

## PERSPECTIVES

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The Kantor Center publishes commentary and analysis on Jewish identity and culture. You are welcome to share your thoughts on our Perspectives with us: [kantorce@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:kantorce@tauex.tau.ac.il). We are glad to share with you the eleventh issue of Perspectives.

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### Putin, Enemy of the People

**Why the Jewish world must unite against the Russian dictator**

*Uriya Shavit*

If only I had a dime for every time I recently came across the line, “contrary to what Francis Fukuyama wrote in 1989....”

The Japanese-American Fukuyama prophesied the “end of history” in an article in the neo-conservative *National Interest* at a time when the absolute disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Bloc, was still far from certain.

The article became world renowned. As is the fate of many famous texts, few people actually read it. Thus, many misinterpret Fukuyama to have suggested that, in the post-Soviet world, there would be no wars or conflicts.

But that is not what Fukuyama suggested.

His main argument was that history is a competition between universally applicable structures of government and that the competition had ended with the bankruptcy of communism.

At least for the time being, history proved Fukuyama right.

While he was euphoric in some of his predictions, including that post-Soviet Russia would not aggressively revert to imperialist expansionism, he intuitively captured the limitations of the threat.

For the past two decades, Russia has challenged the American-led world order, as did China. Yet they have not done so in the name of a universal ideology such as communism. On the contrary, the two regimes have championed the idea that nations have unique characters and are the product of unique circumstances and should develop politically accordingly.

Save for ISIS-styled Islamism, liberal democracy has remained the only ideological force with universal appeal. And the Islamic State no longer exists as a state.

Here lies the reason for the Russian fiasco in Ukraine.

In the bad old days of communism, the Soviets could find allies in subjugated countries who shared, or pretended to share, their belief in Marxist utopias.

Those allies were Soviet puppets but governed in the name of a universal ideal. Thus, it took their people time to realize that Moscow enslaved them. Some actually never did.

In an “End of History” reality, Russia has nothing but Russian nationalism to offer the neighbors it seeks to subjugate.

But Ukrainians – as we have learned in recent weeks – are not Russian nationalists. They are Ukrainian patriots. Just as Poles are Polish patriots, Romanians are Romanian patriots, and Hungarians are Hungarian patriots. Thus they unite in vigorously standing against Russian nationalist imperialism.

That is why Putin is doomed to face disaster one way or another.

If he somehow wins the war, Ukraine would become his Afghanistan, and his state would remain a pariah. If he fails to take over Ukraine, it would become his Falklands. In either case, he would have to answer to thousands of grieving mothers at some point.

It is essential to see Putin for what he is, and for what would most likely become of him. We have reached the point where the moral dimension cannot be separated from the cynically strategic one.

Putin is the enemy of humanity. That is the title you get for cowardly committing war crimes, displacing millions of women and children, and forcing a global crisis on a world in dire need of recovery from the Covid-19 days.

Putin is the enemy of Russia. He turned a nation with great potential into a failed kleptocracy, with him as the chief thief. He turned the Russian military into a laughing stock whose failures will be studied in academies for decades to come.

Communist Russia was an oppressive state based on deception but, for several decades, a scientific powerhouse and a mighty global military power. Putin’s Russia is just an oppressive state based on deception.

Don’t believe the Western Kremlin-experts, who always predict crises after they happen. They insist the dictator and his war remain popular. If this were the case, Putin would not aggressively destroy the free press and imprison, torture, and murder credible challengers. If this were the case, he would allow for genuine, transparent elections.

Putin, the Holocaust distorter, is the enemy of the Jews.

There is a tendency to forget this, but the troubles of European Jews did not end with the defeat of Nazism.

For four decades, Jewish life was suffocated across the Soviet bloc. Jews faced widespread, inherent antisemitism, veiled and not so veiled. Like others, they were denied freedom of movement.

That fundamentally changed with the fall of the Soviet dictatorship.

As a minority in all countries but Israel, a liberal democratic led world order is the only long-term guarantee for the safety and prosperity of Jewish diasporas. That is the world order which Putin now consciously seeks to destroy.

Putin is the enemy of Israel.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Iranian nuclear weapons are not, per se, the existential threat Israel faces.

An Iranian nuclear attack on Israel would result in mutually assured destruction, and the Iranians know that.

But with a nuclear umbrella, Iran could more freely use Syria and Lebanon as bases for massive and ongoing missile attacks against Israel.

Israel's real existential threat is the Iranian- and Russian-backed Assad regime. Through his presence in Syria, Putin has been blackmailing Israel.

If it weren't for war criminal Putin, the war criminal Assad would not have survived in power, and Iran would have lost much of its clout in the region. Birds of a feather flock together.

The war in Ukraine is not between angels and demons. There are no angels in politics. It is, however, a war between a decent emerging liberal democracy led by an energetic, inspiring young Jew and a dangerous, messianic tyrant.

So it's time to more vocally take a side and do away with the hesitations and the calculations.

Enough with neutrality. Enough with the yes, but. Enough with ambiguous phrasings. Enough with seemingly sophisticated relativizing. The moral injury these cause is embarrassing and is becoming dangerous.

Ibsen taught us that the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.

The fear of doing the right thing is often the fear of loneliness.

Which is why, at this historic moment, as we approach the holiday of liberty, Jewish leaders, organizations, communities, and intellectuals across the world should join as one in unequivocally demanding that Putin be brought down – and brought to justice.

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