Tucker Carlson's interview with Vladimir Putin may be the most significant event in journalism within the past decade.[1] It is a meeting of worlds. One the post-Christian, liberal world of the West dominated by the United States, emerging triumphantly out of the Cold War, and the other a coalition of new economies formed by older traditions like Orthodoxy, Hinduism, and Islam in a post-Soviet world. The Russian Federation is undoubtedly one of the most influential, if not the most influential, countries in this coalition, and it has come into direct conflict with the West over Ukraine's status within the past few years. This other side of the world largely hasn't received a platform in Western media to justify itself. Supposing it did, this would be an existential threat to the Liberal order, whose narrative relies on the Whig narrative of history. With that naïve vision, things are constantly better due to Western liberal values. If things weren't so good in the West and other nations had an alternative that resulted in improvement, perhaps the citizens of the West would start desiring a return to its own traditional values of Christianity, of traditional Catholicism.

But Russia finally got its platform, and the very leader of Russia had his chance to justify his alternative to the West. But we shouldn't assume that simply because Putin is against the Liberal order that his narrative is correct; his claims need to be examined independently. And as for Putin, he began with history.

The Russian Challenge to the Western Mind

The Ukraine-Russia conflict is the image of the struggle between the two worlds, so the justification for the war remains the most crucial topic for this dialogue. Putin's claim is multi-pronged, but all of his points are incredibly influenced by his view of history going back over 1000 years. To Americans to preface a political argument with a 30-minute-long overview of history is unheard of, as demonstrated by Tucker Carlson's initial frustration. It is refreshing to see cogent thought and depth from a politician. However, it should be noted that simply making a complex, multi-faceted historical argument doesn't automatically make it accurate, and we should be alert to potential deception. To quote the Russian proverb, *trust but verify*. Indeed, it is a common propaganda tactic to create a sizeable historical narrative, insert a big lie in the midst of it, and then build the rest of the argument on top of the lie. Arguments based on historical claims work like any other argument. If one of the premises is false, the argument is invalid.

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Unraveling the "Centralized Russian State" Narrative

Central to Putin's claim is that the lands that Russia occupies in Eastern Ukraine have had a historical relationship with a centralized Russian state. Putin's overview of Russian history generally demonstrates a certain degree of knowledge on the subject, and his overview serves as a good general introduction to the events surrounding the origins of Russia. However, despite being eloquent, Putin fumbles in pinpointing when exactly a centralized Russian state emerged. At one point, he says it was in 862 when the Rurikid dynasty was established as head of the ancient Kyivan Rus nation, which Putin often refers to as Russia; in another place, he says the centralized state took shape when the Kyivan Rus converted to Christianity under Prince Vladimir. Putin also says that a unified Russian state only began to take shape in Moscow after the Mongol invasion. All of these claims would be false. The early Kyivan Rus' cannot be called a "centralized Russian state" first because it wasn't centralized. The Rus' was ruled by various princes with separate jurisdictions, more approximating a feudal state than a centralized one. It also wasn't *Russian* in the modern

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sense of the term. It wasn't religiously homogenous until Prince Vladimir and was not ethnically or linguistically homogenous, which makes calling it a specifically "Russian" centralized state even more incorrect.[2] What we now call "Russians" are the people that developed out of the princedom of Muscovy after much of the Kyivan Rus was taken by Mongols. Moscow itself wasn't even considered Rus' land until around the 14th century, being initially a backwater town. It was due to luck and the sheer cunning of the Muscovite princes that it became the center of what would later become Russia. This state wouldn't even become centralized in the modern sense of the term until Ivan the Terrible and his Oprichnina policy. This is quite important; as I detail in my article for the February paper, one of the critical issues of the war is whether or not the Russian or Ukrainian state was the inheritor to the legacy of the ancient Kyivan Rus nation. The answer to this question is that both are inheritors to the legacy in different ways. Both descend from it.

The Many-Faced Russian Identity

In essence, Putin's version of history is very much so in the tradition of Russian scholarship. Men like Vasily Klyuchevsky posited that there was an "All-Russian" nation, divided into "Little Russian" or "Ukrainian" and "Great Russian" parts. Putin doesn't use those terms but instead conflates them all together without distinction. When he speaks about the Kyivan Rus being partially occupied by Poles, he doesn't say that it was the "Little Russians" occupied by Poland, but just Russians. He states this explicitly: "I say that Ukrainians are part of the one Russian people." And gives documents about the Little Russians asking Russia for help as evidence. Putin conveniently leaves out the extensive historical documentation showing how the Muscovite Russians looked down upon the so-called "Little Russians" as being corrupted by the Latin West, insisting on their rebaptism even dating back to 1620 and the tsar's insistence that his rule only extended over Great Rus', and not Little Rus.'[3] Those documents conveniently were not given to Carlson. Why this sort of language would want to be used by, say, Russians living during the time of the late Russian Empire is evident, as it justified the territorial gains by the state that ethnic Russians dominated. However, Putin's idea of what constitutes Russia itself isn't so simple, making his insistence on this language odd.

Judging by Putin's words, the Russian Federation is a type of contradiction. At once, it is an ethnically Russian nation; at the same time, it is not, but a motherland to many different peoples as long as they share "traditional values." At present, Russia is a bastion for Orthodoxy; at the same time, the Quran is protected and Russia is "loyal" to other religions. One has to ask how this doesn't wholly dismantle Vladimir Putin's argument. If the Russian nation isn't based upon a Russian racial identity, then what point is it in saying that the Ukrainians are a part of that Russian identity? Suppose a broad Orthodoxy and vague

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"traditional values" are central to what makes Russia different. How is that different from the classical liberalism of America, a nation most certainly founded with a Protestant culture but also had many other traditions with similar but different core values?



Beyond Bolshevism

Despite the contradictory nature of many of Putin's statements, what I hope is evident is that he is not promoting a form of Marxism or Communism. One of the interview's big takeaways is that Putin wants to distance himself from Bolshevism and the Communist legacy. He looks forward to something new. Some might be skeptical about this; many of us have seen Russian soldiers carrying Soviet banners and know that Putin was a former KGB agent. But some fail to see that for Putin, what is most important is that Russia survives and thrives as a nation-state. His entire historical narrative is about justifying Russia as a nation-state, and the Soviet Union is simply a piece of that puzzle. The Soviet Union and its activities in the first half of the 20th century were about preserving Russian statehood

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against Nazism, which for us has many connotations of racial supremacy and nationalism. For Russians, Nazism means a threat to the existence of a Russian state. It's part of a tremendous national myth that the Russian people have always relied on, even going back to the *Zadonshchina* national poem of the Muscovite prince fighting off the hordes of Tatars. The parades and praises celebrating the "Great Patriotic War" are not about nostalgia for Communism or any particular set of Soviet policies but simply about celebrating Russian nationhood. Part of the problem with the modern Russian narrative concerning the USSR is that it isn't entirely historically accurate and consistent with Putin's claim. Putin has a few moments where he says that Lenin, "For some unknown reason," created an autonomous Ukrainian SSR and engaged in Ukrainianization. It was not for some unknown reason but because distinct people were living in the area, and the Soviets were not National Socialists but International Socialists. For the Communists, the goal was to bring all people under an international communist movement rather than a dominant master race, as we saw in Hitler's new Germany. The Soviets had a vested interest in making sure that the Ukrainians were established as their people with their own Communist party and system. Putin goes on to say that the borders and nation of Ukraine are entirely artificial and created at Stalin's whims. To some extent, I think Russia has a legitimate point here. If certain areas that are more Russian were put under the Ukrainian SSR imprudently, like the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that Russia has occupied, in that case, I hold that there might be a legitimate claim for Putin to retain those territories. However, when Russia is seemingly on the fence about whether or not its identity is determined by its racial group or even religion, it seems pointless to quibble about Ukraine's lands not all being ethnically Ukrainian, as many regions with the Russian Federation aren't ethnically Russian, another example of the inconsistency within the argument.

From Soviet Shadows: Russia's Quest for a New Place

For Putin, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that Russia could adopt a market economy and join the wider world as a more prosperous nation-state, but this most certainly did not happen. I believe the most convincing part of the interview is Putin's description of Russia's relationship with NATO during the fall of the USSR. Whether Putin is truthful or not about his true intent, optics matter. Putin gives off the impression that he would have wanted as close of a relationship as possible with NATO; he even floated the possibility of Russia joining NATO after the fall of the USSR. As Putin says: "The former Russian leadership assumed that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and therefore there were no longer any ideological dividing lines.": This should be important to all sides of this argument. Russian leadership saw no ideological difference between the new Russia and the West. So those claiming that Russia, by its very fabric, is traditional and against the errors of the West should realize from this statement and the others prior that Russia was and still is

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influenced by Western, Liberal ideology to the point where they see no essential difference between the two. On the other hand, it should show that Russia is not some beast trying to do everything it can to re-establish the USSR, and so should have been given an open-hand invitation to join the broader Western World. Instead, they were met with rebuke and were forced to forge a new ideology, not based on communism or Liberalism, but something developing and entirely new, a spirit still developing to this day within the broad BRICS economic bloc.

I believe this is what we are seeing today, but so many are missing due to an insistence on viewing everything through the lens of the Cold War. Due to being rejected by the Liberal West and outgrowing the failed Soviet economy, Russia is joining a myriad of other nations in developing a new vision for the future. It's not entirely good, it's not altogether bad, and it is in need of being restored in Christ. What Putin does is identify a problem with the West and its Babylonic activities but let Putin and his supporters consider the foundation of their principles and their coherency and sanctity. Let them take heed, lest they go out of the frying pan and into the fire.

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[1] All quotes are from https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/tucker-carlson-interviews-vladimir-putin-transcript

[2] For more on this, see my article from the February Paper *The Struggle for the* Kyivan *Patrimony*

[3] See Sergei Plokhii's *Origins of the Slavic Nations* p231-235

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