Bailyn, who famously recast the revolution not only as a war for home rule, but also one over who should rule at home.

In present-day Russia, however, historians are not in the lead when it comes to interpreting the past. Remarkably, speaking in late January 2017 at the first meeting of the Organizing Committee for the preparation of the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Vitalij Tretjakov, a conservative political commentator, bluntly suggested that Russia's national interests would be better served if historians were sidelined in the process of appraising the sociopolitical outcomes of 1917. It would be "unwise and unfair," he contended, to give historians a free hand in shaping public attitudes towards the revolution. Tretjakov cited two reasons to support his argument: "First, for the most part today, as always, historians are ideologically biased. [...] And second, they are not political thinkers" (Tret'jakov 2017). The manner in which the Revolution's centennial was observed demonstrated that it is not historians but Russia's political and security elite that is in charge of elaborating a "correct" interpretation of history.

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