William Tyler | From Successful War to Failed Revolution

– Now, I think most of you now gather that I put on my blog a blurb usually before we do the talk, sometimes I may be behind and do it afterwards. And I've got into the habit over the last few weeks of starting by reading the blurb. Now, I think that may be helpful. A number of people have said they did. This is the story today of Russia in the first half of the 19th century. If we're being pedantic between 1801 and 1855. The groundwork you will remember for a modern and European Russia had been laid down in the previous century, the 18th, by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, two of Russia's greatest ever rulers. But Alexander I, who succeeded to the Russian throne in 1801, and he was himself succeeded by his younger brother Nicholas in 1825, simply turned their backs on that Westernisation, that age of enlightenment which had been so embraced by Peter and by Catherine. So, the question is, "Why?" And I think the answer is pretty straightforward. The answer to the question is in the seismic events which took place not in Russia but in France during the summer of 1789. The summer of 1789 saw France break out into revolution. And everybody everywhere in Europe would be affected by the wars of Napoleon and by the ideas of the revolutionaries. Europe, indeed you could argue the world, has never been the same again since the summer of 1789. It is true and you all know that, that the czar, Alexander I, was able to push Napoleon's army out of Russia following Napoleon's invasion of 1812. He might have been able to push the army out, but he found pushing the ideas of the French Revolution out far more difficult. Both he and his younger brother, Nicholas I, fell back on the well-trodden path of Russian repression in the face of threatening ideas. We've met that and we will continue to meet that story. The well-trodden path of Russian repression in the face of threatening ideas. Putin is but the last, or rather the latest example of that. And Russia turned away from Western Europe and turned instead to its Slavic Eastern heritage. And as a result, isolationism spawned hubris. The hubris which we see with Putin in Ukraine. And the Russian army was exposed despite vast resources being spent upon it by Nicholas I. But most of the expenditure went on gaudy uniforms rather than on tactics, training, and equipment. And it was exposed in the Crimean War between Russia on the one side and the Ottoman Empire, Britain, and France on the other. It has definite connections with Russia and Ukraine. Maybe Putin hasn't spent it on uniforms, but he certainly hasn't spent it on training and on equipment and on planning. Nicholas died before the war ended in 1855. They say he died a broken man. The army which he took such pride in had been humiliated. And it was hardly as though the French, the Turks, and the British in the Crimean War were anything to shout about. Russia was again in a dark place. And that was a crisis that had to be faced by the next czar, Alexander III, whose story I will tell next week. But this story, let us begin where I said it began. Let us begin in the Paris of 1789. This is the book by Simon Jenkins, "A Short History of Europe". It's beautifully

written and that's why I choose to read just a couple of paragraphs about the French Revolution to set the scene. "France at the start of 1789," writes Jenkins, "face what the best known students of its politics, Alexis de Tocqueville called quote, 'the most dangerous moment for a bad government when it sets about reform.'" That's a very interesting quotation, isn't it? "'The most dangerous moment for a bad government is when it sets about reform.' Alarmed by incessant riots, Louis XVI summoned his three somnolent estates, that is the nobility, the clergy, and ordinary citizens, mostly merchants and professionals. Louis brought them to Versailles, but the ordinary citizens' radicalism unnerved Louis and his soldiers refused them admission. Its members retired to an indoor tennis court near the palace where they declared themselves a National Assembly." We would say Parliament or Senate or whatever words you want to use. "They swore an oath that they would stay in session until a new French constitution was written." Then, what many take as the crucial date, the 14th of July 1789, I read, "A mob stormed the city's," Paris', "old Bastille Fortress to obtain weapons, releasing not the expected hundreds of political prisoners, but seven bemused convicts." Though small tactical significance, the fall of the Bastille was symbolic, iconic even one would say. It was a symbol and an icon not merely for France, not merely for Europe, but the world. The Modern Age had begun on that day in the streets of Paris, the 14th of July 1789. No country in Europe will be immune to its effects. Here in Britain, we were faced with the possibility of invasion, only prevented by Nelson's incredible victory at Trafalgar in October 1805. Out of the chaotic early years of the revolution emerged a giant, Napoleon Bonaparte. Born in Corsica, he rose. As in times of crisis, men of charisma, ambition, and intellect rise. By the age of 24 in 1791, he was a brigadier general. His first great office came in 1796 when he was the Commander-in-Chief of the French army invading Italy. By 1799, he's the First Consul. And finally in December 1804, he crowns himself emperor.

Now, my story isn't the story of France. My story is the story of Russia. And that story begins in the summer of 1807 when the first Franco-Russian summit took place at the end of June and the beginning of July 1807. Napoleon met Alexander I of Russia. Russia and France had been at war since the year of Trafalgar, 1805. And every time the Russian army, even in collaboration with other armies like the Austrians or the Prussians, every time they met Napoleon, they were defeated. The battle that people remember is the Battle of Austerlitz, arguably Napoleon's greatest victory in 1805. In 1806, having defeated Prussia completely at the Battle of Vienna, Napoleon threatened Russia itself. The Russians managed to hold him in 1807. Napoleon claimed he won because the Russians withdrew. The Russians claim they won because Napoleon stopped going further east. But that didn't stop Napoleon, he is to win a further battle, the Battle of Friedland, fought in northern Germany. By which time Czar Alexander was petrified that Napoleon and the French Grand Armee would march into Russia. So, the

first Franco-Russian summit was held in that summer of June and July 1807. They met at a place called Tilsit. They met in the middle of the River Neman on a raft neither in Prussia held by Napoleon or in Russia. They met on this anchored raft. Alexander seems to have almost hero worshipped Napoleon and certainly the courtiers around Alexander felt that he gave too much away. Russia's only precondition was that no Russian territory should be lost to Bonaparte. But Russia recognised all of Bonaparte's gains in the West. Russia recognised the division of Poland, the reorg, sorry, the reorganisation of Germany and the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw, an independent Polish state. Professor William Doyle of the British Academy has written this. "Alexander became uneasy. The Russians still are at the prospect of independent states on Russia's western borders." Poland, exactly the same situation as we're in with Putin. And we've mentioned before, Russia is paranoid about the threat on its borders. And the result of 1807 Tilsit, is that Poland has been established, a Duchy of Warsaw, on the borders of Russia. And Doyle goes on to say, "Alexander saw at once that the new Polish Duchy would be a French puppet and was uncomfortably aware that Russia's own territory included many potentially restless Polish subjects who had previously been absorbed into Russia under Catherine the Great." You remember that from last week's story and how many of them were Jews. "Alexander, however," says Doyle, "hoped Napoleon would exercise restraint" "in gratitude for his agreement to take concerted action against Great Britain." Well, Britain has been misrepresented many times and undervalued. Britain was indeed going to be on its own. But Britain with its backs to the wall is a most dangerous animal. Napoleon found that out. But then the czar discovered that when you struck a deal with Napoleon, there was no guarantee that Napoleon would keep with it. And despite the agreement at Tilsit, mutual distrust grew between the two emperors and their governments. And gradually, and gradually, the French realised that Russia wasn't a client partner, but rather a rival. By 1811, Napoleon was beginning to plan an invasion of Russia. He believed that the Grand Armee, despite what however poor the French fleet was, he believed the Grand Armee was invincible. Hubris from Napoleon. And finally in that year, 1812, Napoleon invaded Russia with an army of 680,000 men, an extraordinary number for the early 19th century. And 1812 was, as we know, to prove a fateful year for Napoleon, a fateful year for France. But for Russia, a heroic year. A heroic year because they called this "The Patriotic War" in the same way that Putin refers to World War II as "The Great Patriotic War". But, and here is the irony, it may have been a Russian success that although Napoleon took Moscow, he was forced to retreat. And in that retreat through the winter, his army was decimated and he abandoned it to ride back a defeated man to Paris. But the irony is that the victory over Napoleon then, the victory at the Battle of Leipzig, the overthrow of Napoleon in 1814, and the final overthrow of Napoleon in 1815, had an enormous effect on Russia. It was, take a long time. It took a hundred years between 1815 and 1917 for the ideas of the French Revolution to actually succeed in Russia in the Russian Revolution.

But the beginning, well the beginning happened when Russian troops in 1814 entered Paris after the Battle of Leipzig. Napoleon exiled to Elba, you all know the story from which he escaped and then is defeated by an Anglo-German army at Waterloo. But for our purposes, it's the earlier victory at Leipzig and Russian troops in the Champs-Elysees, and Russian officers, boorish they might have been, but they were the victors, arms around the young French mamzelles taking a glass of champagne. They didn't only drink in champagne, they drunk in the ideas of the French Revolution. As I said earlier, Alexander could defeat the French army, but he could not defeat the French ideas. Ideas of what I would loosely describe, these words are always difficult to use, but we can use the word "democratic ideas". Liberte, egalite, fraternite. Those ideas went back with the Russian officers. They'd seen another world. I remember during communism, I was on an education jolly to Eastern Europe. I was there about a week and we came back, we flew back through Switzerland. And when we got into the airport in Geneva I think it was, we were overwhelmed, oh it was dizzying. All the adverts, all the food, all the lights. It was so different from the world we had left behind. And such must have been the impact of Paris in 1814 on these young impressionable Russians. They'd seen a different world, a world they wanted. You want another example? It's like East Germans before the Wall came down tuning into West German television and seeing, it's not even the programmes they saw. It was the white goods, washing machines, fridges, all those things. I want a part of that action. And the Russians wanted part of what the French had got politically. This is what Mark Galeotti in his book we've been using, "A Short History of Russia", has written up. Incidentally here in Britain, Galeotti has been used by the media in the last week or so to give expert advice on the war in the Ukraine. And this is what Galeotti writes, "Should Russia simply try to look like the equal of a Western power without actually trying to be one? Should it stick to its own traditional ways? Should it try and grasp the essence of modernization rather than just appearances? Napoleon's invasion of 1812 was defeated by logistics and demographics, but Russia convinced itself that its ability to weather his advance and join the counter offensive proved that it was stronger than everyone had assumed. This was a perfect excuse to justify putting off the social, political, and economic modernization that Russia desperately needed." And to stop walking along the path that had been prepared by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great in the 18th century. And Galeotti goes on to say, "The 19th century was therefore one of competing myths, each of which directly bound Russia with Europe. To reformers, it needed to be more Western. To conservatives, Russia needed to reject the West, lest chaos be unleashed." Russia was now pulled distinctly in two directions, conservative, reformist. The conservatives looked East to a Slavic inheritance of Russia, the reformers to the West, the ideas of the French Revolution. It's a really important turning point in the history of the czars and czarism, but also in the history of Russia itself.

I'm going to conclude this little bit of the talk tonight by reading two pieces from Galeotti. The first goes like this, he says, "Revolutionaries were increasingly looking to ideologies being elaborated in Europe and seeing them in magical solutions that could somehow leapfrog Russia into the forefront of the socially and economic advanced nations of the West. Unwilling to accept the changes reshaping Europe, unwilling to accept exclusion from Europe, Russia was being torn apart by the contradictions in the stories it told about itself." "Much," he goes on to say, "of Russia's 19th century would be defined by Napoleon's invasion of 1812. The war that followed called the 'Patriotic War' by the Russians was a terrible one for them. And consequently, the victory that followed was a transformative one. Alexander I, the czar whom one of his contemporaries said, 'knocked at every door, so to speak, not knowing his own mind', had first turned against France, then with it in an alliance of convenience that had foundered as Napoleon failed to keep his promises to help Russia against the Ottomans. The French emperor was a man who could not stop for either personal or political reasons. So, in 1812, he led his Grand Armee into Russia. It was said Napoleon, once a time," time, "once and for all to finish off these barbarians to the north who must be pushed back into their ice so that for the next 25 years, they no longer come to busy themselves with the affairs of civilised Europe." Barbarians from the West. It's almost in terms of ancient Rome in Britain, the barbarians beyond the wall, beyond Hadrian's Wall, the barbarians. Napoleon's use of the term barbarians to describe Russians was a widely held Western European view. And one that of course rankled with Russia in the same way maybe that Putin believes the West looks down on Russia. And yet with his great army Putin thinks, like Alexander, that it is in fact Russia that is the superior and not the West. Russia has so many chips on its shoulder as we've seen in previous talks. And this merely highlights this. The chip that the West is out to do Russia down, creating Poland on its borders. That the West looks down on Russian barbarians who should be pushed back onto the ice. That's not how the Russians see themselves. But as we saw last week, the Russians might see themselves as civilised, dancing French polkas and so on in the court at St. Petersburg. But the reality, the reality was the deep-rooted barbarism in Russia, not least the continuation of a large, millions in fact of serfs that we saw last week in Catherine the Great's reign. Before the war with Napoleon, we're only talking a few years, Alexander I on coming to the throne toyed with the idea of reform. Well, you can make a case, can't you, that young people tend to be more radical than older people. We who are older say we are less naive than the young. We've seen it all before. Now whether that is true or not, it's certainly true in Alexander's case, Alexander I. He toyed with the idea of reform. Now, one of the reforms was an excellent reform. He introduced examinations for entry into the civil service. Now, that's a very positive move, something that Britain wasn't doing at the time, and Britain was doing it in terms of class largely. But actually in practise in Russia, it meant the same thing because the educated were

those at the very top of society. It wasn't open competition. And so it didn't achieve what in other circumstances an examination system for the highest civil service posts would achieve. Indeed, Alexander began to change his mind because of the war and because of the ideas that were entering Russia. Many of you know that during the Cold War when many books and television and pop music and all, everything was banned in Russia from the West. Nevertheless, it came in. It came in. A friend of mine went to Russia during the Cold War and talked to in private houses to groups of people who wanted to know what was happening in the West and wanted someone to talk to them about the democracy of the West. Ideas are very difficult to stop. Repression doesn't stop ideas. Repression simply pushes them underground where they grow and where they can't be seen. If you are dealing with ideas, you have to match them with ideas. You have to defeat them openly with ideas. But in the truth, in Alexander I's reign, what idea is there to put up against these ideas coming in from Western Europe? And the answer is very little. The czar is an autocrat. There are serfs, little better than slaves. Outside St. Petersburg and Moscow, rural Russia is mediaeval, mediaeval in its structures, mediaeval in its life cycles. It's totally out of touch compared to Western Europe. And thus the views of Peter and Catherine that Russia needed to catch up with the West, Alexander thought was not the right way forward. And here a quote that I've used just now, I will say again. "To conservatives, Russia needed to reject the West lest chaos be established." That's the fear. That's the fear. If you don't crush it, it will crush you. It will crush the society that those at the top enjoyed. Bubbling under the surface. They could all slit our throats one night, as it were. And they'd seen that. They'd seen that in France with Madam Guillotine. With the head of the king and the queen in a basket underneath the guillotine. And they are frightened stiff that that could come to Russia. So, what you do? You repress, you put people in jail, you execute people. You just desperately try to control people. This is what Galeotti says that I've been trying to say in that sense. He says this, "The early years of Alexander's reign had generated hopes that change was coming to Russia, hopes the subsequent conservative reaction dashed. Secret societies, radical factions, and conspiratorial movements bubbled away beneath the orderly surface of the regime. Some advocating constitutional monarchy, others outright republicanism." In hindsight, what the czarist regime as a whole should have done was to move towards a constitutional monarchy. That is to say, well, we can't exactly say what in Russian terms a constitutional monarchy would've looked like. It would've looked more authoritarian than that in the Britain of the day. But there would be an elected parliament, probably in two parts, which would to a great extent ameliorate the worst actions that the autocrat might take. It would become a brake on the autocracy. Now, if you're an autocrat and you believe that you can crush opposition by repression, why would you concede? People usually concede when they've run out of other options. And Alexander didn't concede. And his son, as it goes through the story, his brother rather, and then on and on

and on, they don't concede.

And so the inevitable happens in 1917. And although when we did this at school or university or you read books, the Napoleonic period is quite separate from that of the 20th century. In Russia, you mustn't look at it like that. There is a continuum and an awful logic that takes us from the French Revolution and the invasion of Russia in 1812 and Russian troops in 1814 in Paris right through to the bread riots in St. Petersburg and Moscow in February 1917 and onwards to the Bolshevik revolution of Lenin in October 1917. In hindsight, in retrospect, that journey looks an inevitable journey. But only in hindsight. Alexander I and the czars that succeed him, with one exception, seek to restrain, seek to stop, and believe they can win. And therefore why change? Because change is a difficult thing to do. Gorbachev is to find that out in Russia in the 20th century. You cannot have a little reform. It doesn't work. You either have reform or you don't. And in that respect, the czars were right. We don't have reform. But they're wrong because the pressure for the reform is, to use that nice verb used by Galeotti, "bubbling" beneath the surface. In November 1825, Alexander died of typhus. Thus he missed the first sniff of revolution in Russia which comes a year later, I'm sorry, a month later in December of 1825, a revolution we call the Revolution of the Decembrists. Why Decembrists? Because it was in December. And who were they? They're the same officers who had imbibed the ideas of the French Revolution and taken them into the Russian army. Alexander was succeeded not by the next brother in line, there were three brothers. The next one would've been Constantine. But he was succeeded by his younger brother Nicholas, who becomes Czar Nicholas I. The problem of the succession was one of the things that added fuel to the flames of the rebellion, revolt, revolution, whatever word you want to use. Revolt is probably the best word in the month after Alexander I's death, the Decembrists of December 1825. You see, unbeknown to the Russian people, Constantine, the next brother in line after Alexander, had privately and secretly renounced the throne. So, in British terms, it's as though the queen dies tomorrow and then it's announced by the Prime Minister the following day that actually Charles had renounced the throne some years ago. And that was the situation in Russia. This is the magazine that I've been using on the Romanovs. And it goes like this, "In 1819," well that's six years before Alexander's death, "Constantine had secretly renounced his rights to marry a commoner." So, he had secretly renounced his rights to the throne in order to marry a commoner. "On Alexander's death, Nicholas tried to evade his unwanted inheritance, swearing an oath to whom he called the Emperor Constantine. Russia was therefore stunned when on the 13th of December, a manifesto appeared announcing that Constantine had rejected the throne and declared Nicholas was now emperor. Believing that there had been an unlawful coup and seeing an opportunity to demand change, some 3,000 officers of the Imperial Guard and the aristocratic leaders assembled that night on St Petersburg's Senate Square shouting their demands, 'Constantine and constitution!'" And it

was reported at the time that some ordinary soldiers who were participating thought the cry, "Constantine and constitution!", thought constitution must be Constantine's wife. They had no idea what constitution meant. What a mess Russia is in at the end of 1825. A czar who had rejected the throne but hadn't made it public. A younger brother who didn't want the throne and proclaimed his brother as czar. An opportunity presented itself for the army to take action.

Now, at this juncture in Russian society and Russian history, there really is no other body to take power for change but the army. And who knows? If Putin dies within the next year, we may be saying exactly the same thing. Maybe only the Russian army can restore order in the same way that in the English Revolution of the 17th century, it was Cromwell's army that restored order. When there is complete disorder, maybe the army is the only source. And these officers in December 1825 saw it as their opportunity. Nicholas, now czar whether he wanted to be or not, thought he faced revolution. And indeed he did in a sense. Because as I say there was a line between the French Revolution and Napoleon in 1812 through to 1917. So, there is a distinct line from 1825 revolutionaries through to the revolutionaries in 1917. These revolutionaries were upper class, the officer corp of the Russian army. But it was revolution. Had they succeeded, Russia might have got a constitution, might have had an elected parliament, and some pliable Romanov might have been put on the throne as a constitutional monarch. Let me read on a little bit. "In the end, Nicholas decided to face the rebels head on. He said, 'I'll either be czar or I'll be dead.' He commented this whilst riding out himself to the Senate Square in St. Petersburg." The rebels occupied one side of the square. Facing them on another side of the square were 9,000 troops loyal to Nicholas. There was a standoff. Nicholas sent an aide across the square in an attempt to negotiate with the rebels. Instead of negotiating, they shouted insults at the aide. And some of them even opened fire on the aide. They were not in the mood to negotiate. Nicholas was still reluctant, however, to take military action. There was a standoff lasting hours. This couldn't go on. And then he ordered. And then he ordered the artillery to open fire in a square. A big square, some of you've been there to St Petersburg, but a square nevertheless. Some tried to escape by breaking the ice in the river and drowned. Nicholas said afterwards, "I am emperor but at what a price." "I'm emperor but at what a price." I've written, "An inauspicious start to a reign that was to last nearly quarter of a century." He is to reign, well, actually over a quarter of a century, he's to reign from 1825 to 1855, a period of 30 years. It would be untrue to characterise Nicholas' reign as one of repression following the repression of the Decembrists because there was improvement. The first railway was actually opened during his reign. Think. We're in the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s. Think about what it is in England or America or wherever. It, this is a modern world, but not in Russia. But there are some modern aspects to it. And one of that is a railway. And I'll just share this before giving you something interesting. "Russia gained its first wealth, a spur of

track running from St. Petersburg to Tsarskoye Selo in 1838 and four years later work began on a line connecting the capital of St. Petersburg to Moscow." Here's an interesting tidbit of history. Some of you will speak Russian. And you know that one generic word for Russian stations is the word "vokzal". V-O-K-S-A-L. It has no, sorry, V-O-K-Zed-A-L, vokzal. It has no origins in Russian language. It's origin is in English. And the story goes back to the 1780s when an Englishman called Michael Maddox, who was a theatre manager and had been a theatre manager in Russia, had come back to England and gone to the famous pleasure gardens of the Vauxhall Gardens in London. And he had a brainwave. "I could make money by taking this idea of pleasure gardens back to Russia." So, he went back to St. Petersburg and he called it Vauxhall after the Vauxhall in London, V-A-U-X-H-A-L-L. But he called it in Russian V-O-K-Zed-A-L. And that first railway line in the 1830s terminated at the pleasure gardens of Vokzal. So, you got off at a station called Vokzal. And from that, the word enter as a generic word for railway stations in Russian.

History is always, always so fascinating. You never know where it's going to take you next. I just find that story an extraordinary one really. There was progress. There's progress in other things, too. It isn't all a story that's negative. Let me just share this with you, if I may, if I can find it, I will read it. "The Russian empire still lagged dangerously behind its European rivals in early industrial development. 19th century Russia had the surface polish of the age but it remained in a century backward agrarian country." And over and above everything else it still had serfdom. And that was to the rest of Europe, that, Western Europe, that seemed, it really did seem mediaeval. It seemed incredible that a country that purported to be European and who had some trappings of Europeanization, railways, some industry, could nevertheless still have serfs. And Mark Galeotti writes of the continuance of serfdom. "Most strikingly Czar Nicholas I actually disapproved of serfdom. Through his reign, he would convene a series of secret commissions to try and find some way of squaring the circle. How to abolish a system of serfdom that would prove an inefficient, inhumane, and a source of periodic uprisings without totally destabilising the whole social order and alienating the rural gentry, the landlords who were the backbone of czarist rule in the countryside." Oh dear, Russia's left it too late. The czar wants to get rid of serfdom. But all the information he gathers says, "Hang on a minute, if you get rid of it, you're going to destabilise the country." A little reform remember is a dangerous thing. "Nicholas was brave enough faced with physical danger," says Galeotti. "But he never dared tackle this challenge of serfdom. He concluded, quote, 'There is no doubt that serfdom in its present position is evil, but trying to extinguish it now will be a matter of even more disastrous evil.'" Oh dear. That could almost serve as an epitaph. That could serve as an epitaph nearly 70 years before the Russian Revolution and the overthrow of czardom, czarism, an epitaph on czarism itself. It's an evil. But if we squash the evil, we shall release a worse evil.

Russia, torn between West and East, torn between a little reform and fearful of the whirlwind that that would unleash is Nicholas I's position. Imperial wise, Russia expanded. It was, it expanded at the, against Persia and the Ottoman Empire by increasing its possessions in Central Asia and the Caucuses. But the empire doesn't rub out the problems at home. It doesn't deal with the underlying problems of economics, and more specifically, political constitutional matters. It simply doesn't deal with those. Repression grew. In Poland where rebels sought to reestablish a Polish state, Nicholas sent in troops, abrogated the constitution, and totally assimilated Poland 100% into the Russian Empire. He persecuted Roman Catholics. And he followed a similar policy in Ukraine. And of course, absolutely of course, as you might well guess, if you don't know, he hit upon Jews. "The worst treatment as usual was meted out to Russia's Jewish population. Nicholas forcibly drafted Jewish males as young as 12 into special military training battalions. Though compulsory service brought no rewards. Regulations forbade any Jew from military promotion, new laws curtailed rabbinical schools and the study of the Talmud, and heavy taxes on those in the Pale of Settlement left many people impoverished." Repression at home under a title of autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality, autocracy, orthodoxy, Christian orthodoxy, and nationality. And that isn't what's wanted in the middle of the 19th century. What's needed is reform, the abolition of serfdom, and constitution. Not autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality. They don't match liberte, egalite, fraternite. And however many times you repress Catholics, Jews, Poles, you create more for the bubbling underneath the surface of society. And Nicholas spent money on the army, as I read at the very beginning. In lovely uniforms. But not on training and not on armaments. In 1853, Nicholas through hubris, Russian hubris against the Ottoman Empire, Russian miscalculation over Western Europe, he decides to engage in war with the Ottoman Empire. This is a fatal move. "In July 1853," I read, "after years of protesting, Nicholas made a provocative move, invading the Turkish controlled provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia. England, France, and Turkey," Ottoman Empire, "saw this invasion along the Danube as the first effort to seize control of Bulgaria." And Bulgaria enters our story next week. The Russians want to control Bulgaria again because of their obsession about things on their borders. "Serbia," not only Bulgaria but also Serbia, "and eventually the whole of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The emperor, Nicholas, was convinced that neither England nor France would risk a war against him merely to uphold the Sultan." Because this is a part of Europe far away from France and Britain. Why would they get involved? Why would they get involved? Well, he miscalculated. And he miscalculated because Britain and France believed that if the Ottoman Empire was destroyed, political chaos in Eastern Europe and wider in the Middle East would ensue. The 19th century politicians in both England and France were of course correct 'cause we know exactly what happened in the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. Chaos. And we know that part of reason for the First World War was

that chaos that had come to Europe, Eastern Europe, with the virtual withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire. France and Britain in the 19th century had judged the matter correctly. Whether America and EU and Britain have judged the events in the Crimea right in 2014 and in Ukraine today will be a matter for future historians to look at. Should we have made a stand over the Crimea? Should we have made a stand in Ukraine? We simply don't know. Will it encourage Putin or those who follow Putin, believe in autocracy, nationalism, orthodoxy to send Russian troops in against the Poles? Would it? Would it risk a war? Or would it bank on the fact that the response from the West would be pusillanimous? But it wasn't pusillanimous in the 1850s. And the Crimean War is the result of that. The Russians performed extraordinarily badly. One of the main reasons is that they had a long line of communication from the Crimea back to Moscow and St. Petersburg, an enormously long line of communication. Whereas the British and French and the Ottomans did not. One, they could bring up supplies from Constantinople and secondly, they could bring supplies through the Mediterranean from the south of France. We had no problems about supply. Our problems, and nor really with equipment. Our problems were the appalling generalship of the French and the British. Some of you who take a dim view of 1914 could say that was demonstrated in 1914. Now in British terms, there were reforms in the 1870s, the so-called Cardwell army reforms. And that maybe just about saved us in 1914. But the generals still behaved and not much different than their predecessors in the Crimea. Nicholas died a broken man without the war so far being ended in February 1855. He was only 59 years of age. The war continues after his death. And I'm going to finish with a little piece here. "On the 18th of February 1855, Czar Nicholas I died at the age of 59, a broken man. He tried to hold his empire in check whilst transforming it into a bastion of conservatism. And he failed. Not even repression and discipline could stave off growing dissent. Now it was left to Nicholas's son and successor, Alexander II, to clean up the dangerous situation he inherited." So, from 1801 to 1855, the rule of Alexander I and his brother Nicholas I, did not build on the progress made by Peter and Catherine. And Russia found itself in 1855 with Western Europe striding ahead, striding ahead of Russia. Think Paris, think London, think Berlin. Striding ahead. And he's got to do something about it.

Well, next week we will discover that he tried. But in the last analysis, he failed. And we are on this pathway to 1917. The nearer we get to 1917, the more obvious in hindsight it is that czarism cannot change and therefore will simply have to go. The question is when does it go and how does it go? And will it be succeeded by more authoritarianism or by democracy? Russia's story, in the modern world if you like, from the 18th century onwards is not, is not an overwhelmingly glorious one. Quite the reverse. But interestingly, Putin's spin is that the Russian success in 1812 and the Russian success in 1942 are what defined Russia. And Russia is defined by ever increasing its territories. Now Russia is defined by recovering its

territories. And Russia's paranoia of the West continues, sometimes wishing to catch up, think the Cold War and Russia desperately trying to catch up with America in the space race, alternating with a view that Russia is splendid, different, and superior. Putin's view. What an interesting story for me to tell and I hope you find it an interesting story to listen to. So, it's half past exactly. Shall we see if we've got any questions?

– [Wendy] Thanks.

– I've got, sorry.

– No, no, no, thanks Patrick. Thanks William. That was fabulous.

Q & A and Comments

– I've got Anita who says, "Putin compared himself to Philip, to Peter the Great last week in a speech." Yes, he did. And he is not Peter the Great, and I think it's pretty obviously why he isn't. When we come to Putin, we'll spell it out, but I think everyone realises that he's not Russia's next great leader. Next week we shall get to the third czar who is great-ish, which is Alexander II. The first, Peter the Great, second, Catherine the Great, third Romanov is Alexander II. I don't think we can, I said, well, I would make a case for Yeltsin, but it's a pretty thin case. We are still waiting for a successor to Peter and Catherine in truth.

– Yeah, and Harriet adds to that. Sorry, I lost that. And Harriet adds, "Yes, and Putin cited his territorial imperative as deriving from Peter's worldview." That's absolutely everything that we've been looking at over the last weeks.

Q: "Where is the River Neman?"

A: The River Neman was the border between Prussia and Russia at the time. And Tilsit today is in Lithuania between Lithuania and the Russian enclave of Kalingrad.

Q: "How many troops did he lose?"

A: Virtually, I mean something like 80 to 90%.

Q: "Why did Napoleon feel compelled to take Russia on and invade?"

A: Because Napoleon is obsessed. I often think of Napoleon like a wind up children's toy. You wind it up and he walks. And he doesn't ever stop until the clockwork in him gives up and he falls over. 1799, First Consul to 1815, Waterloo. He's going forward and he falls over. He can't stop himself. His whole purpose in life becomes conquest. He

is on, again, someone on a conveyor belt. He's an interesting man, of course. And maybe we will have an opportunity later this year to talk about Napoleon.

- Oh, Ron, that's a, Ron, that is a first rate question-

Q: "Why did the American Revolution not have as much impact as the French Revolution change for ideas, spread of nationalism, social change, and anti-imperialism?"

A: The simple answer is because America wasn't in Europe. The ideas of the French Revolution were, as they say, carried on the bayonets of Napoleon's Grand Armee right across Europe. Also, the American Revolution and the American democratic ideals are English, Anglo-American if you wish, but they're not European ideas. One of the reasons why Britain never was easy within the European Union, because we find European democracy different than ours. And of course Britons take superior views that ours is superior. How we can take that at the moment, I'm not sure. But that's what happens. The Americans have done the same. It's basically because America wasn't in Europe and remember, America chose isolationism during the Napoleonic Wars. There were no American troops at Waterloo. They chose not to engage with Europe, believing that Europe was the Old World in every possible connotation of the word old. Whereas America was the New World in every connotation of the word new.

Q: "Given the rejection of democracy historically, do the Russians see Peter and Catherine the Great as the West does?"

A: No, they don't. What the Russians see is two great leaders who made Russia the equals of the West, not the West. They were trying to make Russia more Western. Putin he would clearly be that they made Russia the equals of the West, not the same as the West. I hope that's clear.

Q: "What do you think of Simon Rothschild's book, 'The Romanovs'?"

A: And somebody put, "Yes." Sorry, I think you mean Simon Sebag Montefiore. Anything by Simon Sebag Montefiore is great, although I think his book on Jerusalem is perhaps not his best, but his books are good. And certainly the book on the Romanovs is fine. Yeah, well, we've answered that. Good.

Q: "If Russia had moved to a constitutional monarchy, did they have enough of an educated class of people?"

A: Excellent. No, they did not. But then, can I be really, really stir the pot? How educated are the electorate in Britain or in the States in 2022? Do we have enough people educated in our societies to make our democracy work? This was a big issue during Brexit and one that politicians in Britain didn't want to answer. And I'm sure the same is

true in America. Oh yeah, yeah.

– Carol says, "I take issue with the label barbaric being used to refer to Russia alone." Yeah, but I wasn't talking about America. I was talking about Russia. Yes, you can use barbaric in other ways. And if we're being, if we're being, annoy a Briton, and he will start using words like that to describe America. Not least at the moment with the gun laws. No, you can use barbaric, but the point about using it there as Napoleon did, it represented a Western European view of another European country. "And so I'm saying that using it about civilised are extremely problematic and misleading and shouldn't be used." No, they shouldn't, because that was the word that Napoleon used. That was the early 19th century word. That was the word that would've been used in Britain. And so it's perfectly proper to use it in that context, in my opinion. But you may disagree.

– Oh, and well, thank you Judy. You said pretty much what I've just said. Oh,

Q: "Where did the failed revolution of 1905," says Irene, "sit in all of this?"

A: Who was the ah, well we will come the 1905 revolution, but basically the 1905 revolution, the 1905 revolution came to a grinding halt. Rather surprisingly, repression worked for a little while, for a decade, and it did push Russia just at the very 11th hour into having a parliament, a Duma. And, but it didn't, it didn't work in the way of Western European Dumas or Western European Parliament. I will come to 1905. It's a very interesting story. It's part of a wider conflict between Russia and Japan and their defeat by Japan.

– Bobby says,

Q: "Vias Nipol once suggests after such a huge conflict, successful governance is very difficult to attain. Do you have any thoughts that perhaps that applies to Russia as well?"

A: China has in the past and arguably today has successful governance. America has successful governance. And some of you might want to say, well, at least in living memory.

– No, I think Africa is, no, Africa is a very different story. There's been a book just published called "Africa is Not a Country". And that's absolutely true. Africa's never been a country. Russia has been. No, there is no real reason why a constitutional Russia couldn't work.

– Oh, Victoria, bless you. "Similarly, the Russian word for pencil, 'karandash', comes from Caran d'Ache." That's the French pencil maker. Oh, that fantastic piece of information. I did not know that. Oh,

Victoria, you've made my day today. Oh, that's wonderful. It's words can be so interesting in terms of origin. It's like only one word from Aztec is in English, American English or British English as far as I know, certainly in British English, but I think in American English, and the word we get from Aztec is "chocolate".

- Martine, "While Russia still have serfdom, England still have the slave trade up until the early 1800s so Europe wasn't so advanced either." The whole question of slavery is a woke agenda, and I don't want to go down there. It's a complex one. By 1800, Britain had a very successful anti-slavery movement. By the end of the 18th century, no slaves could live in England. You were free as soon as you set foot on English soil. There's, it's a question I can't easily deal with. Oh, well thanks very much.

- Thank you, Gordon, that's nice of you. No, no.

Q: "Was there some incident made him turn on the Jews?"

A: No, not particularly. They were just, well, they were Poles. Most of them were Pole, had Polish ancestry, that didn't go down well. And you know better than I, that if there's, if you've got to a find an enemy within, the Jews were a very helpful enemy. Particularly if you're Russian Orthodox Church, Catholics and Jews immediately come to mind. It's just, I was going to say it was just, no, I won't say that. I was going to say straightforward. It is classic anti-Semitism. Blame the Jews. No, that people, I'm glad you've liked it. It makes it worthwhile me doing.

Q: "Do you see a parallel between the czars and the present day mullahs of Iran?"

A: No, absolutely none. The mullahs are propelled by a twisted version of Islam. The czars were not twisted by orthodoxy. Most of them weren't particularly religious.

- Oh,

Q: "To what extent did General Winter defeat Napoleon?"

A: Absolutely. The winter did destroy his army. General Winter is said always to be the greatest general the Russians ever had. And certainly that's true. But it's also the long lines of communication that he had. It's the Russian tactics of hit and run. It's the fact that the Russians employed a scorched earth policy because the Napoleon's army couldn't live off the land and they certainly couldn't bring provisions from the West. If you want an example of General Winter, it killed the horses or they killed the horses in order to eat, to keep warm, et cetera, et cetera. I mentioned a book in a previous lecture that had just been released? Oh dear. We've got to get me a better

clue than that. I don't know which that was, unless it was the one about the Soviet. Was it one about, hang on, was it, can't quickly find it, but I think it may have been a short introduction, short history of, I think it might have been, "A Short History of the Soviet Union".

– Wilma, thank you. No, no. We'll miss that bit out. "When I was holidaying in Moscow in 2010, I wanted to see what was going on east of Moscow. The Russian people told me that it was still very barbaric in the east part of Russia and not to venture off." Yeah, we'll come to Gorbachev in due course.

– And oh, good, Victor. "Another explanation of the lack of US revolution having an effect in Europe is that the American Revolution was only breaking ties with England. The landed gentry remained in control. There was no social revolution to point to. It was not a standard for those who wanted change." That is an extremely good point, Victor, to make. Remember, the American Revolution is an English revolution. It was led by the English against the English. The English both lost and won the American Revolution, and it didn't change the social structures. You are absolutely spot on. I agree with that.

– Oh, sorry. Marion says, oh, "Caran d'Ache is Swiss, not French." Yeah, good, good. "The French word 'bistro' comes from the Russian word for 'quick'. It's what Russian officers in 1815 wanted for fast food." Oh, that's brilliant. Yes, I did know that.

– Barbara, "About education, some of our USA most pro-authoritarian senators are Harvard and Yale graduates. Makes us wonder." Well, we've got the same with the British cabinet at the moment. Academic success doesn't necessarily breed common sense. One of the problems with education, America, higher education America and British today, is that it's a very narrow education. Whereas the concept of education in the 19th century, think Cardinal Newman's book about education, was a much wider brief as what adult education is about. It's what I'm trying to do with all of you. We're not just doing Russia. I'm trying to introduce you to lots of other ideas, which you may agree with, which you may fundamentally disagree with, but it's taking a wider view of things.

– Oh, Antony Beevor's book. Yeah, in which case it should have been on my list. Is it? I think I put Beevor's book on the list, but if I haven't. Oh, right. Okay, I'm sure Antony Beevor's book I put on one of my book lists on the blog, but if not, I'll bring, I'll show you. I've got a copy somewhere, but I can't quickly put my hands on it. No, I can't quickly see it. I'm, to the horror of my wife. You can't see. But I'm absolutely surrounded, you know, I've got books. If I, I've got books that way. I've got books that way. I've got books that way. Yeah, and books this way. Yes, I've got books everywhere. Right,

right.

– William, I'm going to jump in here and say yes.

– Right, that we should stop, yes?

– We are benefiting. We are benefiting hugely from your abundant knowledge. So, I want to thank you very much for that outstanding presentation once again. And I'm going to just jump in here just to say thanks, because we've got Dennis coming on soon who's going to be talking about the origins of international human rights law. So, I just want to give my team a chance to have a break before the next. And I want to give you the opportunity to go and relax and have a whiskey with your wife.

– Thank you. And goodbye everyone.

– Thanks very much. We will see you next week.

– You will, bye.

– Enjoy the rest. Thanks everyone. Thanks for joining us. Thank you, Jude. Bye-bye.