

Psychohistory, Ideology, and Ukraine: A Reply to Juhani Ihanus and David Beisel

ABSTRACT: Ideology can be defined as ideas that have the effect of legitimizing or delegitimizing power, especially in the political-economic arena. U.S. and NATO policies towards Ukraine, for example, require such legitimization to keep taxpayers funding the current war. Scholars may participate in legitimization, whether deliberately or unintentionally, by their choices of what they talk about and what they omit in a given context. In this article, I critique the legitimization of American militarism, including articles by Juhani Ihanus and David Beisel in the Spring 2022 issue of *Clio's Psyche*. By putting Vladimir Putin on the couch and omitting objective security threats to which the Russian leader apparently responded, these psychohistorians demonize Putin and implicitly exonerate the U.S. and NATO for their roles in the conflict, even if inadvertently.

It is an undisputed axiom of the social sciences that war and other forms of power depend upon legitimization (Skinner, 2002). Even dictatorships fall without legitimization (Sharp, 2012), much less regimes that depend upon votes in contested elections. Indeed, the whole concept of “ideology” can be defined as ideas that legitimize or delegitimize the power of ruling elites, their policies, and the institutions they lead (Skinner, 2002).

Power can take many forms: the extraction by elites of nearly a trillion dollars per year from U.S. taxpayers to maintain the biggest war machine ever created on earth; the frequent use of military power (whether in the form of threats, proxy wars, covert operations, or overt interventions) on behalf of strategic and corporate interests (Chomsky, 2004); and the ongoing sabotage of international efforts at demilitarization and cooperative security (Deller et al, 2003).

What does the legitimization of militarism look like? As with the power it serves, legitimization takes many forms, including: think tanks whose mission is to produce propaganda; university “Russian Studies” programs whose experts make the historical record safe for “democracy” (AKA American mil-

itary hegemony); and a “free press” that generally manufactures consent (Herman and Chomsky, 2002) for the superpower’s endless wars. Finally, it includes well-intentioned articles on “Putin and Ukraine” by psychohistorians who are authentic scholars and not propagandists, but whose ideas nevertheless contribute, even if inadvertently, to demonization of a military adversary in the midst of war.

Before engaging with these psychohistorians (Ihanus, 2022a, 2022b; Beisel, 2022), we should note a specific military threat and provocation that preceded Putin’s 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This was described as follows by journalist Christopher Caldwell: “On Nov. 10, 2021, the United States and Ukraine signed a ‘charter on strategic partnership’ that called for Ukraine to join NATO, condemned ‘ongoing Russian aggression’ and affirmed an ‘unwavering commitment’ to the reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine.” This charter, combined with massive shipments of advanced weaponry from the US and other NATO countries to Ukraine, created a plausible scenario that Russia needed to “attack or be attacked,” according to the author (Caldwell, 2022).

To be sure, this 2021 U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership has a broader historical context. To get the big picture, let us zoom out and look at the last century or so of US-Russian relations. Such a fly-over necessarily omits vast amounts of detail that are visible at closer range. At the same time, however, this is the only way to see features of the whole that are just as necessarily lost when zooming in on individual trees that make up the forest.

THE U.S. AND RUSSIA: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

I begin this story with World War I, which the U.S. entered on the side of an alliance that included the Russian Empire. To legitimize the war, which was really a clash of rival empires, President Woodrow Wilson called it a war to “make the world safe for democracy.” This was complete nonsense, of course, considering that Czarist Russia was one of the most authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes on earth. After the Bolsheviks overthrew this reactionary state, the U.S. and Britain recoiled in horror and abruptly switched their attitudes towards Russia 180 degrees, ostensibly because the new regime was authoritarian and anti-democratic!

Thus, began decades of “defending the free world,” AKA global corporate capitalism, from the Red Menace. With the rise of Hitler and German rearmament, Stalin sought coordinated military preparation with the West to meet the threat (Holdsworth, 2008), but the U.S. remained isolationist and Britain pursued its now notorious policy of appeasement. France did explore common security with the Soviets (Wikipedia, 2022), but given the overall geopolitical situation, Stalin chose a tactical non-aggression pact

with Hitler that gave the USSR time to mobilize for the Soviet-Nazi war that both dictators knew would come eventually.

After Hitler took Paris and later invaded the Soviet Union, the Allies left to Stalin the task of defeating the German Wehrmacht, mounting their Normandy invasion to liberate France only after the Nazi forces were already in retreat. Notwithstanding this historical record, Americans have been falsely taught in school for decades that it was the United States that defeated the Third Reich.

As for the Cold War, conventional wisdom in the U.S. is that the Soviets menaced democracy in the post-war world and the U.S. met the challenge, assuming the mantle “defender of the free world.” There are a number of things wrong with this picture, but let us examine just two. First, it was not the USSR that launched the Cold War but the United States. The pivotal event was Truman’s incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which preempted a Soviet invasion of Japan and forced its surrender exclusively to the U.S., instead of jointly to both allies, as in Europe (Alperovitz, 1994). This abrupt end of the U.S.-Soviet wartime alliance was also the Cold War’s opening salvo, signaling U.S. possession of the ultimate weapon of mass destruction and willingness to use it against civilian populations (Alperovitz, 1994).

Second, U.S. Cold War policy was entirely about defending capitalism, not democracy. The manifest absurdity of the democracy myth can be seen in U.S. support after 1945 for fascist dictatorships in Europe and throughout the world, including Spain, Greece, Zaire, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras, etc., etc. (Blum, 2014). It was President Harry Truman and rabidly anti-communist officials such as James F. Byrnes and James Forrestal who set the U.S. on this course immediately after World War II.

Former Vice President Henry A. Wallace had proposed an alternative vision for the post war world: a peaceful political competition with the USSR. But this was out of step with powerful special interests, especially the defense contractors, oil companies, and other big corporations who stood to benefit from U.S. military hegemony, regardless of its cost to ordinary citizens in the U.S. and abroad (Domhoff, 2013). Truman fired Wallace (then his Secretary of Commerce) after the latter stated in a speech: “we should recognize that we have no more business in the political affairs of Eastern Europe than Russia has in the political affairs of Latin America, Western Europe and the United States” (Culver and Hyde, 2000).

With the end of the Cold War, we reach the era of Yeltsin and Putin, where psychohistorians Juhani Ihanus and David Beisel take up the story in the Spring 2022 issue of *Clio's Psyche*. In his concluding essay, “Tragedy Without Catharsis” (Ihanus, 2022b), Dr. Ihanus writes: “Putin’s disappointment

with Western values, though briefly applied in Russia, led him to struggle against the idea of the U.S. as the only great power in the world.” The author does not say exactly what values he has in mind, but presumably something about “freedom.”

As for personal freedoms, they were no doubt an affront to Russian authoritarians, including right wing clergy. More problematic for ordinary Russians, however, was the freedom of big capitalist institutions and individual robber barons to do whatever they wanted, unhindered by government. This experiment in neoliberalism was undertaken in the 1990s by Boris Yeltsin, who outsourced Russia’s transition to a market economy to the big Western banks, the IMF, and pro-corporate American economists Larry Summers and Jeffrey Sachs (Stiglitz, 2017).

This application of certain “Western values”—legalized thievery, rapaciousness, and contempt for the public good—might have been “brief,” but it was highly consequential. In those few years of capitalist “shock therapy,” foreign bankers and an emerging class of home-grown oligarchs abruptly dismantled Soviet institutions, replaced them with a regime of gangster capitalism, and swindled ordinary Russians out of their shares of the newly privatized, post-Soviet economy (Stiglitz, 2017). This made Yeltsin the darling of Western elites, even as the Russian masses suffered a worse economic catastrophe than the Great Depression of the 1930s and a long-term legacy of social and industrial wreckage (Stiglitz, 2017). That was the Russia that Putin inherited when he assumed the office of president in 2000.

As for the current war in Ukraine, the prevailing legitimization for America’s and Europe’s expensive, dangerous, and counterproductive arming of that country harkens back to Russia’s February-March 2014 annexation of Crimea, which is said to reveal the imperialist and gratuitously aggressive nature of Putin’s leadership and regime. This dominant narrative that Putin threatens peace and democracy in Europe is based on a blatantly deceptive omission.

Specifically, pundits and politicians who legitimize American militarism typically choose to take Russia’s annexation of Crimea out of its historical context, without which the event cannot be understood. This context was a 22 February 2014 coup that deposed the duly elected, pro-Russian president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. Consistent with U.S. support for fascist regimes and groups before, during and after the Cold War (Blum, 2014), this coup was a joint project of Ukrainian fascists and the CIA (Marcetic, 2022).

While the Euromaidan protest three months earlier had been peaceful, it morphed into this violent, U.S.-backed coup in Kyiv. This posed an obvious security dilemma for Russia, given especially that the country’s Black Sea Fleet had its official primary headquarters and facilities in Sevastopol, Crimea’s largest city.

My point is not that Russia was justified in annexing Crimea—the action was clearly a violation of international law—but rather that the dominant narrative of the annexation as an unprovoked act of Russian imperialism obfuscates what actually occurred, which cannot be understood except in the context of the U.S.-backed coup. And if the annexation was a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, so was U.S. support for the coup that preceded and provoked it. Notwithstanding this, apologists for American militarism sanctimoniously and hypocritically denounce the annexation, while remaining silent about the preceding U.S. involvement. For more on these events, see “A U.S.-Backed, Far Right–Led Revolution in Ukraine Helped Bring Us to the Brink of War” (Marcetic, 2022).

PUTIN AND PSYCHOHISTORICAL REDUCTIONISM

Turning now to Ihanus’s main article, “Putin, Ukraine, and Fratricide” (Ihanus, 2022a), David Beisel writes that the author “presents a grand synthesis that is multi-layered, multi-causal, and illuminating, successfully interweaving history—real, distorted, and mythical—with psychobiography, group psychodynamics, and projected fantasies” (Beisel, 2022). Beisel then questions the practice of “criticizing colleagues for what they did not say rather than concentrating on what they did say.”

I generally agree with all these comments, but with an important proviso. If Ihanus intended to shed light on Putin’s 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, then it is not acceptable to omit the one “real history” factor that might actually explain the Russian leader’s action, namely the imminent threat to Russian security posed by the above-mentioned 10 November 2021 U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, combined with the massive arming of Ukraine by the U.S. and NATO (Caldwell, 2022).

I am not suggesting that Ihanus should have addressed these security issues in any detail. But in the context of the current war, talking only about Putin’s psyche and the experiences that shaped it creates a false narrative that the Russian leader’s motivations alone can explain his decision to invade Ukraine, rather than an interaction between his motivations and an objective security threat.

Thus, while Ihanus does present a “multi-layered, multi-causal” explanation, his focus on Putin’s psychology combined with his exclusion of objective military antecedents that are essential to understanding the war still amount to psychohistorical reductionism. Further, the article unwittingly contributes to a bigger false narrative that demonizes Putin and implicitly exonerates the United States and NATO for their roles in the conflict.

Because of limitations of space, I can only flesh out this critique by examining a few excerpts from the above-mentioned articles. In “Putin, Ukraine,

and Fratricide,” Dr. Ihanus writes: “Putin’s reconstruction of the history of Rus’ is also his personal re-enactment of the collective traumas of the Soviet Union and current Russia. To his savior mindset, Russia has been deceived by the hostile countries. He sees Russia encircled and strangled by enemies.”

Having recourse here to a psychological explanation for Putin’s actions gives the impression that Russia in fact was *not* deceived by hostile countries. If Putin’s perceptions have a substantial basis in reality, attributing them to a savior complex only obfuscates what is occurring, even if Putin does have a savior complex that might be determinative in other situations. In reality, Soviet leaders reportedly understood from their conversations with U.S., German, British, and French officials in 1990 that NATO would not be expanded eastward (National Security Archive, 2017). When in subsequent years NATO admitted more than a dozen new members from Eastern Europe, the Russians had reason to believe they had been lied to, notwithstanding certain ambiguities in the diplomatic record (Sarotte 2021, cited in Fuchsman 2022).

The author then discusses two monuments to Saint Vladimir the Great (“Volodymyr” in Ukrainian), one in Ukraine and the second built more recently by Putin in Moscow. Remarking about the height of the Russian monument (52 feet), Ihanus says that it ominously reminds people of Hitler’s Thousand Year Reich. He then writes, “The attempts to steal a historical figure from Kyiv to Moscow is a provocative part of the ongoing information war that aims to rob the right of the Ukrainians to their own history.”

First, it should be noted that the Ukrainian monument is nearly ten feet taller than the one in Moscow,¹ but for the author, only the Russian monument is “ominous” and suggestive of fascism. Second, as Ihanus had previously noted, “Moscow as the Third Rome continued the work of Vladimir the Great, the emancipator and the savior” (Ihanus, 2022a). But then he contradicts this view by presenting Volodymyr/Vladimir as an exclusively Ukrainian saint who is being “robbed” by Russia.

Whether consciously intended or not, the author here is vilifying Putin by association with Hitler and providing grist for Ukrainian nationalism. As with the above-mentioned 2021 U.S.-Ukraine Charter and arming of the country, I would not expect the author to discuss the centuries-long shared history of Russia and Ukraine in any detail. But failing to even acknowledge this shared history in the context of comparing the two monuments, Ihanus leaves the reader with a Ukrainian nationalist message, even if unintentionally.

1. The Wikipedia articles “Monument to Prince Volodymyr” and “Monument to Vladimir the Great” give the heights of the Ukrainian and Russian monuments respectively as 67 feet and 57 feet, 5 inches.

The author then writes: “The secrecy and veiling of the atrocities of Communism, especially during the Stalin and K.G.B. era, are specific features of Putin’s personal relation to that grim history, which has been replaced by a glorious history, revised consistent with the retroactive and patriotic interpretations of historical legacies.” Here he contrasts demonic and idealized views of the Soviet Union. Instead of seeking psychological integration, however, he validates the former and minimizes the latter, contributing to demonization of the U.S.S.R. Previously, the author gave respectful credit to Ukrainians for helping to defeat Nazi Germany (Ihanus, 2022a), but when Russians glory in that legacy, he says they are living in the past and viewing it through a patriotic lens. (I am not a Russian patriot, but will be eternally grateful for the Soviet Union’s heroic sacrifices that defeated the Third Reich).

The author further writes: “The beating and slaughter of millions (e.g., four million Ukrainians) during the Stalin Terror have been reinterpreted in certain Russian history textbooks and manuals as a ‘necessary evil’ because the State was preparing for the Great War. Millions of corpses were needed as a rehearsal for the war efforts.”

These events, it should be noted, have become for Ukrainian nationalists what Vamik Volkan calls a “chosen trauma.” As for the whitewashing of the events in Russian memory, that reminds me of how most American history textbooks to this day make light of my country’s “grim history” of Black slavery, Native American genocide, imperialist war, and support for pro-American fascist regimes across the globe, which are sanitized as “Manifest Destiny,” “Defending the Free World,” and the like.

Personally, I am proud of my country’s positive accomplishments—like Walt Disney’s wonderful children’s movies, the Civil Rights Movement, putting humans on the moon, and inventing the internet. But for thirty years, the United States has also been bullying, humiliating, threatening, and provoking its defeated Cold War adversary, and the current war in Ukraine is a predictable result. I challenge everyone who is minimizing this “grim history” to finally face reality and start telling the truth.

Turning to David Beisel’s essay “Ihanus’ Fine Synthesis on Putin and Ukraine” (Beisel, 2022), here we find an implicit endorsement of the dominant “Russian imperialist” narrative of the war and dismissal of the threat posed by NATO’s and American militarism as a figment of Putin’s imagination. The author writes “[Putin] wants to conquer Europe at the same time that he needs to resist his imagined fantasy attack that is being launched against Russia by the U.S. and NATO.”

In this regard, it is worth noting that the United States—the world’s current military hegemon—aims to dominate not only Europe and Russia, but

the entire Earth, outer space, and cyberspace, not only in Putin's imagination but in reality. Total global domination is the stated policy of the United States, put forth in the Pentagon's doctrine of Full Spectrum Dominance (Bacevich, 2021). It is backed up by nearly a trillion dollars per year of military spending, maintenance of more than 700 military bases on seven continents, the world's most powerful navy operating in all oceans, and proxy wars or active engagement in dozens of current conflicts worldwide, not only in Ukraine. U.S. "projection of power" in Europe since World War II has included the deployment of tens of thousands of troops, placement of advanced weaponry including nuclear missiles, stationing of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and war games and other war preparations. None of these things are figments of Vladimir Putin's imagination.

Meanwhile, where is Dr. Beisel's psychohistorical examination of American militarist fantasies and actual imperialist policies? I find it more than a little ironic that a citizen of the world's most heavily armed state and only superpower can have so much to say about Putin's militarist fantasies and nothing to say about those of his own leaders. This is especially problematic in light of his and my country's relentless militarization of European security, from the Cold War through the present, culminating in the arming of Ukraine and the 10 November 2021 "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership" that preceded the current war.

Finally, it is an entirely reasonable question whether, in critiquing legitimations of American militarism, this very article of mine is itself an ideological and political exercise. The answer is certainly yes, but with two major provisos. First, contrary to the common practice of labelling left viewpoints "political" and so-called mainstream viewpoints "scholarly," what I have had to say is no more political and no less scholarly than the authors I am critiquing. Second, while the ideological positions of Drs. Ihanus and Beisel were implicit in their articles, and in that sense less accessible to the reader, I have endeavored to make the political questions at issue entirely explicit, so that the reader can more easily evaluate for herself or himself what is being said—not only on the level of ostensible scholarly claims, but also on the level of politics and ideology.

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Reply To Brian D'Agostino

From its beginnings, psychohistory's critics—and some psychohistorians themselves—have cautioned about the tendency for psychohistory to play up psychology at the expense of history. The fear that history may slowly disappear from the psychohistorical equation is based on reality. Brian D'Agostino's commentary is a welcome reminder of this caution since in their quest to get to the bottom of psychological motivation, the writings of some psychohistorians sometimes lose sight of historical contexts and the ways external events influence internal decisions.

Brian finds fault with what I and Juhani Ihanus have written on Putin on just these grounds. His critique is well intentioned but bends too far in the other direction. Brian's near-exclusive focus on externals ignores the internals. It produces an out-of-balance, one-sided essay that does the very thing Brian charges us with doing, but in reverse, ending up ignoring Putin and the war's psychological dimensions.

Our work was psychohistorical, written for a psychohistory publication, designed for a psychohistorical audience and, therefore, emphasized the psychological. Brian claims our essays ignored the real provocations from the U.S. that played some role in Putin's decision to go to war in Ukraine. More on that later.

In his critique, Brian leaves out the work of two contributors to the Spring 2022 *Clio's Psyche* discussion that would have strengthened his case, one by historian/psychoanalyst Paul Elovitz, the other by historian Anna Geifman, a superb piece which captures Russia's long search for identity occasioned by numerous invasions by different peoples over the centuries. Anna's paper would have bolstered the general principle that the content of the mind is molded by culture and historical events (the normal way historians explain psychological phenomenon) as well as such things as swaddling, child abuse, and the consequences of domestic violence, none of which Brian's essay mentions so intent is he on making the case for the cause of Putin's war as a reaction to America's post-World War II drive for Imperium.

Brian also overlooks an additional commentary on the war published in the same *Clio's Psyche* issue as the essays he critiques. That issue carried appreciations of Howard Stein's scholarship. My contribution to the

Festschrift, "Listening with Howard," included some thoughts on the war in Ukraine as well as a discussion of how Howard's work influenced my way of listening to history and the role of unconscious complicity in international affairs. More on that later.

Some of Brian's sources further weaken his argument, either because they are suspect or need to be approached with great caution. For example, Branco Marcetic's essay titled, "A U.S. Backed, Far-Right-Led Revolution in Ukraine Helped Bring Us to the Brink of War," appearing in the February 7, 2022 on-line and print journal, *Jacobin*, is cited by Brian to prove western "influencers" joined with neo-Nazi Ukrainians to cause the Maiden demonstration of 2014, thus ousting the pro-Russian leader of Ukraine and causing Putin to annex Crimea.

There is no doubt that neo-Nazis lurk among the Ukrainians. At the same time, many left-leaning scholars consider the journal *Jacobin* an arm of hard-left socialism and an instrument of socialist propaganda. In my view, there is insufficient evidence in the Marcetic article to prove the CIA combined with Ukrainian neo-Nazis in a plot to oust the then existing pro-Russian president. No hard evidence is offered to prove Brian's assertion beyond mention of some tenuous ties between right-wing Ukrainians. Unless I missed it, the article never names the CIA. Moreover, Brian's claim is refuted by the article itself: as Marcetic writes: "It is an overstatement to say, as some critics have charged, that Washington orchestrated the Maidan uprising."

Additionally, Brian's essay ignores a later article in the same journal that raises doubts about his argument. An interview conducted by Loren Balhorn with Russian activist Boris Kagavlitisky, a Professor of Sociology at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Science titled, "A Russian Sociologist Explains Why Putin's War Is Going Even Worse Than It Looks," posted on the *Jacobin* website on 7.22.2022, quotes Kagavlitisky's view that, "thinking that the war is rooted in geopolitics [is] a common, but understandable mistake in western analysis." Putin's decision for war, according to Kagavlitisky, was "preconditioned by the [Russian] domestic situation."

Brian's assertion that an overview of long-term Russian-U.S. relations is necessary because our essays have ignored the proverbial forest for the tree. Here he finds: "It was not the USSR that launched the Cold War but the U.S." Not so fast. Things are neither as clearcut nor as one-sided as Brian would have it. The origins of the Cold War remain one of the most hotly contested issues among historians. Do we go back to the early aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, to the Civil War of White versus Red armies, the invasion by the U.S. and other powers, including Japan, bent on destroying the Bolsheviks, or to the days of the Comintern and its avowed goal to destroy

capitalism as well as the Red-Scare-1920s, to Soviet spying, the mutual East-West distrust of the 1930s, Stalin's opposition to Popular Front politics, the shock of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, atomic spies at Los Alamos, or do we start only with Truman, Hiroshima, and the post-World War II aftermath? Sometimes it is necessary to look at both forest *and* the tree.

Brian charges us with "well intentioned" scholarship that "aids a false narrative," contributing "inadvertently to the demonization of a military adversary in the midst of a war." One needs to question whether it is we who demonize someone who remains at heart a KGB agent, coldly orders Cold War-like assassinations in Russia and abroad, imprisons dissenters, and coolly pursues a strategy of massive destruction of civilian populations in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine, or is it Putin's own behavior that demonizes itself? Sometimes Bad Guys are real Bad Guys and not just the result of manufactured fantasies for the convenience of the west's own projections.

It is true, as Brian points out, that America's aggression is not entirely a "figment of Putin's imagination." When I wrote this phrase I was not referring to the reality-testing part of Putin's mind. I was referring to the part of Putin's inner world consisting of his fantasies, repressed aggression, tendency to paranoia, and unfinished business, as any reading of my original comments makes clear.

In his rush to indict the capitalist system and U.S. imperialism, Brian inadvertently exonerates Putin. His critique ends up denying Ukraine, a Russian colony for centuries, its right to independence, while accepting Russian sovereignty as legitimate.

In international and national politics it often takes two to tangle. In Brian's rendering, when the U.S. follows its national interests it is "bullying, humiliating, threatening and provoking." When Russia engages in the same behavior it is presented as a reaction to western provocation.

I would ask Brian to think about applying a different model to international affairs, one of codependent dysfunction, the well-known dyad of collusion, *folie à deux*.

I have spent the last twenty-five years arguing for an approach to international and domestic politics that stresses mutual interaction—and joint responsibility—of both parties in many disputes and their sometimes violent outcomes. I take great pleasure in being able to publicly thank Brian for his support of my work and by encouraging others to read my book *The Suicidal Embrace*, first published in 2003, which he has praised as "a foundational work of our field."

In that study I surveyed tens of thousands of documents and found through the words and actions of leaders and diplomats a hidden unconscious dys-

functional system of mutual Great Power interaction in the diplomacy of the 1930s. The powers acted as if the fantasy of the family of nations was real, and the family was a pathological one writ large. What began as a diplomatic Anglo-German duologue was joined by the other powers—a *folie à deux* become a *folie à plusieurs*—as the Greater and Lesser Powers unconsciously colluded by bonding in a union of self-destructive decision making—in Neville Chamberlain’s words, “a suicidal embrace.” Their appeasement policy led inexorably to a war they could blame on Hitler. There is no doubt Hitler caused World War II. Yet, many respected historians have noted how the decisions and actions of other powers knowingly and unknowingly enabled him.

This pattern of mutuality is found not just in the run-up to the Second World War but over and over in post-war international affairs. I explored that pattern most explicitly in a 2011 *Clio’s Psyche* Symposium Essay, “Military and Diplomatic Blind Spots and Traumatic Reenactments” (Vol.18, no 2), and most recently in my paper, “*The Suicidal Embrace Revisited: Lessons for Today*,” delivered at the IPA Convention in May 2022. Those, and other works, present evidence showing patterns of the U.S. provoking potential adversaries, then acting with surprise when they launch an aggressive reaction against us.

Brian asserts the U.S. wants to dominate “the entire earth, outer space, and cyberspace,” which we declare, projectively, is Russia’s goal. Looked at from the mutual interaction model I am proposing, there is no disputing that such domination is our goal, but it is Russia’s, too, both states caught in an unbreakable grasp we cannot escape—Chamberlain’s “suicidal embrace.” That these two adversaries interact in a mutually-reinforcing feedback loop is what Brian plays down in his rush to prove only one side of the psychohistorical equation.

David Beisel holds a Ph.D in Modern European History from New York University, is twice past-president of the International Psychohistorical Association, and edited The Journal of Psychohistory from 1979 to 1987. He has written widely on American and European history and most recently is co-author with Irene Javors of six psychohistorical essays on music, film, and politics in their new book, Genres of the Imagination (Circumstantial Productions and Amazon, 2021).

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response **JUHANI IHANUS**

Legitimations and Justifications: A Reply to Brian D'Agostino

At first, it was somewhat bewildering to notice that, according to Brian D'Agostino, my earlier article "unwittingly contributes to a bigger false narrative that demonizes Putin and implicitly exonerates the United States and NATO for their roles in the conflict" and that my focus on Putin's personal psychological issues amounts to "psychohistorical reductionism." After comparing our views, I reached non-reductionist reflections on the psychohistorical endeavor and its bases, also finding some common ground between my approach and the one sketched by D'Agostino. He seems to admit that there is "interaction between his [Putin's] motivations and an objective security threat," which I agree with, pinpointing that such "objective" threats go through the personal, cognitive-neural, emotional, and motivational filters of the leaders.

I believe one of the crucial issues here is how to psychohistorically analyze the legitimations and justifications for war, considering "both sides," both "objective" (military, political, and economic) "legitimate" interests as antecedents and highly "subjective" psychological developmental and motivational issues involved in the personally "justified" decision-making of those in power. Personal justifications lean on individual associations, transferences, memories, motives, and fantasies, but they are nurtured by legitimized, lawfully guarded ideologies, myths, symbols, and rituals as well as surrounded by collective traumas and unconscious group fantasies. D'Agostino gives a realpolitik, military, media, and academic context to U.S.-NATO staging and provoking the Ukrainian hotspot and conflict to push forward the western interests—that I also called "values" in general.

The close alliance in the U.S. between Big Defense and Big Money—the “military-industrial complex” that President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about in his farewell address on January 17, 1961—has been updated during Biden’s administration, and recently researched, for example by Steinbock (2022). Eisenhower advised his successors to find a balance between a strong national defense and diplomacy in dealing with the Soviet Union. He saw the disastrous effects on democracy from misplacing power to a vast military establishment and a large arms industry. (Eisenhower, 1961.)

DECEPTIONS AND THE OLD GUARD

In my previous articles (Ihanus, 2022b; 2022c), I had to concentrate, because of the limited space available, on the mostly personal justifications of war from Putin’s side. I neither aimed to exonerate the U.S.-NATO policy nor to provide “grist for Ukrainian nationalism” but to clarify some aspects and conceptions of Russian imperialist patriotism with its long historical background in Putin’s and Russians’ mindset. The old hierarchization is still alive, especially among the political elite, placing the Great Russians on the top, followed by the White Russians (Belarusians), and, on the lowest level, the Little Russians (Ukrainians) (cf. Kuzio, 2020; 2022). Putin’s fear of the dissolution of Russia (as happened, “catastrophically,” to the USSR.) is manifest in his savior mentality, and in his effort to “build” an “all-Russian” nation with the help of centralized power (on Putin’s “historical justification” of his doctrine of one Russian people, see Putin, 2021). The internalized sense of limitless power may have deceived Putin himself to go to extremes. However, of course, there are real deceptions from the side of the Western powers and NATO, and it is impossible for Putin to accept such provocations. He has also been personally offended that the Soviet massive sacrifices in World War II have been somewhat downplayed in the West. For example, when he was not called, with others in Europe, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day of the 1944 Allied landings, he commented that the Normandy landings were only the “Second Front” in comparison with the “First Front” consisting of the Soviet troops (Hodge, 2019).

The Soviet school system that Putin went through in the 1960s was a centralized government-run system. Besides including moral education, it taught children Marxist-Leninist doctrines, testifying that the expansion of Russia belongs to the natural order of things, and the West and all the capitalist countries influenced by the western, especially American, interests and ideologies were devoid of friendship and solidarity, led by hate, anger, and revenge against the socialist countries and their legally elected regimes. It was the duty of every Russian citizen to detect the enemies of the State and to fight against reactionary doctrines.

The period of gangster capitalism ruthlessly robbed Russian national assets during Boris Yeltsin's rule, and had traumatic effects on the Russian citizens who now again experience the effects of the current sanctions. During Putin's second presidential period, there were attempts at more democratic renewals. For example, the curriculums of the schools included the more liberal-humanistic conceptions and views of history, the respect for democratic practice and peaceful international cooperation although mixed with patriotic tones. However, the old guard turned the renewals back to strict patriotism, and the Kremlin launched, in 2014, the new national history curriculum for raising Russian identity, based on Russian glorious history, and facing the new world order where western powers are supposed to have diminished, and Russia has found new associates (Aleksashkina & Zajda, 2015).

The younger Russian generations are gradually becoming more transnational, while the older guard resists globalization and the rights of "lower" national identities to even exist. For example, the ex-President and ex-Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, now the deputy chairman of the Security Council, and still Putin's loyal servant, has become increasingly hawkish and belligerent. He even denied the independent Ukrainian identity and published, in a Telegram post (July 27, 2022), an imaginary future map on which Ukraine does not exist, except in Kyiv, and Ukraine's territories are divided between other countries, all eastern and southern Ukraine belonging to Russia. In the same post, he also mentioned that the mind of the President of Ukraine was "damaged by psychotropic substances."

Of course, different shades and nuances exist. On the Ukrainian side there are also ultra-nationalist groups that have committed violent acts such as the Odessa massacre on 2 May 2014, killing Russian civilians with Ukrainian nationality. The current Ukrainian government wants to legitimate the abolition of all reminders of Russian identity, culture, and language. The preparations for "liberating" the Ukrainian identity from the Russian "yoke" has produced such phenomena as President Zelenskyy and his wife posing on the pages of *Vogue*, symbolizing the transition to the U.S.-led western consumer citizenship.

THE MAPS OF MIND AND THE ENEMY

The decisions of the Kremlin and the White House have both rational and irrational layers. Even official, "realistic" legitimations that D'Agostino refers to include irrational and unconscious aspects, but they are presented as rational and conscious. The irrational and unconscious aspects are usually more pronounced in crisis situations. When the more personal justifications come to influence the decision-making of the leaders, the twilight zone can be dangerous, touching the traumatized developmental regions

of the human mind that psychohistorians try to map with the help of their sensibilities and their transference-laden viewpoints.

The interaction between the realpolitik perspective and transference-laden viewpoints takes place in the field of private and shared emotions, memories, fantasies, and other mental states with individual, national, and cultural variations. “Realistic” monitoring of the strategic war maps is not enough and gives only partial explanations, whereas psychohistory provides the analysis and reflection of the maps of mind. For example, the imaginary maps that Medvedev presented. The psychohistorical atlas of ambivalent, tormented, and often split human emotions, intimate fantasies and group fantasies is not meant to obscure but to make more conscious the unconscious undercurrents of world power politics and their individual and cultural backgrounds.

Both “objective” legitimations and “subjective” justifications, wavering between conscious, preconscious, and unconscious layers, are present in world politics. The intrapsychic conflicts of the human mind are always involved when the cycles of abuse and the acts of violence are started, and the globally self-destructive wars waged to sacrifice “our” youth for “our” wellbeing, and to destroy “them” who do not deserve to live (Beisel, 2003; deMause, 2013). The personal and collective traumas cannot be resolved through strategic-military measures nor by exploiting and destroying the world for my/our pleasure. Images of enemies are constantly produced to maintain the facade of justice and the war industry. Sometimes the updating of enemy images lags, for example, the East-West confrontations and targeted projections during the Cold War are still reflected in the agendas of Russia, America, and NATO (Ihanus, 2022a). The goal of war machines is to run the nation’s (war) economy rather than to resolve conflicts.

The lure of fighting against the enemy is manifest, for example, in the strong enthusiasm connected with heavy weaponry: faster and faster fighter planes, bigger and more lethal hypersonic missiles, huge tanks, and aircraft carriers, heralded in political and economic forums, the media, and video war games. People feel small in front of these enormous killing systems, sensing the mixture of awe and horror because of their destructive capabilities. All military exercises and operations destroy nature and cause unforeseen amounts of risk to the environment, polluting the Earth

The sacrifice and suffering in wars go on brutally and namelessly, epitomized not in any sanctified Savior statues but in the forgotten graves of the unknown soldiers.

TRANSFERENCE AND PSYCHOHISTORY

For psychohistorians, the lack of empathic childcare and parenthood is at the core of domestic violence and wars between nations. That is why psy-

chohistorians pay so much attention to childhood experiences of the leaders and the led. The dilemma of the psychohistorian is how to combine the different layers, for example, the realpolitik legitimations and the personal justifications of war, when the psychohistorians' research is influenced by their own transferences and resistances (Ihanus, 2015). Transference is among us and them, and in-between, in everyday life and world politics, not only in the psychoanalytic setting.

Detecting and analyzing transference phenomena in the U.S.-Russia relations or in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is not psychohistorical reductionism but a pivotal element of psychohistorical research. Realpolitik as such is not enough, neither is the psychic reality, but their interplay is present when official legitimations ('it is lawful') and personal justifications ('it feels/sounds right') are used to provoke and enact the fight against the enemy. The "real history" factor that, according to D'Agostino's claim, "might actually explain the Russian leader's action" is not a sufficient explanation but a version of reductionism. Traditional historical and social science research support a stance that prioritizes "real history" and rejects developmental and personality psychology, psychobiography, group psychology, and the psychodynamic points of view.

What justifies a belief is a complex question that cannot be fully considered here. A few remarks must suffice. In philosophy, "evidentialism" stresses that the believer's possession of evidence for a certain belief justifies it. Such evidence consists of perceptual, introspective, memorial, and intuitional experiences. It is typically associated with internal determining factors, reached by reflection or other mental states. "Reliabilism" stresses that justification of a belief must be based on a reliable source, experiences being a part of that source. Reliabilism typically refers to external conditions and rational sources. Psychological factors that involve emotions, desires, needs, fantasies, and various biased psychic states are usually held to be unreliable sources. When beliefs originate from such sources, they do not really qualify as knowledge, even if true. (Steup & Neta, 2020.) Psychohistorical research in no way denies the crucial issues of external conditions and power politics, but it cannot solely rely on them when it tries to unravel the multidetermined, complex, and often irrational intermingling of internal psychological states with external conditions.

History cannot be controlled or owned, because there are always gaps and margins in the past that escape the researcher's grasp. The historian shares the same group fantasies and myths as the members of his/her community and culture. Such group fantasies and myths express, sometimes more openly, sometimes more covertly, the projected wishes of the members, as well as the personality qualities and behavioral ideals valued in the commu-

nity and culture. Group fantasies and myths can also be used for political and economic purposes (cf. Arlow, 1997; deMause, 2002). They dissipate the individual feelings of guilt, and they create the comforting illusions and anchors of reality, rationality and objectivity, banishing ambiguity and uncertainty. Group fantasies are produced, recycled and utilized in, for example, religion, politics, advertising, marketing, myths, and the media. They also influence memory and its social and political meanings and functions

The strangeness of past times (a sense of strangeness), which is also part of the historian's transference relationship with history, usually remains on the margins when familiar and safe features are recognized from the past. Such security-oriented transferences of the researcher place in history things that are already known and feelings that have already been labelled, which thus leads to misidentifications. There is also something more than just transference between history and its interpreter. In addition to individual fantasies, the historian's interpretations are influenced by group fantasies that gather material not only from communal and cultural history but also from current events.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The remembering of the past bound by group interests lacks the structured methodology, source criticism, systematicity, well-grounded claims, and self-reflection. König (2008) emphasizes that the collective memory usually works without assessing things carefully and reacts sensitively to insults, rage, and shame. A collective memory is "always a distorted, embellished and one-sided representation of the past, and as long as the past is only reminisced, we always have a more or less distorted image of it according to the wishes of the respective remembering group" (König, 2008, p. 15). König (2008, p. 16) does not mean that memories are always mistaken, but that memory and historical research both follow their own logic and do not merge with each other.

The collective memory of a community is the result of the combined effect of many actors. Professional historians are one group among many, and not necessarily the most influential. At its best, professional history can create a picture that comes from putting documents into context, which helps both individuals and communities to remember the past beyond loyalty requirements, group ties, and ideological systems. Political systems, on the other hand, use collective memory as their basis for non-scientific justification. (König, 2008, pp. 16–17.) Political interest groups select and present the events of the past for public use, by fictionalizing and mythologizing them, and by disputing competing stories and myths.

When historians interpret their sources, they also reflect themselves, their preferences, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values. They can

attach themselves to certain sources and rely on certain authorities. They do not read history like an open book and regularly assign the same unshakable truths to it. In their self-mirroring, the historians transfer their own internalized object relations and transferences to historical persons and their relationships and contextualize the actors and actions of history with the fabric of their psychic reality.

Historical research and history writing should also be viewed from the perspective of the historian's own personal history, personality development, and structure. Perhaps by doing so some biases in historical research and history writing could be better identified.

Emotion-based identities are constructed and reconstructed, staged and enacted, creatively storied and restored on the trembling web of human desires, joys, vulnerabilities, and traumas. Psychohistory may give insight into how memory and the language of emotions are in continuous dialogue with social and cultural contexts and ideologies, changing the manifestations and repressions of individual and societal symptoms. Historical circumstances may also enable malignantly narcissistic leaders to structure an external world that supports the leader's grandiosity and provides relief from his/her internal conflicts (cf. Volkan, 1980, pp. 138–139; Glad, 2002, p. 25).

By commanding and orchestrating loyal supporters, by eliminating enemies and critical opposition, and by repressing and replacing past personal conflicts and collective traumas, the leader may slip into a lonely path, out of psychic balance, with “no face-saving exit” (Glad, 2002, p. 34). The lonely tyrant's route may collapse and lead the tyrant to express apocalyptic visions for no future: “... one can believe that the horsemen of the Apocalypse are already on their way and all hope is in Almighty God,” as Medvedev put it in an interview (June 15, 2022; quoted by Brugen, 2022).

Continuing the theme, Putin stated (August 1, 2022) in his letter to the participants at a UN conference to reaffirm the nuclear non-proliferation treaty: “We proceed from the fact that there can be no winners in a nuclear war and it should never be unleashed, and we stand for equal and indivisible security for all members of the world community” (Simko-Bednarski, 2022). At the same conference, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reminded the gathered politicians and diplomats about the “nuclear undertones,” reminding them that “future generations are counting on your commitment to step back from the abyss” (Simko-Bednarski, 2022). An echo from Eisenhower's farewell address to the American nation is still relevant today: “As we peer into society's future, we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiri-

tual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.” He insisted that the world should not become “a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect” (Eisenhower, 1961).

The free rational choice of mind, intentionality and the setting of goals can be surrounded by narcissistic drives, hidden desires, and the delusions of absolute power and mastery. What would happen if the leaders were replaced by social robots that would coordinate and structure political and institutional practices by programmed rules, scenarios, and values? Would the Apocalypse be decided more realistically, without any vain passions?

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response BRIAN D'AGOSTINO

Brian D'Agostino's Concluding Reply to Ihanus and Beisel

In his response to my article, Juhani Ihanus writes: "The 'real history' factor [U.S. and NATO threat to Russian security] that, according to D'Agostino's claim, 'might actually explain the Russian leader's action' is not a sufficient explanation but a version of reductionism. Traditional historical research and social sciences tend to support such a stance that prioritizes 'real history' and rejects developmental and personality psychology, psychobiography, group psychology, and the psychodynamic points of view." Similarly, David Beisel suggests that my essay exhibits a "near-ex-

clusive focus on externals” and that I “rush to prove only one side of the psychohistorical equation.”

There are three issues here. First, what I wrote above in “Psychohistory, Ideology and Ukraine” is a critique of and corrective to the *Clio's Psyche* articles by Ihanus and Beisel, not an attempt to provide a comprehensive psychohistorical account of Putin and Ukraine. Inasmuch as these authors in their replies provide a corrective to my corrective, I substantially agree with them. In fact, I have a number of peer-reviewed publications in political psychology that examine motivation, psychodynamic effects, and other psychohistorical topics not addressed in my current article.

Second, however, it is not entirely correct that my article focuses on “externals;” more fundamentally, it is a critique of ideology. In their responses, neither Ihanus nor Beisel engage the main point of my article: that in the context of the current war, talking only about Putin’s psyche and the experiences that shaped it functions ideologically to blame Putin for the war and implicitly exonerate the U.S. and NATO for their roles. I made a point of saying that neither author is a propagandist, but regardless of their intentions as scholars, what they chose to talk about and what to omit had the effect of legitimizing American and NATO’s militarism. My reconstruction of US-Russian relations was not in the first instance a conventional “realist” exercise, which I fully understand is one-sided, but an effort to show how the dominant narrative in the U.S. falsifies history in the service of legitimizing American military hegemony.

This leads to my third point—the unique position of the United States in the current world order. Beisel writes that in my “rush to indict the capitalist system and U.S. imperialism [I] inadvertently exonerate Putin” and that my article exhibits “Either/Or Thinking.” However, in addition to being a corrective and a critique of ideology, my article takes account of a fundamental asymmetry of power between the United States and Russia at the present time. The United States is currently the only global superpower. The world’s five most heavily armed states with their 2021 levels of military spending (in billions of U.S. dollars) are as follows: The U.S. (801.0), China (293.0), India (76.6), United Kingdom (68.4), and Russia (65.9) (Tian et al, 2022).

The fact that the U.S. spends more than 12 times as much on its military as Russia is only one measure of the lopsided power imbalance between the two countries. Comparing GDP, another measure of national power, reveals an even more stark imbalance: U.S. GDP in 2022 (largest in the world) was 25.3 trillion US dollars, compared with Russia’s 1.8 trillion (11th in the world; International Monetary Fund, 2022). In other words, the U.S. economy dwarfs Russia’s by a factor of more than 14.

As in my article, the point here is not to recite “external” facts for the sake of facts or realist reductionism, but rather as a reality check on ideology and fantasy, in this case the notion that the U.S. and Russia are comparably matched players on the geopolitical stage. It takes two to tango, but only one to exercise global military hegemony. Russia finds itself in a reactive position because the U.S. projects power in Eastern Europe and in the world on a scale that far exceeds the former’s capabilities.

In the context of talking about military power, Beisel writes: “In Brian’s rendering, when the U.S. follows its national interests it is ‘bullying, humiliating, threatening and provoking.’” First, the only legitimate objectives of military force today are self-defense and collective security, not pursuit of “national interests.” Second, whose interests, exactly, does the American empire serve? The middle-class taxpayers who disproportionately fund the country’s war machine, or the corporations and their shareholders who disproportionately benefit from it? For a further critique of state capitalist ideologies, I refer the reader to my book, *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America*.

Regarding the 2014 coup in Ukraine, Beisel notes that the article by Branco Marcetic that I cited does not document my claims about CIA involvement. Point well taken. What is certainly well documented, however, is the role of the US government in supporting the coup, particularly through the actions of then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, in concert with the publicly funded National Endowment for Democracy (Carpenter, 2017; Klarenberg, 2022; Sakwa, 2022). And for the record, I never said or implied that “Washington orchestrated the Maidan uprising,” only that the coup in which it culminated was a joint project of Ukrainian fascists and the U.S.

Beisel also insinuates that the journal *Jacobin* in which Marcetic’s article appeared is “an arm of hard-left socialism and an instrument of socialist propaganda.” This exemplifies what I noted in my concluding paragraph: how the accusation of being ideological is selectively deployed against “the left” (or “the right,” for that matter), while “mainstream” authors assume the mantle of pure and apolitical scholarship. Yet Beisel’s comment is itself ideological, calling this double standard into question.

I conclude by reflecting on these observations from Juhani Ihanus:

During Putin’s second presidential period, there were attempts at more democratic renewals. . . However, the old guard turned the renewals back to strict patriotism . . . Dmitry Medvedev, now the deputy chairman of the Security Council, and still Putin’s loyal servant, has become increasingly hawkish and belligerent.

Indeed. And what, exactly, was the larger historical context of this trend in the Kremlin? Had the U.S. played its geopolitical cards differently and made peace with Russia in the decades after the Cold War, would Putin and the old guard still be so belligerent today? We will never know for certain, but it is plausible that different policies would have produced different outcomes.

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