

- As you know, I'm going to talk about the last three leaders of Russia, that is say, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and today, Putin. Gorbachev was the Soviet Union's last hope. He'd been born in Soviet Russia, the first Soviet leader to have been born since the Revolution of 1917. I say Gorbachev was the last hope because he was a genuine reformer and intellectually was bright. He still believed in communism, but regarded it as needing updating to meet the stresses of the last decade of the 20th century. He became General Secretary of the Party following Chernenko's death in 1985, but previously he'd been marked out by Andropov as his successor, but Andropov died very shortly after coming to power, as we well know. Andropov saw in Gorbachev, I think the reformer that he, Andropov couldn't be, but when Andropov died, the Politburo who selected the next leader were not tempted to drop a generation, which they clearly needed to, and Andropov had seen the need to, instead of which they appointed the elderly and aiding Chernenko. So it wasn't until 1985 that Gorbachev became leader of what was still the Soviet Union. Gorbachev had quite radical ideas of all Russia as a superpower, and Jeffrey Hoskins in his "Oxford Russian History" writes in this way. He explains the following. "Gorbachev had become convinced that the USSR "was not increasing its security by accumulating nuclear "and conventional weapons, but on the contrary, "undermining it by presenting to "the outside world an enemy image." Enemy image was a phrase of Gorbachev himself, "which provoked other powers to re-arm against it. "His new thinking in foreign policy led him into a series "of agreements with American President Reagan, "in which both sides made deep cuts "in their nuclear and conventional arsenals. "At the United Nations, Gorbachev explicitly renounced "what he called the primacy of the class struggle, "which had hitherto been at the centre "of Marxist Leninist doctrine and called for "'a world without violence and war, and dialogue "'and cooperation for the sake of development "'and the preservation of civilization.'" Well, that marked him from the very beginning, if you like, as a very different kettle of fish to all the Soviet leaders that had preceded him. He's prepared to look at some of the very basic tenets of Marxism and challenge them. You may remember that Mrs. Thatcher, in the light of all of this, called him a man we could do business with, and that's what he wanted to be, a man that the West would do business with. He was a quite different sort of Russian leader, and certainly as different as possible from Putin in his view of the world. Gorbachev always seems to me to have been focused more on foreign policy than on home policy, but he took up, well, he took up the reigns of Andropov and tried to constrain, restrain the Marxist elite. He led a crackdown on endemic corruption within the elite and a crackdown on fraudulent crime amongst the elite, and the words which came to identify Gorbachev's home policies were, you remember, glasnost, which meant openness, and perestroika, which meant rebuilding or in the sense of USSR at this point, political reform. Life was being breathed into the

body of Russia. I should say, I'm using Russia as the alternative to the USSR. You won't get confused, I hope, but the term Russia, we use as an alternative for the term USSR. As Gorbachev fails and falls in power, Russia comes to mean the Republic of Russia around Moscow and St. Petersburg rather than the whole of the USSR. Today, Putin talks about Russia as the whole of Russia, exactly like the czars and indeed, the Soviet leaders before Gorbachev. So please don't get confused with the different usage of the word Russia. Well, Gorbachev may have been a reformer both at home and abroad, but he discovered what many political leaders have discovered before, that you can't have a little reform and then hope to control it, and that was absolutely true on the home front. On the foreign front, of course Gorbachev made an enormous success with Reagan and Thatcher, but on the home front he really didn't because he remained a Marxist, and although he was a reforming Marxist, he couldn't control the pace of reform or the direction of reform once he set that particular hare running.

I'm going to read a short extract from Hoskins again, which emphasises this. "It soon became apparent that the Soviet Union "could not continue in anything like its present form "if there were free speech and pluralist parties. "As in the past, the bonds between the ruling class "and the mass people were too brittle "to withstand serious strains." Too brittle to withstand serious strains, but Gorbachev had no way within the system in which he was operating in the USSR of controlling the change, controlling the pace of the change, and as I said, the direction of the change, and this wind of change blowing through Russia, which Gorbachev had set loose, was gaining momentum right across Marxist Eastern Europe, and in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, we see with hindsight that was the first domino which led to the complete collapse of the old Soviet Empire and the Eastern Marxist block. It was a symbol of Churchill's Iron Curtain, which Churchill had said back in the 1940s divided Western and Eastern Europe, and when the Wall came down and the East Berliners crashed across into West Berlin in unparalleled scenes of joy, it really did seem that history had taken a quite different direction. The dominoes fell one by one, and I for one will not forget that Christmas Day seeing on our television news screens the fall of CPSU. What an extraordinary moment that was, all captured live on international television, and the USSR was caught up in this sudden collapse of Eastern Europe and for a brief moment, democratic freedom seemed just over the horizon, even in Russia, which had really never experienced a peaceful democratic state at all, and although events in Russia were not particularly bloody, indeed they weren't in much of Eastern Europe, they were very complex in Russia and very, I suppose I might say very Russian. The end for Gorbachev came with a slow unravelling of his dream of a reinvigorated Marxism. First, the hard-line communists rejected Gorbachev's reforms and the reformers, we might call them radical reformers, wanted to go far faster into a capitalist world, and so Gorbachev's walking a tightrope between old-fashioned Marxism and modern capitalism. In

hindsight, it was bound to fail. He had no support, there was no grassroots support for what he was doing. There was grassroots support for the Marxist hard-liners and there was grassroots support for, as he emerges as the leader of the radicals, Boris Yeltsin, but Gorbachev saw himself outflanked. In the winter of 1990-'91, there was a, which was a particularly severe winter, there were mining strikes and for just one moment, Gorbachev hesitated and wondered whether he should go back to a stricter, more authoritarian form of Marxism, but he didn't and he moved instead decisively towards the radicals. In Mark Galeotti's book on Russia, I read this. "Gorbachev began negotiating with the elected presidents "of the various constituent republics of the USSR." Now remember there are different republics. They formed the USSR of Soviet Republics, of which Russia was one, but they had been totally controlled of course by Russia, but now, "Gorbachev talked to the presidents of those republics "and said, look, we need to agree a new way forward, "and he proposed a union treaty and this treaty "would destroy the former Soviet state "and the czarist state before that. "It would destroy in fact what we now describe "as the Muscovite empire. "It would be a federation of voluntary members," more like, more like, but not exactly the same, the European Union. More like, but not separated in quite that way politically, but more like EU. Well, that was radical enough.

At this point, let me just interject. This is the opposite of what Putin is attempting to do. Putin is attempting to restore the Muscovite empire, the empire of the czars, the empire of Stalin. That's what Putin is. He isn't for this egalitarian idea of a commonwealth of independent states, which is how Gorbachev was, the CIS, Commonwealth of independent States. Instead, Putin wants a Russian empire, a Muscovite Empire, a czarish empire, a Soviet empire with a czar, maybe not called czar, but there have been moves, so we understand, suggested that to Putin that he might take the title czar. Whether those reports are accurate are not is not entirely sure. The hard-line communists there felt that Gorbachev was betraying the legacy of Lenin and they attempted to stage a coup d'etat and Gorbachev was arrested in his dacha, his villa in the Crimea. The hard-liners established what they called an emergency committee to run the USSR. Within three days, all of this had collapsed. Gorbachev was released and comes back to Moscow, but he doesn't come back as the leader anymore. His own time was really now up, and the new kid on the block is Boris Yeltsin, and as Galeotti writes of this moment, a crucial moment, "the hard-liners, had anticipated that the cowed and docile "Soviet population would simply accept them. "They were wrong. "People began coming out into the streets in protests "in Moscow and across the country, "and Yeltsin seized the moment to seize power." Yeltsin was the president of the Republic of Russia. The outlaw of the Communist Party refused to sign the union treaty. The Baltic states declared their independence, says Galeotti. Ukrainians demanded their independence. Recognising the realities of the situation, in his final duty as president of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev decreed that it will

be dissolved at midnight on the 31st of December, 1991. The USSR is history, and the Commonwealth of Independent States follows, and Yeltsin is to remain in power for the rest of the decade, for the 1990s, but what exactly is Russia? We can't use the term USSR now, we can't. The Commonwealth of Independent States is a mouthful and is dominated by Russia, but what is Russia? And that's a very difficult question to actually answer. What is Russia at this point? And Hoskins tries for an answer which is as good as, perhaps one will get. "On the Kremlin roof, the hammer and sickle was taken down "and replaced by the red, white, blue tricolour, "which had been the flag of Russia's "merchant navy before 1917," red, white, and blue because Peter the Great had adopted the Dutch flag, changing the order of the colours, when he brought shipbuilding techniques back from Holland all those centuries before. "Replaced then the hammer and sickle by the red, white, blue tricolour which had been the flag "of Russia's merchant navy before 1917. "There was no double-headed eagle on it, which implied "that Russia was renouncing its claim to empire," and the eagle is of course back with Putin. Significant of flags. There's still the red, white and blue, but the Imperial Eagle is back and you may have seen pictures from the Ukraine of Russian forces in the field flying the old flag of the Soviet Union, not because they're Marxists, I don't think so, but I think rather that it was a symbol of the Russian empire as is the double-headed eagle. "There was no double-headed eagle on this flag which implied "that Russia was renouncing its claim to empire, "but what was to take its place? "What was Russia now?" says Hoskins. "The clash of symbols and narratives continued. "The post-Soviet regime took a long time to decide "what should be the new national flag? "What should be the words of the national anthem, "whether Lenin should remain in Red Square, he did, "and what principal city should be renamed?" Leningrad returns again to be, of course, St. Petersburg. "They argued whether Nicolas II should be buried "with full national honours, and indeed he was in 1998," and Yeltsin at the last moment attended it even though Yeltsin in his previous incarnation as a communist apparatchik had had the Ipatiev house where the Romanovs were shot in Ekaterinburg pulled down.

Now, Yeltsin and his party saw the whole business of making Nicholas II a saint of the Orthodox church. We really have come around in a, not a full circle but a very odd sort of shape circle if you follow my meaning. We're getting religion back and we're getting the Romanovs back, but Lenin still remains and there's arguments over the national anthem. There's arguments over the flag, and there's still those oddities over the Ukraine. The Russian flag of the double-headed eagle of Putin as well as the Soviet flag are flying from Russian military vehicles. It's important to remember that Yeltsin's vision is rejected, has been rejected by his predecessor Putin, because Putin has re-lit the flame of Russian, Russian nationalism, not a commonwealth of independent states but an empire ruled by a czar in Moscow, and I said it's a circle in a very odd shape. Well, this is back to pre-1917 because Putin uses the Orthodox church more perhaps

even than the czars used it to underpin his authority. So Yeltsin does have a decade almost in office and it wasn't plain sailing for Yeltsin and those who supported him. Russia had no experience of anything but autocracy. Yeltsin, says Hoskins, "failed to persuade Parliament to agree to "a new constitution and instead he dissolved it "in September 1993. "Many of the deputies refused to accept his decision, "declared his decree illegal and deposed him as president. "Paramilitary forces came out to support him, "and Yeltsin suddenly found "an armed rebellion in Moscow itself. "He responded by sending tanks in." He overcame this counter-revolution, but what really distinguishes Yeltsin's regime from any other is the adoption of what has been called wild capitalism. It prove, and goes on proving to be a disaster in Russia, with oligarchs, with oligarch corruption, filling the vacuum left by the state. They bought up state-owned, 'cause everything had been under the USSR, state-owned businesses, whether television, whether radio, whether electricity, whether gas, whatever, they bought it up and made a fortune, and we see all of that with the oligarchs around the world today. Did I remember correctly that in the press, it said the Canadians had seized a Faberge egg from an oligarch? I may have got the country wrong, but I think it was Canada. Wild capitalism, no controls. You could say in the mid-1990s, Russian society was breaking down. Independence republics began to exert more independent control of their own business and Russia, whatever sense you mean it, either the Russia of the old Soviet Union, the one republic, or if you mean Russia as the whole country, Russia was becoming a lawless state. It was becoming ungovernable. Hoskins says this. "Most Western commentators in these early post-Soviet years "wrote as if the choice in Russia "is between authoritarianism and democracy. "In actual fact, the real issue is whether Russia "is going to have an effective state at all. "If not, its population will have to place its trust "in such lower level leaders and institutions "as could protect them and provide them "with life's necessities." In other words, perhaps an Abramovich presidency in Siberia. It looked as though the whole thing could come apart, and Yeltsin was sadly compromised by alcoholism. You remember the time that his presidential jet landed in Ireland and he was so sloshed that they couldn't even get him to come out of the plane. You know, it's a sad illness that Yeltsin suffered from.

Had he been a fit man, might he have done more? I think he might, or to take an alternative view that having let wild capitalism loose, he had lost complete control of the democratic process, yet I refuse to believe that at bottom, as it were, Yeltsin wasn't a genuine reformer and potentially a genuine democrat. This is Boris Yeltsin's own book, which is called "Midnight Diaries" and this is right at the end of the book and it's a written account, or written transcript of his radio broadcast on the evening of New Year's Eve, 1999-2000, and he began by saying in this, it's an extraordinary document and it clearly was written by him. "Dear Russians, there is just a little time left "before a magic date in our history. "The year 2000 is approaching, a

new century "and a new millennium. "We have all tried this date out on ourselves. "When we were children and later when we were "more grown up, we tried to calculate how old we would be "in the year 2000, how old our mothers would be, "how old our children would be. "It once seemed too far away, the unusual New Year's Eve. "Now this day is here. "My dear friends, my dear ones, "today I'm giving you my New Year's greetings "for the last time. "Well, that's not all. "Today, I'm speaking to you for a last time "as the president of Russia. "I've made a decision, I've thought about it long and hard. "Today on the last day of the outgoing century, "I'm stepping down from office." To almost everyone, this was a shock. "I've often heard it said that Yeltsin would cling to power "by any means possible and would never give it up. "That's a lie and it's not the point. "I've always said that I would not depart from "the constitution by even a single step and that "the Duma parliamentary elections must take place "within the time allotted by the constitution. "That has happened. "I also wanted the presidential elections to take place "on schedule in June 2000. "This is very important for Russia. "We are creating a most important precedent "for the civilised voluntary transfer of power, "power from one president of Russia to another, "elected anew, but I have nonetheless "made a different decision. "I'm leaving, I'm leaving before the end of my term. "I realise that I must do this. "Russia must enter the new millennium with new politicians, "with new faces, with new intelligent, strong, "energetic people and we who have been in power "for many years must step down." That's an extraordinary speech and he's set up his successor, a younger man whom he believed, incorrectly as history tells us, that would carry his reforms further.

Now I see all that as evidence of a genuine reformer and a genuine democrat. You can be cynical about Yeltsin and many people are. I prefer not to be. I think he was the real thing, and then he finally in his radio broadcast finished by saying, "I'm leaving. "I did everything that I could. "A new generation is coming to take my place, "a generation that will do it bigger and better. "In accordance with the constitution, I am resigning. "I've signed the decree on the appointment of chair "of the government, Vladimir Putin as acting president. "Under the constitution, elections for president "must take place within three months. "I've always believed in the amazing wisdom of Russians. "Therefore I have no doubt what choice you'll make "at the end of March 2000," i.e. I have selected this young man, younger than him, Putin, to be the next leader. He's going to have three months to get into my shoes and run Russia and you'll see what a great choice I've made and all vote for him democratically as the new president to Russia. That's what he's saying. He's stayed managing his successor and then he finishes. "In wishing you farewell, I would like to say "to each of you, be happy. "You deserve happiness, you deserve happiness and peace. "Happy new year. "Happy new century, my dear Russians." I think that's a quite amazing broadcast, a quite amazing broadcast, and had he been succeeded by a younger, sober version of himself, then clearly we would not be in the position we are today,

but instead he selected Putin. Yeltsin was wrong about Putin. Putin has had no intention of letting power slip away from himself. Putin has been in charge now for over two decades. True, at one point because the constitution said so, he had to stand down and become prime minister and Medvedev took over as president but he didn't matter 'cause everyone knew Putin was still running it and he subsequently changed the constitution. He isn't going to let go of power until he's forced to, the opposite of what Yeltsin said in that broadcast. This will be the handing over by one president to another, according to the constitution and there will be elections. It's perhaps easier to say who Putin isn't rather than he is. He is not Gorbachev. He's abandoned, as far as one can see, Marxism except for the autocracy, although the autocracy comes from czarism as much as from communism, but he's abandoned Marxist economics and Marxist social plans. He's also abandoned the secular nature of Marxism and he's embraced, whether as a political ploy or as a genuine conversion, he's embraced the Russian Orthodox Church, but likewise, he, Putin is not Yeltsin. He is, I've written on my notes here, isolate in control of Russia. True, he's reigned in the oligarchs' wild capitalism, but it's been replaced by what commentators in the West call crony capitalism, friends of Putin, family of Putin given jobs, mistresses of Putin given jobs. Likewise, he's not Lenin. Does he have any distinctive political ideology, save the neo-fascist one of recreating the glory of the Muscovite Empire? I don't think there is one. I don't think there is anything leading it other than the Muscovite empire and dream of a greater Russia and a dream of him leading that, the uncrowned czar I would say, or the republican czar, or whatever phrase you want to use that he is. He is the czar. Like Peter the Great, whom he admires, he's obsessed by the West and wishes Russia to be an imperial power, as we've said, once more. He really doesn't care about the wider world. Indeed, he despises us in the West as weak. That is the absolute opposite of Gorbachev's view of the world. He's not seeking peace in the world. He's seeking the glory of Russia and if that means war in Ukraine, it means war, and that's why NATO is so petrified that he will, with no assistance given to the Ukrainians in terms of men on the ground, he might look at Finland or Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, even Poland, and you may have seen in the press reported in today's British press that Poland has bought large number of arms, a great number of arms from South Korea. Obviously fear that from Ukraine, Russia will advance there. Now we, of course we don't know what's going to happen in Ukraine. You can find commentators who will say that this is a war without end that will drag on for years, others who say the Ukrainians might gain a victory and Russia withdraw. I can't see Russia withdrawing. I can't see Russia withdrawing even if Putin drops dead tonight, but maybe I'm wrong and no one knows. No one knows what this Russian enigma will turn up next. We simply don't know. I said you could describe him as the republican czar. I said you could refer to his policies for a greater Muscovite to be neo-fascist. He's an autocrat and he's developing that obsession of autocrats from Hitler to Mao Tse-Tung, that is to say, a cult of

leadership. This is from the "Times" earlier this summer. "Children of nurseries and schools in Russia "are being forced to perform in song, "pledging allegiance to President Putin "and barren to follow him into 'the final battle "'with the country's enemies.'" Final battle with the country's enemies, being sung by primary school children. "The rock song 'Uncle Vova, We Are With You' "was recorded shortly after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 "and gained new relevance for Kremlin supporters "with Putin's full scale invasion of Ukraine "on the 24th of February." Vova in Russian is just short for Vladimir, so Uncle Vladimir, we are with you. The chorus says, "from the northern seas to the southern borders, "from the Kirin Islands to the Baltic coast, "on this earth there would be peace, "but if the chief commander calls us to the last battle, "Uncle Vova, we are with you." I don't know about you, I find that really scary, really scary. Putting it in the language of war, this is like the Hitler youth. We should be very, or if you prefer, like the Pioneer Corps in the old Russian. This is the Young Pioneers. This is very dangerous territory. That came from the "Times." This came from the British newspaper, "The Guardian."

"History is teetering on an edge. "No one knows which way it will go. "Maybe the Russian empire, the last and most terrible "of the European empires, will fall." Most terrible because of the horrors committed under the czars, under the Soviet regime, and now under Putin, "or maybe it will absorb the hit and survive "as it has survived and expanded since the 17th century," since Peter the Great. We simply don't know. "Is it going to fall, as all other "Western empires have fallen?" But the Chinese empire hasn't fallen and the American empire taking the continent of America itself has not fallen. So can Russia also not fall? There's no guarantee it will. Well, it will eventually, but eventually has no timeframe. "You'll be a fool to bet against it. "Surviving the graveyards of Eurasia "are full of those who did."

However backward we in the West have portrayed Russia as being from the 16th century onwards, from the beginning of the house of Romanov, through to Putin, it survived. It survived when other empires have fallen. The trick, of course, is how you at some point change it into a modern European state, but is that at all possible in any timeframe? Is it doomed forever to be outside of the accepted civilization of the West? The only alternative being its complete fracture, which many of us thought would happen under Yeltsin, but which Putin has stopped and is now, with the invasion of Ukraine, going back on. In the Sunday "Times" newspaper from earlier, 12th of June, last month, Mark Galeotti, whose books I'd been using, wrote an article, and I'm only going to read the headline. Mark Galeotti said, "Putin Is No Peter the Great, and His Pawn Shop Empire "Can Only Purchase a Fake Victory." I don't agree. I think that's wish fulfilment. I simply don't know, and if you say for sure, Galeotti is an expert, I know that, but really, this pawn shop empire, I'm not sure, pawn shop. He still has nuclear weapons which could destroy the capital cities of the West, was he to press a button. I don't buy it. I see Putin as the very opposite of Gorbachev, a man who is a distinct threat not just to the West but to the world as a whole. Note his stopping of grain leaving the Ukraine

for Africa. I don't think he cares about anything other than the Russian empire and himself. We are strongly in Nazi and Hitler territory, except, except that there were other Nazi leaders around Hitler and we were just fortunate that when Hitler committed suicide, the whole thing came down. It might not have done had he been assassinated in 1944 in the Stauffenberg plot. Another leader from the inner core of the Nazi party might emerge who might have done or sought to do a deal with Russia, who wouldn't need to have done a deal with the West if he could have done a deal with Stalin, which he might have been. There's no one as far as anyone can see around Putin. Well, we all knew the names of the people around Hitler, but we don't know the names of the people around Putin because they're insignificant. Putin is Putin.

Now, I didn't know how to finish this talk because history never ends, it just continues, and we haven't even come to a natural end with the death of Putin or the removal of Putin and drawn a line under the three leaders I've been talking about, who in their various ways have attempted to change Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, during fall of the Soviet Union in Gorbachev's case, but I can't do that and I can't guess what Putin might be doing as I'm talking to you now, bombing Odessa again, letting the grain ships out. I don't know and nobody knows and that's what makes dealing with Putin so extremely difficult, and I thought long and hard about how to finish and I've read a great deal and thinking about, was there anything that people wrote that I would give a big tip to, alpha double plus, and one is Mark Galeotti's other book, or one of his other books, "We Need to Talk About Putin," and pretty well at the end of the book he has a number of points to make, which I would like to make using him, and Galeotti writes, "Remember that all ordinary Russians "should not be considered Putin's ardent followers "but rather considered his victims, "even if they may not think of themselves as such." Victims, it makes us think differently about Russia, not as this evil empire but as a people enslaved by its own leader, and that's an interesting switch of looking at it, and I agree with that. "We need to make sure they realise that we are not "their enemy and not least for the post-Putin future." Well, of course, we aren't doing well on that sort. Because of the embargoes placed on Russia, Putin is able to say, this is what the West does to us. This isn't me, this is the West, and so that's a difficult line for the West to walk. "We need to appreciate the extent to which Russia "is driven by emotions, by a sense of threat and abandonment "and disrespect that might be hard fully to justify "in objective terms, but felt no less strongly for that." The fact that Russia thinks it's looked down upon by the West, that it can't catch up with the West, but he ends on an optimistic note. Galeotti writes, "Personally, I'm still an optimist and believe "that Russia is slowly moving towards Europe "and European values as it works its way through "the tramits resulting from the end of empire, "but this is likely to happen over a matter of generations "rather than years," and I need to tell you that this book was written in 2019

before Ukraine. I don't think Galeotti would write that now, would it? Russia is slowly moving towards Europe and European values? Absolutely not, and that's the trouble with Russia. We misjudge it. We are over optimistic about Russia, or we're over pessimistic. We were over pessimistic in the Cold War, thinking they were more powerful militarily than they were. We're more optimistic before Ukraine in believing that Putin was moving towards a more European sort of society as in this book by Galeotti, but we get it wrong. He goes on to say, "so we need to talk about Putin because much of this "will still hold, as I've just said, even when he's gone." Even when he's gone. There are, my view, naive people in the West who believe remove Putin, you remove autocracy, cronyism and all the rest, and you introduce democracy overnight. Don't think that's going to happen. You might, and many people think this, replace Putin with someone further right, right and left don't have much meaning, but more autocratic, more fascist even than Putin, one of the generals, and he ends this little piece, Galeotti, by writing, "not everyone who supports Putin is our enemy. "Not everyone who opposes him is necessarily our friend." Remember Gorbachev, attacked on both sides, by Yeltsin on one side, by the hard-liners on the other. It's a case of wait and see and not to jump in and believe the worst of who is succeeds Putin or the best of who succeeds Putin, but to be realistic about who succeeds Putin. Russia is not going to be transformed into a Switzerland, even a France and Germany or Britain overnight. That simply won't happen. The final paragraph in his book, "We Need to Talk About Putin," Galeotti says, "so maybe even as we look to a future Russia after Putin, "that gives us another reason to talk about Putin "because there could be another Putin, "an even bigger one waiting in the wings," the point I just made. We simply, as ever in Russia, don't know. I brought along another book. This is a massive one. It's a new book by my friend who I was at prep school with, Philip Short. Philip is one of the brightest, if not the brightest person I've ever met in my life. Has a double first from Cambridge. He worked for the BBC and he's written some magnificent biographies. He's read, he's written, for example, a biography on Mao, on Mitterand, which is a splendid biography, and this one on Putin seems to me to be absolutely up there with the best of his writing.

Now I don't agree with everything he says. That's not the issue. It's a brilliant, if you are looking for a big tome to get you through the Northern Hemisphere's winter or to sit on a beach, well I think it's not quite a beach book, but to get through a winter, then this is a good book to plough into it. I promise you it's easy to read, but it is a big book and it's been extraordinarily well researched, and I'm going to read you the last three little paragraphs of Philip Short's book, "Putin." "A Russian journalist once remarked to Putin "that Saudi Arabia would always be a US ally. "'Always?' Putin said. "'Always doesn't exist.' Russia, says Philip, "is used to playing a long game. "Just as Putin is convinced that one day, despite the war, "Moscow and Kyiv will overcome their differences, "he believes that

America and Russia will eventually settle "into a less contentious relationship. "In the long term, he's no doubt right, "the only uncertainty being how long the long term is. "The maximum that countries have permanent interests, "but no permanent friends or enemies remains as true today "as when Lord Palmerston coined it in 1848. "Countries have permanent interests, "but no permanent friends or enemies." Russia's permanent interests? We've talked about so many times over the last weeks. Its permanent interest to catch up with the West, to have secure borders from the West, if possible, to have buffer borders to the West and to exceed the West. Philip's last paragraph, which I think is extremely good, but because I, not because I know him, but because it's, it says what I would want to say and perhaps don't have the brains to say, Philip writes, "it will be wrong therefore to regard the current hostility "between Russia and the West as forever fixed, "but in the meantime, Russia will remain "an awkward bedfellow, an unimaginably vast country "suspended across the top of the world "between Europe and Asia. "Its history is profoundly different from that "of its European cousins, "yet its people are formed in exactly the same mould." Let me read that again. "Its history is profoundly different "from that of its European cousins." No reformation, a very late industrial revolution. An even later agricultural revolution, no democratic revolution. "Its history is profoundly different from that "of its European cousins, yet its people are formed "in exactly the same mould. "That is part of the problem. "Family quarrels are often the most intractable. "Russians not only look like Europeans, they are Europeans "and are expected to behave as the rest of the family does. "Unaccountably stubbornly, they refuse to do so," and he chillingly writes in the last sentence, "that will not soon change." "Russians not only look like Europeans, "they are Europeans and are expected to behave "as the rest of the family does. "Unaccountably stubbornly, they refuse to do so. "That will not soon change." Whoever replaces Putin will not be given a magic wand to transform Russia into a modern Western European country. Russia, remember, is gens-like. It looks both West and East. Putin is an Eastern tsar as much as he is a Western czar, and that makes it very, very difficult for the West to analyse him, to analyse the moves that Russia make, to make decisions on what to do. Are we right to bolster Ukrainian defence when there is a good argument in favour of Putin's view that at least eastern Ukraine should be Russian? Odessa, for example, which Ukrainians are still fighting hard for, has always been from its very inception and building Russian, or are we wrong not to send NATO troops in and to fight Russia bayonet to bayonet on the grounds that Putin would never press the button because of mutual destruction because we in the West would press the button. It's difficult. It's extraordinary difficult, and having come to the end of this course on Russia, I am no clearer in my own mind how we cope with Russia. If I was phoned up this evening, or we don't have really a prime minister at the moment in Britain, but just assume we do, if I was phoned up by the Prime Minister and asked William, you've given a lecture to Lockdown University on Russia. Could you come in and give

some advice on how we should proceed? I don't really know what one would say, to be hawkish or doveish. To be hawkish could be mutual destruction. To be dove-like could lead to further Ukraines, and if I was asked by this imaginary Prime Minister, what is going to happen after Putin's death? Well, you may as well throw dice in the air and see what they land on, because who knows? I don't think it will be democracy if you push me. I think it will be a military dictatorship, hopefully a military dictatorship which would move towards putting in place a civilian president in a democratic Russia, but I don't know. I don't know, no more than you know. I've got to finish there. I hope you've enjoyed your course on Russia. I hope you might read some of the books that have been on my book lists. I hope you will continue to read the press that you have confidence in, to watch the media news that you have confidence in, and that's important in all our societies today to say, that you have confidence in, because many of us in the West are concerned about the manipulation of media, both on television and in paper and print. Follow the story and we'll see what happens at some future date. However, I shall be back, grown and mown from all of you in September, first Monday in September, and I think I'm doing a few weeks on the Baltic states, on the Baltic, but before then, on Thursday of this week, I'm doing a session on monarchy and I hope to bring, you know, the case for and against and we're talking about the British monarchy, obviously. Well that, I'd pretty well finished what I want. I finished a lecture written, and what was interesting was they were almost no contemporary books that I could use because most of the books are absolute drivel, but more of that on Thursday, half past seven on Thursday. Hope to see you.

Now I've got some questions relating to today, and I've got them relatively quick.

Q & A and Comments

This is Peter. Gorbachev's thinking was reinforced and extended by his talk to the USSR ambassador to Canada who had seen how the Western ways truly were better. Absolutely correct, and M.W. Septum comments, this was especially true with the farmers of southwestern Ontario. Absolutely correct.

Q: Did Gorbachev's underlings support his ideas or did they try and undermine it?

A: No, well that's a difficult question to answer. I think that one has to say they supported him, but gradually those on the right, which is a silly way of putting it, those on the left, the hard-line communists began to drop him and so did the radicals who were beginning to centre around Yeltsin. It's a slow process and what I would say is that Gorbachev failed to put in place a support group for himself and his policies. He never managed it.

Q: What does it mean, the radicals?

A: Radical meant they wanted reform to go first.

Q: Do you think that the desire Putin to, sorry, this is Lawrence. Do you think the desire Putin to expand westward, regardless of the welfare of local inhabitants, can be compared to the doctrine of manifest destiny which encouraged early American settlers to move westwards as a right?

A: Well, though there are distinct differences, which I won't go, I haven't got time to go into, but it explains what I meant about an American empire. I know to many Americans the word empire is anathema, but it misjudges their own country in my view.

Q: James says, why were so many of these new caps on oligarchs on minority non-Russian nationalities? Is the value of power and glory more important for Russians than the, or than the values of success and freedom?

A: James, that is a wonderful question for which there is really little answer at the moment. We don't know. What you say is factually correct and your answer may be as good as anyone else's. We simply don't have the evidence to be able to make a definitive answer.

Christopher, forgive my comment. I speak Russian and the surname is pronounced, oh yes, sorry. Don't ever believe any foreign, I'm like Churchill's French. My pronunciation of anything that isn't English is appalling. We tend to say in England, PEW-TIN, and I'm sure that's wrong as you rightly say, but it's how we pronounce it. So it's like Churchill refusing to say PAIR-E and saying PAIR-IS.

Q: How was Gorbachev able to dissolve the USSR?

A: Because Yeltsin said that's what you've got to do, and he couldn't do anything other. It's his way of having a peaceful handover.

Q: How did the oligarchs emerge?

A: They bought up the firms in which they had previously been working. So if you were the managing director of a plant making, I don't know, car tyres, you bought it out and you went on running it as a private company and you began, the successful ones began to buy other private companies and turn themselves into oligarchs.

Q: Why did Yeltsin allow them to buy state assets for a penny?

A: Because he didn't really understand capitalism and he thought it would all work out for the best.

Q: What did the Western powers, especially USA, do to support?

A: Not much. What did the Western powers, especially United States, do to support Yeltsin's efforts to create a commonwealth? Not much. We were, we really thought it was all going to work out so well after the collapse of communism.

Q: How does the Jewish refugee movement fit in with the changes of the 1980s?

A: So Shelly, that's a question for Trudy to answer.

Q: How does the average citizen feel about Yeltsin and Putin, their changes?

A: We don't know. We have very little idea what the average Russian citizen feels about anything, let alone what they feel about Yeltsin and Putin.

Q: Does it matter where in this vast country you live in?

A: Oh gosh, that's a difficult question. Yes, it does matter because further east you go, the poorer it becomes. The further west you go, the more Western it becomes.

Q: How could Yeltsin ignore that Putin was a member of the KGB?

A: He thought that we had all moved on from there. He himself had been an apparatchik of the communist regime and he thought that Putin had ditched communism, which he had. Putin's KGB membership, it's more, oh dear, gave him the ability or some of the abilities needed by an autocrat. Putin simply missed that. He missed it because he didn't want to see it. He wanted to go, he wanted a younger person to take over. Putin was able and younger and that's who Yeltsin decided.

Q: Can Putin's manoeuvres be compared to Stalin?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: Does he have children?

A: Yes he does. He also has some illegitimate children.

Q: Did he deceive Yeltsin? Is he a cunning narcissist?

A: Yes, I think he probably is. Did he deceive Yeltsin? I'm not, I don't know the answer to that. I'm not sure I would.

Robert asked a very interesting question.

Q: What does the Chinese leadership in Putin's grand plan?

A: We don't know. We don't know. At the moment he's keeping China on side. More importantly, China is keeping him as much as arm's length that it can, and we don't know how any of this new world politics will work out.

Q: Who is in line to follow Putin when he dies?

A: We don't know.

Q: Do you think Putin might have been restrained, I think, if confronted by some of the Western leaders?

A: No. He might have withdrawn from Ukraine, but he would've gone in. Think Hitler and the Rhineland.

Karen, the Russian economy based on oligarchs' holdings and black market money cannot coexist with the Western economy. This is like two worlds colliding. I don't see any end to the conflict. You are probably or possibly correct.

Q: Did the USA and Clinton miss a major opportunity to build a special relationship with the Yeltsin Russia by the economic development and government? Marcia says.

A: That's a really important question. I think given the time when all this was happening, they wanted, they were just pleased that we weren't in the confrontational position with Russia that we had been, and I think they were just hoping for the best and they had, as they say, other fish to fry.

Q: Is the personality and desire for power different for Putin that it was for Trump?

A: Yes, because Putin's insane. "Globe and Mail" suggests Putin was a mafioso. Sounds true. A criminal background? No, he was KGB. Is he a psychopath? I don't think so.

Q: Do you think there was anything sordid about Putin having a stand-in last week?

A: No, I don't think that's probably true. Absolutely, Barbara, one doesn't get a sense of what ordinary Russians think.

Q: Why is Putin courting the corrupt and evil leadership in Iran? Please give us your opinion.

A: Because Iran is anti-West and has resources that he wants, and you

can put pressure on Turkey through Iran. Oh, meant to say corrupt. Why is Putin courting the corrupt and evil leadership in Iran? Yeah, yep, I think my answer is as stands.

Q: Margaret, what is also so threatening that the ordinary Russian thinks the West is the enemy?

A: Yes, it's propaganda, but we don't know how much of the propaganda is believed. Putin has poisoned a whole people. So when Putin goes, it's not as if Russia will change and embrace the West, and yet that is exactly what West Germany did in 1945.

Q: Sheila, what is in it for Russia making the agreement about grain? Surely the African countries won't be taken in by the idea of them giving food.

A: It's, yeah, it is difficult. I think he's not bothered by Africa. He's obsessed by the West, as I said before, like Peter the Great was obsessed.

That's, Alec, that's a very good point. Russia is a country of 145 million people and shrinking. Correct, an empire usually has a growing population, correct. Put it into a context, Pakistan has 200 million, Bangladesh 170. Aren't we seeing the death throes in an empire builder? China has 1.3 billion waiting on the border. Well, we said, or I said, it's too early to say that the empire will fall.

Q: What do you mean by European values? Does America have European values?

A: Oh, what a good question. No, probably the answer is no. America doesn't, because we're talking about a American civilization is a wider one than European and European civilization and European values are to some extent different, and certainly in terms of continental Europe, of course America is different 'cause it has British values and not European, all that's a really area. It will take me a long, that's a really interesting question. I could go on to here to midnight and beyond.

Russia led by Navalny, it won't be. What a rude answer that is, but no, I don't think it will be. I've got to stop in a minute.

Q: Robert says, is it conceivable that the West, well-intended military, Ukrainian economic punishment, sadly just adding more fuel to fire?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. I agree. I don't, but on the other hand, what do we do if we don't do that?

Thank people like Dawn for saying they enjoyed the lecture. I, of

course I enjoyed doing it.

Faye, the podcast "The Duran" offers heterodox perspectives on Russia, Ukraine, EU, NATO actions. I appreciate the heterodox perspectives of Alexander Mercouris and Alex Christoforou. Three months ago, they accurately predicted what is happening today, including the collapse. Including the collapse, the third world countries. Yeah, sorry, can't read anymore. Oh, that, well, people are now just saying thank you. I'll stop there then, Judy, if people are just going into, I appreciate people saying thank you, but it's embarrassing to read those things out. So thank all of you for listening. That's more important. If you weren't listening, I'd feel a bit of an ass here looking at the screen and talking to myself, although my family accuse me often of doing it.

- [Wendy] Thanks, William. That was an outstanding presentation and just, thank you for today and thank you for the past few months and certainly Russia has been very interesting and on behalf of Lockdown University and Judy, we wish you a very happy holiday.