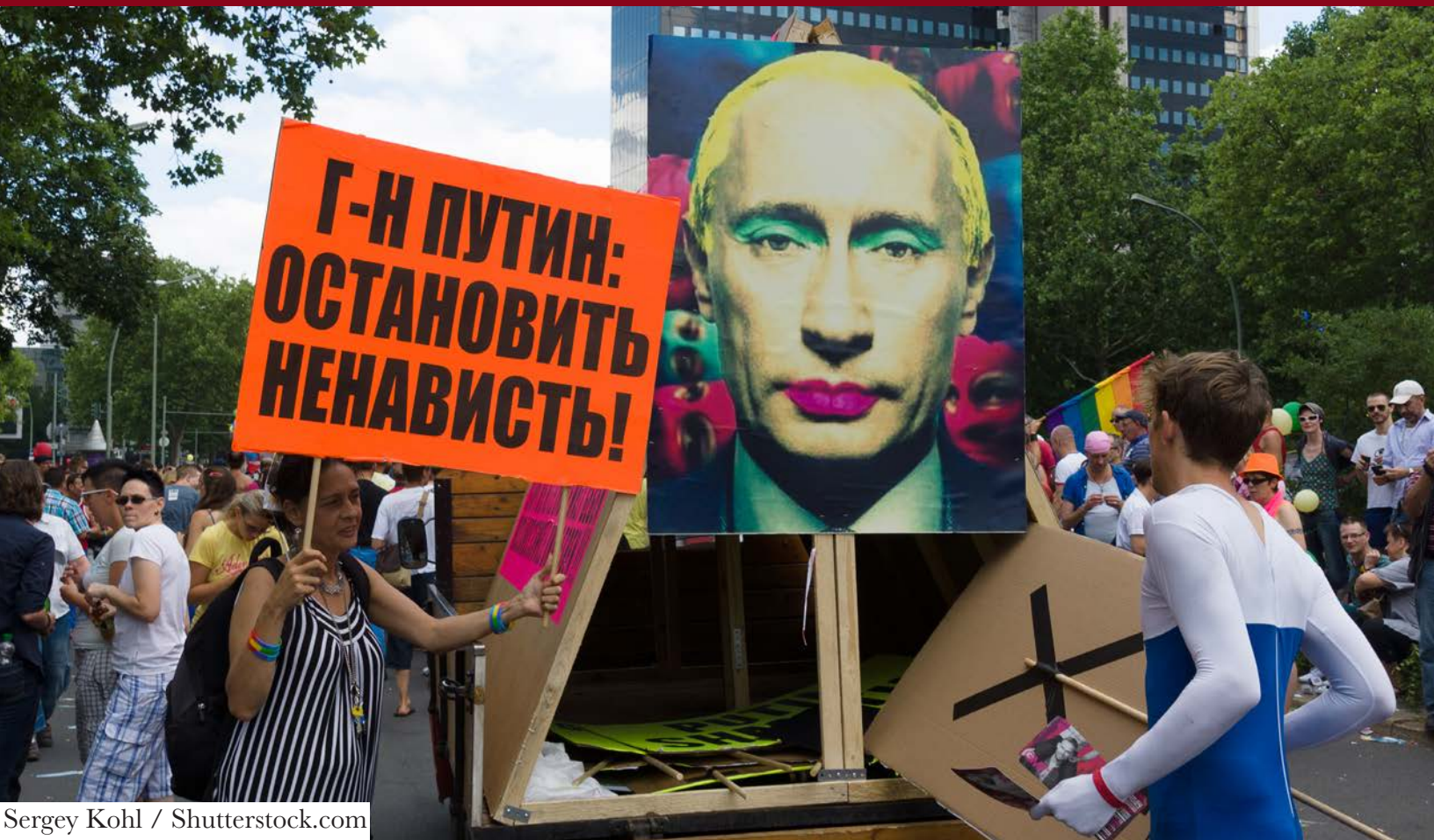


Nursing Injustices:

An Unsparing Psychological Profile of Vladimir Putin
will Reveal a Deeply Vulnerable Kremlin Leader

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Since seizing control of the Kremlin 21 years ago, Vladimir Putin has waged an image-making campaign to build himself as the savior of Russia. The country's leadership has always been enigmatic to outsiders, but Putin has presented special riddles as to his actions, motivations, and goals, even today. Many critics, at home and in the West, paint him as nearly invincible. Some astute observers say he nurses profound personal vulnerabilities ripe for exploitation.

Effective exploitation of Putin's weak points requires a certain degree of political incorrectness that few Kremlin-watchers or geostrategists seem willing to risk. That reluctance has squandered endless opportunities to hem in the Russian dictator without risking harm to the Russian people, or armed conflict beyond Russia's borders.

While Russian leaders generally have had a mysterious outward persona, Putin seems to present special riddles as to his actions, motivations, and goals. Indeed, the Kremlinology profession has gotten no closer to understanding Putin today than it did

more than twenty years ago, when many of those experts welcomed Putin as a focal point of order after the unpredictable rule of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. As such, policymakers must ask themselves if their strategy has weakened Putin's iron grip on power or, to the contrary, has strengthened it all along. The old carrot-and-stick approach to the Kremlin leader, resting mostly on ever-tightening sanctions that have caused considerable economic damage but failed to open Russia, have indeed failed.

In the more than two decades of Putin's rule, descriptions of him and prescriptions about what to do with him, if anything, have played into his propagandistic image of himself as all-powerful and even invincible. Many observers seem to forget that, of course, Putin is only a man. As with all human beings, Putin has his own inner psyche. Yet there has been little attempt to exploit, let alone understand, Putin's inner psyche for purposes of statecraft.

The idea is nothing new. The late Jerrold M. Post, who founded and for years ran the CIA's Center for

the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior, explained the importance of understanding the inner psyche of world leaders, citing a 1969 work on personality and politics:

“A leader’s personality may be especially important under four conditions: when the actor occupies a strategic location, when the situation is ambiguous or unstable, when there are no clear precedents or routine role requirements, and when spontaneous or especially effortful behavior is required. These conditions stress the importance of the context in which the actor is operating, observing that the impact of leader personality increases to the degree that the environment admits of restructuring.”¹

The only consensus is that Putin is paradoxical. It takes no particular training or skill to reach that conclusion. Concomitantly, the reaction to Putin by other world leaders, whether German Chancellor Angela Merkel or any American president, be it Barack Obama, Donald Trump, or Joe Biden, is also paradoxical.

The usual explanations for the Kremlin leader’s actions fall into one of four categories: Putin seeks to increase his power and political longevity; enrich himself and his cronies; reimpose Russia as a serious Eurasian if not global power; and make a world “safe for autocrats” by corrupting or coercing foreign elites; or a combination of the above.

Kremlinologists then make predictions based on these assumptions. But then Putin somehow baffles them once again. An example at the time of this writing is how the Kremlin moved toward completion of its signature geopolitical project, the Nord Stream 2

gas pipeline to Germany, while bypassing Ukraine and Poland. Moscow craftily overcame waves of opposition and sanctions, through much perseverance, political cooptation, influence money, and intelligence tradecraft. Then came the poisoning of opposition figure Aleksei Navalny, an incident that got senior German politicians (usually shy towards, when not receptive to, Moscow’s machinations) talking openly about cancelling Nord Stream 2. And just when Putin was vehemently denying poisoning or harassing Navalny, and gaining echo among influential European apologists, came the news that Navalny’s properties were being seized by the authorities in Moscow as the poisoned victim was barely emerging from his coma in Berlin. Navalny then was arrested upon his return to Moscow under clearly trumped-up charges, sparking protests across the entire breadth of Russia.

So then Kremlinologists recur to admitting that Putin’s quirky personality may affect policy outcomes that are otherwise not easily explained, and may even put at risk larger political goals. Understanding them can lead to more positive outcomes.

Psychological profiling has been described as more of an art than a science, since it almost never permits clinical study of the person being studied. Non-clinical psychological assessments are insufficient to draw medical conclusions. The four psychologists consulted for this study emphasized this. A 2008 “movement patterns analysis” study by the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment—the office that performs deep research to develop long-range strategic military planning—tentatively concluded that Putin suffers from a “neurological abnormality” developed before he was born, an autism spectrum disorder called Asperger’s syndrome. The military researchers, who based their assessment on Putin’s unique physical motions, said that they were unable to prove their

theory without being able to “perform a brain scan on the Russian president.”² One of the researchers, Dr. Stephen Porges of the University of North Carolina, disagreed with the Asperger’s assessment but did advise, in the words of a news report, that American officials “needed to find quieter settings in which to deal with Putin, whose behavior and facial expressions reveal someone who is defensive in large social settings.” In Porges’ own words, “If you need to do things with him, you don’t want to be in a big state affair but more of one-on-one situation someplace somewhere quiet.”³

Ian H. Robertson, a neuropsychologist at the University of Texas in Dallas, wrote “After 15 years in power, psychological factors have to be taken into consideration in analyzing Putin’s actions and, more importantly, in deciding how to respond to them. And contempt must be considered as one of the most important elements of his psychology. It is not only contempt for what he almost regards as weak—and possibly, in his macho world view, effeminate—western leaders. More important is his contempt for their institutions such as international treaties and laws.”⁴

Nursing Injustices

Betraying his image of confidence and strength is Putin’s nursing of grievances, real and imagined. Nina Khrushcheva and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, among others, have written brilliantly on Putin’s knack for injustice-collecting.⁵ A Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy biography on Putin, an open-source psychological profile, contains chapters on Putin’s multiple and made-up identities.⁶ Anders Åslund has elaborated extensively on Putin’s grand theft and neurotic relation to money.⁷ Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson have an entire book on Putin’s

inordinate malice.⁸

Something about Putin personifies Russia and Russian-ness, or at least that’s how Putin’s image-makers have wanted it to seem. Yet there is something about Putin that is decidedly unacceptable in Russian culture, particularly in the grand tradition that he purports to guard and revive. It is this aspect of Putin’s internal being—that the Russian leader likely believes that the real Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin never would be accepted in his own country—that merits careful study. In this article, we can only begin to launch a discussion of the subject, a learned speculation based on the art of psychological profiling and the impolite trades of psychological warfare and political subversion.

Psychological Profiling

Psychological profiling is part of the political psychology field of “leadership analysis,” an interdisciplinary approach that creates psychobiographies of leaders to understand their traits, thought processes, worldviews, strengths, and weaknesses. Every aspect of the leader’s psychological life is dissected and studied: neurological, cultural, philosophical, spiritual, moral, habitual, rational and irrational, even sexual.

For intelligence purposes, psychological profiling generally permits no personal access, or “evaluation and consent,” to the figure being profiled; here it is an assessment for national security policy, not a medical diagnosis. As with medical psychology, psychological profiling makes no value judgments about traits and behaviors, but unlike medical psychology, psychological profiling is intended as a tool to exploit or manipulate the traits and behaviors of the profiled individual. The late Yale- and Harvard-trained psychiatrist Jerrold M. Post founded the CIA’s Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior to profile foreign

leaders as an aid to diplomacy and decision-making.⁹ President Jimmy Carter used Post's psychological profiling of Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to shepherd the 1978 Camp David peace agreement between both countries.¹⁰ Usually the U.S. does not acknowledge its psychological profiling of foreign leaders, but the practice has been an important tool of U.S. intelligence since the United States became a world power.

It began with the war to defeat Nazi Germany. During World War II, the U.S. initiated psychoanalysis as an intelligence discipline to assess the psychology of Adolf Hitler, understand the man and his innermost motivations and fears, and exploit Hitler's personal vulnerabilities to win the war. OSS produced two major reports: one led by Harvard psychoanalyst Walter C. Langer,¹¹ and the other by Harvard psychologist Henry A. Murray who had begun his work independently in 1932.¹² Langer apparently had no access to or even knowledge of Murray's earlier work,¹³ yet the separate profiles accurately predicted Hitler's behavior as the war would turn against him, his fear of facing the public in the midst of failure, his behavior that would provoke an insider assassination attempt, and his suicide.

Decades later, Jerrold Post commented on the Murray study, which was more detailed but less organized and analytical than Langer's assessment: "the author observes that Hitler's 'sex life is as dual as his political outlook. He is both homosexual and heterosexual; both Socialist and fervent Nationalist; both man and woman.'" ¹⁴

Langer stated in his preface that his report "represents an attempt to screen the wealth of contradictory, conflicting and unreliable material concerning Hitler into strata which will be helpful to the policy-makers

and those who wish to frame a counter-propaganda," what today would be called a counter-narrative.

The Langer psychoanalysis consists of five parts: "Hitler as he believes himself to be," "Hitler as the German people know him," "Hitler as his associates know him," "Hitler as he knows himself," and a "Psychological analysis and reconstruction."

The Langer and Murray reports deeply explored Hitler's sexuality and "psychosexual development," with Langer going into vividly explicit detail, ranging from Hitler having no interest in sex at all, to being a "chronic masturbator," a voyeur, or impotent. "Others, and these are perhaps in the majority, that he is a homosexual," Langer wrote, "It is probably true that he is impotent but he is certainly not homosexual in the ordinary sense of the term. ... He is an extreme masochist who derives sexual pleasure from a woman" performing extremely degrading functions on him, which Langer detailed.

All four participants in the Langer study, along with a fifth scholar who learned from other sources, "agree that the information as given is probably true in view of their clinical experience and their knowledge of Hitler's character."¹⁵ Langer concluded that Hitler's psychosexual repression resulted in him not having permitted himself "to a really intimate relationship with either man or woman,"¹⁶ that he performed a submissive role with both men and women into his early adulthood,¹⁷ and that he was likely a physically impotent heterosexual and a passive but inactive homosexual.¹⁸ According to Langer, despite affairs with at least two actresses and a relationship with Eva Braun that began in 1932, "It does seem that Hitler feels much more at ease with homosexuals than with [heterosexual] persons, but this may be due to the fact that they are all fundamentally social outcasts

and consequently have a community of interests which tends to make them think and feel more or less alike.”¹⁹

That community developed “during the early days of the [Nazi] Party [when] many of the inner circle were well-known homosexuals,” according to Langer.²⁰ Said one former Hitler associate cited in the OSS report, “Surreptitious relationships, substitutes and symbols, false sentiments and secret lusts—nothing in this man’s surroundings is natural and genuine, nothing has the openness of natural instinct.”²¹

The conclusion of the OSS report was that Hitler had a profound fear of ostracism about his sexuality, and that that fear could be exploited by the Allies to win the war and secure the peace. Of all likely scenarios for Hitler’s demise as the war dragged Germany down, the psychological profile concluded, “Hitler might commit suicide. This is the most plausible outcome.”²²

Putin’s Psychological Profile

As harsh as criticism of him can be, Putin is no Hitler. However, the Russian strongman does appear to suffer from personality disorders and psychopathologies that, in an ordinary person, would merit understanding and compassion. In Putin’s case, however, where issues of war and peace are at stake, they represent personal vulnerabilities that, properly exploited, constitute weaknesses in his personalist regime. As such, the disorders of the Russian leader are, in the end, a matter of geopolitics and statecraft and merit serious discussion.

Post, the former CIA profiler, made no public mention of Putin’s sexuality but assessed him as suffering from childhood or adolescent abuse . “Teased and bullied at school, in response to any insults or criticism, Putin

immediately responded viciously to his tormenters,” Post said as the psychiatrist co-author of an article with Jennifer McNamara. “This was an early example of narcissistic dynamics—an exaggerated defense overcompensating for his underlying insecurity. Putin was also incapable of handling criticism from teachers, openly expressing outrage at being reprimanded.”²³ That extreme sensitivity and outrage would manifest itself outwardly from the Kremlin, McNamara and Post added:

“As president, Putin continues to react intensely to criticism as any oligarch or journalist who criticizes or opposes him is likely to find themselves in prison or dead.

“From boyhood on, Putin has been intensely ambitious, setting his sights on becoming a KGB spy and staying doggedly focused on the path to achieve this. Putin explains that he was drawn to this career by the realization that ‘one spy could decide the fate of thousands of people’—reflecting his narcissistic dreams of glory.

“Arranged stunts and photos showcasing his machismo are indisputable evidence of Putin’s extreme narcissism. These include riding horseback while bare-chested and fitting a tranquilized tiger with a GPS satellite transmitter. Each stunt is intended to convey the image of Putin as fearless, powerful and in control. It also is notable that these photo-shoots increased dramatically in 2008 when Putin became Prime Minister and was

replaced by Medvedev.”²⁴

Putin over-compensated. McNamara and Post described Putin as “A brutally ruthless dictator ... obsessed with masculinity, power, size and strength,” an obsession “(possibly) the result of being bullied as a kid (he’s 5 feet 6 inches).” Putin used to express outrage for being reprimanded and continues to react intensely to criticism: “any oligarch or journalist who criticizes or opposes him is likely to find themselves in prison or dead.”²⁵

Georgetown University Professor Andrew Kuchins addressed the question that few dare ask: Is Putin’s behavior rooted in repressed sexuality, and if so, is it of a repressed homosexual? In a 2015 social media post, Kuchins commented, “Having to repress his homosexuality may explain a good deal of aberrant behavior.”²⁶ Another leading Kremlinologist, Dr. Carol Saivetz of MIT, answered, “It’s been rumored for a long time.”²⁷

The Problem about Proof

Rumors about personal lives prove nothing. However, in intelligence analysis, as the OSS studies of Hitler showed, rumors about world leaders can contain vital leads about where else to search and whom to ask. They also provide clues about political behavior and offer insights for policymakers to exploit or shape that behavior.

Some rumors are often little more than political ammunition, though when dealing with political figures, they can offer insights when carefully assessed. Critic Stanislav Belkovsky wrote in a 2013 biography that Putin is a lonely person who is “latently gay.”²⁸ Putin is described as the “weak son of an alcoholic” and a “deeply lonely politician” who prefers the company of animals to people. A Kremlin image-

making team allegedly created a phony story of Putin having an affair with an Olympic gymnast to show off his purported sexual prowess and cover up his inner torments.²⁹ From New York, BuzzFeed ran a feature titled “The 16 Most Homoerotic Photos of Vladimir Putin.”³⁰

Those two examples are speculation from an outspoken political opponent and snarky ridicule in response to Putin’s crackdown on gay “propaganda” from a particular year. They would not survive academic scrutiny in and of themselves. But they do offer tentative reference points. Putin and his supporters have given philosophical reasons why homosexual expression and symbolism were to be driven out of Russian public life, citing a return to Orthodox Christian moral values and a movement away from libertine Western society. Those in themselves are spiritual or theological, not psychological, motivations.

However, many Putin observers and biographers touched upon the personality disorders and psychopathologies associated with gay men who are either in denial or live clandestinely, as described by both classic and modern psychotherapists. This is where a psychobiography of Putin is important, since he was raised as an atheist in Marxist-Leninist society with no beliefs of his own in a society that rejected critical thinking and self-expression, and he has no known youthful background in Christian theology or Biblical moral tradition.

Other leading academic specialists on Russia have more openly speculated for a long time that Putin’s actions may be from a repressed homosexual orientation. They are reluctant to discuss it openly, not only because of political correctness and fear for their academic positions, but because none of their training (mostly in history or political science) has taught them

how the study of psychosexuality may aid in assessing Putin's personality and therefore his governance.

Kuchins and Saivetz represent rare instances when reputable Russia-watchers and insiders shyly spill out into the public what they often talk about in private with colleagues or Russian contacts. A former prominent Russian official who knew Putin during their teenage years in Leningrad told the authors at a Harvard event that Putin had been part of a street gang that raped boys whom they considered weak or effeminate. He did not know whether the practice was out of sexual orientation or as a means of insecure adolescents to dominate and humiliate.³¹

Other observers are bolder. A Russian gay leader once urged Putin to come out “for everyone’s sake.” Former Russian domestic intelligence officer Aleksandr Litvinenko, a veteran of the Federal Security Service (FSB) who defected to London, wrote an article in 2006 describing Putin as a “pedophile” with an interest in small boys. Litvinenko said he learned the secret in the late 1990s: “when Putin became the FSB director and was preparing for the presidency, he began to seek and destroy any compromising materials” that the KGB had collected. “Among other things, Putin found videotapes in the FSB Internal Security Directorate, which showed him making sex with some underage boys.”³² A Russian government death squad later murdered Litvinenko with radioactive polonium, with a British inquiry later concluding that Putin “probably” gave the orders personally.³³

For a strong, alpha-male leader, Putin has shown unusual sensitivity to being called gay. As a result, it has become standard fare for Russian activists to sport a meme of the Kremlin leader’s face made up in drag, superimposed over rainbow colors. The regime made that meme illegal—an action that became

subject of an article in the U.S. Army’s professional scholarly journal to discuss how the United States could use ridicule as a non-kinetic weapon against the Kremlin.³⁴

The repressed part of Putin’s psyche could be the “dark energy / dark matter” that, combined with more explicable motivations, may help finally unravel the paradox of Putin.

To be sure, we may never know with certainty Putin’s true sexual orientation or history and again, were he an individual with no particular political or military power, there would be no cause for interest. One of the four psychologists consulted on this Putin case mentioned that, while there are unmistakable parallels, some of the psychopathologies prevalent in gay men in denial explored above are also evident in patients who were abused as children or adolescents. The OSS found the same in its 1943 psychological profile of Hitler.³⁵

Putin’s “Internalized Homophobia”

Scholarly literature on the psychology and history of gay men in denial reveal patterns that permit a modern psychological profiler to apply to Putin. Four reasons suggest that the chance of Putin being a gay man in denial is greater than the mathematical probability of the proportion of these individuals in any random male adult population.

First of all, the issue is not whether Putin is gay, but whether he is in denial or otherwise feels internally tormented, repressed, or ostracized, which in turn drives his dangerous traits as leader of Russia. Homosexuality is not the issue to exploit. Putin’s apparent denial or repression of his supposed homosexuality is what makes him—and therefore his regime—very vulnerable if Western leaders or

domestic rivals know how to play it.³⁶

The first of the four reasons comes from the many parallels between Putin's words and behaviors and the classic works on gay men in denial, as published by scholars and medical professionals whose lives were dedicated to studying and counseling patients with this profile.

These classics include two of Sigmund Freud's contemporaries: Edmund Bergler and Carl Jung, both of whom wrote about the psychology of homosexuality. Jung influenced the Harvard psychological profilers of Hitler for the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) intelligence service in Switzerland during the war. Jung had been working with the British since 1941. After the U.S. entered the war, the OSS recruited Jung as "Agent 488" to help the Allies understand the mind of the Führer, and to understand the psyche of the wartime German population. General Dwight Eisenhower read Jung's work to devise ways to persuade the German public to accept Allied defeat. Jung as an OSS asset, who doubtlessly shaped the OSS psychological profiles of Hitler, would not be revealed for decades.³⁷

Freud's student Bergler, a controversial psychoanalytical pioneer, dedicated his entire career to counseling gay men in denial living in those less-tolerant times in the West—times that fairly can be said to characterize much of Russia today.³⁸ Many of these gay men had families and careers and were living a secret double life. Bergler documents in three books the stresses and psychopathologies these gay men suffered, plus the self-defeating and aggressive behaviors these psychopathologies provoked in his patients.

These books, published in the 1950s, help form a psychological profile of Vladimir Putin.

For example, Bergler found that cruelty toward other gays is a "telltale sign" of gay men in denial. Putin has been harassing gays since before he came to power, and probably since puberty. Gorbachev and Yeltsin never harassed gays, nor did they obsessively accuse others of being gay, as Putin frequently does. Modern psychologists call Putin's actions "defensive projection" and "internalized sexual stigma" or "internalized homophobia," with "perceptions of community" being an important factor.³⁹

Of the twenty "telltale indices of homosexuality" in men that Bergler identified,⁴⁰ eleven are evidently associated with Vladimir Putin, two are not, and the remaining seven remain unknown and unavailable to study (as these relate to inner thoughts and feelings that cannot be studied without Putin's cooperation), therefore are not included here. The "observable" 13 traits are narrated (exactly as written by Bergler) in the following table, followed by an assessment of whether they reflect President Putin's actions or observed personality:

Personality structure; injustice collecting with all its concomitants: provocation, pseudo-aggression, self-pity	Yes
Inability to maintain long-range relations; when, in exceptional cases, these are attempted, insurmountable conflicts of the injustice-collecting type invariably appear	No
Inordinate malice (pseudo-aggression), covering massive masochistic depression	Yes
Megalomaniacal conviction of being “special” and set apart	Yes
Unfounded conviction of the presence of homosexual trends in everyone	Yes
Jealousy surpassing anything observable in heterosexual relationships; this jealousy is but window-dressing concealing masochistic injustice collecting	Yes
Psychopathic trends, ranging from unreliability to instability to refusal to acknowledge accepted standards [...], on the assumption that the right to cut moral corners is bestowed as compensation for having “suffered so much”	Yes
Compensatory hyper-narcissism and hyper-superciliousness	Yes
Flippant-cynical outlook on life, with special emphasis on tearing down accepted values	Yes
Peculiar and neurotic attitude toward money; when in poverty, pathologic parasitic tendencies predominate [...]—whatever they get is not enough; when wealthy, allow others to take advantage of them, but indignantly complain of the beneficiary’s “ingratitude”	Yes
Conspiratorial attitude: hyper suspicious, hyper-secretive, rather unscrupulous in execution of their aims	Yes
Complaints about “constant tension” [...]. To cover up psychic masochism (inwardly always connected with the image of the “bad mother”), they resort to the defense of homosexuality	No
“Artistic pose”: Homosexuals consider themselves at least superior beings, possessing sensibility and sensitivity higher than the norm. [...]	Yes

Bergler was a pioneer in the 1950s but for a few decades fell out of favor in gay studies as attitudes changed over time. However, over three-dozen studies published in gay-affirmative academic journals starting in the 1980s did broadly coincide with Bergler's observations by identifying higher incidences of psychopathologies (emotional distress, high-risk behavior, low self-esteem, psychological incongruity, problems with intimacy, over-compensation, devalued self-concept, etc.) among gay men but attributed these to the stresses stemming from social stigmatization and abuse since infancy, not to their homosexuality itself.⁴¹

One study found that homosexual orientation “is associated with a general elevation of risk for anxiety, mood, and substance use disorders and for suicidal thoughts and plans.”⁴² Bergler's 1950s observation of excessive risk-taking by gay men was also borne out decades after he completed his work. Of particular concern is the finding that among HIV-infected gay men studied, a lifetime of “major psychiatric disorders” (generalized anxiety disorder, major depressive illness, distress, substance abuse) led to the high-risk behavior that resulted in their HIV infection.⁴³

Putin's Need for Concealment

Bergler concluded that concealment by gay men of their perceived stigma “sap so much of their inner energy that the shell is a mixture of superciliousness, fake aggression, and whimpering.”⁴⁴ A more recent study came to a similar conclusion calling the repressed state of mind a “private hell.” As Kuchins, the Kremlinologist cited earlier, suspected about Putin, one of these studies reads: “Concealing a stigma leads to an inner turmoil that is remarkable for its intensity and its capacity for absorbing an individual's mental life,” and could lead “to anguish and perhaps even to

psychopathology,” as well as “to an impairment of cognitive abilities for the stigmatized person” and to “mental control problems.”⁴⁵

On the flip side, other studies conclude that the process of “coming out” (as the aforementioned Russian gay leader urged his president) has a therapeutic impact on the well-being of gay men, reducing their anxiety, excessive risk-taking, and self-harming behavior, and increasing their healthy self-esteem.⁴⁶ This of course is easier in the United States or Scandinavia than in traditional societies such as Russia where homosexuality is widely considered socially unacceptable and shameful.⁴⁷

Putin's Projection

Further to the Berglerian “telltale” sign that a homosexual in denial sees “homosexual trends in everyone.” When the European Union granted Ukrainians visa-free travel, Putin punned that Ukraine was fleeing to “blue” (i.e., “gay”) Europe. “Blue” in Russian is a deprecatory slang for gay. Putin obsessively accuses the West of “spreading homosexual values” and being governed by homosexuals, goaded often by certain Western embassies' display of the rainbow flags for certain seasons and events. Putin implied that all American diplomats are gay when the U.S. embassy hung the rainbow flag in 2020.⁴⁸ In order to boost the chances of a Kremlin-favored candidate in the French presidential elections, the Russian disinformation machine accused the eventual winner, Emmanuel Macron, of being gay. Part of Putin's own crafted cult of personality is the portrayal of the Kremlin leader the sword and shield against such corrupting values.

Bergler observed that traumatized gay men follow a certain pattern of conflictiveness. First, he wrote, gay men in denial are “extremely sensitive to offenses that

other people would not consider offenses at all [...] His first act consists of provocation or the misuse of an existing situation.”

“The second act is devoted to an apparent attempt at self-defense [...] he vigorously protests the other person’s supposedly aggressive conduct, and launches an attack in retaliation,” Bergler wrote; “In the last act he retreats from his inevitable defeat to self-pity [...] ‘Such an injustice! These things happen only to poor little me!’”⁴⁹

As one of any examples, Russian leader betrayed his lack of confidence in himself and the nation at the Valdai club in October 2016:

“Yugoslavia, then Iraq, as I told you, then Libya, Afghanistan, NATO movements—what is that? And then, each time, something is forgotten, discarded, that provokes us into some kind of action to protect our interests, and then they say: Look at evil Russia taking such-and-such steps. So don’t provoke us into that, don’t provoke us into actively protecting our interests. Let us agree about something. It’s not impossible. But then what we agree on is not fulfilled. [...] Even if there were no such problems with Ukraine, with the southeast, Crimea, with Syria, they still would have found something else to deter Russia.”⁵⁰

Nikita Khrushchev’s great-granddaughter, Nina, noted that Putin is obsessed with injustice-collecting. Bergler (as well as more modern psychologists) observed that distressed gays often provoke then expect rejection and discrimination, only to then “whimper” that the world will never accept them on equal grounds.⁵¹

In a heated exchange with an American journalist at the St. Petersburg economic forum, Putin lamented that European Union figures do not regard him as a true European leader. In a series of interviews with Oliver Stone for Showtime and released in mid-2017, Putin obsessed over victimhood imposed upon him personally and upon Russia nationally. For the Russian president, the crises in bilateral relations, Ukraine, Syria, protests and the devaluation of the ruble, and many other problems, are all foreign plots against him.

Awkwardly yet curiously, a Putin sympathizer described the Russian strongman’s historic mission in terms similar to Carl Jung’s description of male gay psychology. Helena Goscilo writes about Putin:

“This book examines the nature of this vision, wisdom, moral and physical strength—the man uniquely capable of restoring Russia’s reputation as a global power. [...] The ideal of masculinity was invoked on all sides as a symbol of personal and national regeneration, but also as a basic [sic] to the self-definition of modern society. Manliness was supposed to safeguard the existing order against the perils of modernity [...] Putin regularly manages to convey the disciplinary process of achieving self-control when confronted with stupidity, incompetence, or simply a view counter to his own [...] as a restorer not only of Russia’s status in the world, but also of the classical world heritage.”⁵²

Jung wrote about the mindset of gay men he studied:

“He is likely to have a feeling for history [...] and cherish the values of the past.

[...] [He] can appear positively as bold and resolute manliness; ambitious striving after the highest goals; opposition to all stupidity, narrow-mindedness, injustice, and laziness; willingness to make sacrifices for what is regarded as right, sometimes bordering on heroism; perseverance, inflexibility and toughness of will; a curiosity that does not shirk even from the riddles of the universe; and finally, a revolutionary spirit which strives to put a new face upon the world.”⁵³

This description, of course, is not unique to gays, let alone those who live under imposed or self-imposed repression, but it is a factor that a pioneer like Jung empirically encountered. Jung did not write much about homosexual psychology, but he noted that the gay men he studied tended to have high interpersonal sensitivity (“almost feminine insight and tact”), charismatic appeal (“supremely gifted as a teacher”), messianism (“a spiritual receptivity which makes him responsive to revelation”) and other personality traits that also match Putin’s undoubted success in dealing with not only other leaders and influencers, but with common people all over the world.

History of the KGB and Male Homosexuality

The second reason to suspect that Putin is denying or concealing his sexuality in ways that matter to international security and diplomacy comes from the KGB’s long association with gay men in denial, and how this influenced both the organization and therefore the country.

Orthodox Christianity considers all sexual activity

outside male-female marriage as a grave and mortal sin. This is a deeply rooted, sincere, theological belief pre-dating Christianity to the ancient Hebrews. In Russia, male homosexuality remained a moral issue until it was criminalized under Tsar Nicholas I in 1835 and became a state matter. The laws, however, were not enforced among the upper class. “Powerful supporters of the Romanov dynasty, and members of the tsar’s family, were flagrantly gay, and received patronage and immunity from the throne,” according to a historical essay in the *Moscow Times*. The tsars did not outlaw lesbian relations.

The Bolsheviks legalized male homosexual expression in November 1917, not pro-actively as some revisionist historians suggest, but as a matter of their nullification of all tsarist laws. The Soviet criminal codes of 1922, and as revised in 1926, legalized voluntary same-sex relations.⁵⁴

Stalin criminalized male homosexuality in late 1933. This action was proposed by Stalin’s first deputy People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs Genrikh Yagoda, who ran the secret police (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, known then as NKVD) on a daily basis due to the chronic health problems of the actual NKVD chief. Yagoda became full People’s Commissar of the NKVD in May, 1934, days before issuance of Article 154 of the Soviet Penal Code that defined male homosexuality as a crime—and allowed Yagoda to use it as a pretext for political persecution.

Stalin was preparing for a new round of political purges within the Communist Party in what would become known as the Great Purge. Under Yagoda, the fight against male homosexuality was part of the fight against fascism. *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, respectively the official newspapers of the Communist Party and the

Soviet state, ran an article simultaneously on May 23, 1934, authored by prominent writer and future five-time Nobel prize nominee Maxim Gorky, with the slogan, “Destroy homosexuality and fascism will disappear!”⁵⁵

This was less than two weeks after Yagoda became full NKVD Commissar. Yagoda then commenced the Great Purge of mass arrests, show trials, and publicized executions of Stalin’s rivals within the party, and designed and supervised the massive slave labor camp system known by the acronym GULAG. The NKVD actively recruited gays as informers if they wished to avoid persecution and be sent to the camps.⁵⁶

In 1936, homosexuality itself was declared a political crime against the Soviet state. As with the tsar, enforcement was based on one’s level in society. Stalin purged Yagoda that same year and replaced him with a sadistic homosexual at the top of the repressive machine: Nikolai Yezhov.

Less than five feet tall at 151 centimeters and with a disability that affected his legs, Yezhov publicly lived as a heterosexual, having been married twice and with an adopted daughter. Within the party, he earned the nicknames “Bloody Dwarf” or “Poison Dwarf.” Yezhov had overseen the scripted, forced confessions of Stalin’s opponents during the first part of the Great Purge. With Yagoda becoming too powerful in the midst of the purge, Stalin removed him, finding Yezhov’s lack of institutional ties with the NKVD and his ruthless personality to make him the right man to accelerate the purge to liquidate the original Bolsheviks.

Later, on Stalin’s orders, Yezhov had his predecessor, Yagoda, arrested and accused of a variety of crimes, including corruption and treason as a German agent.

Yezhov alleged that Yagoda tried to murder him with mercury, and of poisoning to death the socialist realist writer Maxim Gorky and his son. Gorky had been the writer of the “Destroy homosexuality and fascism will disappear!” articles two years earlier. Yezhov also accused Yagoda of owning a collection of pornography and a dildo.⁵⁷ Yagoda was shot the next year.

Yezhov completed the Great Purge and oversaw more than 681,000 individual executions. Too powerful for Stalin, Yezhov would meet the same fate of his victims after a sensationalized show trial. Among Yezhov’s real or forced confessions:

“I think it essential that I inform the investigation of a series of new facts concerning my moral-personal dissoluteness. I mean my longtime vice of homosexuality.

“This began in my early youth when I lived as an apprentice to a tailor. At about the age of 15 or 16 I had a few instances of perverse sexual acts with other apprentices of my own age of the same tailor shop. This vice renewed itself in the old Tsarist army in frontline conditions. Aside from one chance contact with one of the soldiers of our company I had relations with a certain Filatov, my friend from Leningrad with whom we served in the same regiment. Our relations were ‘mutual,’ that is the ‘female’ part was played first by one side, then by the other. Afterwards Filatov was killed at the front.”⁵⁸

The Russian original is translated to English more

accurately as “sodomy.” The confessions go on, with Yezhov describing homosexual relations with a Bolshevik radio technician assistant, and again in 1924 in Semipalatinsk; in Orenburg with a married man and a longer live-in relationship with single man in Kazakhstan in 1925; and a renewal, after his dismissal as NKVD chief in 1938, of relations with another man from 1924; followed by relations with man whom he had first met in the army in 1918, as well as with the man’s wife. “All of this was accompanied, as a rule,” Yezhov said, “with heavy drinking.”⁵⁹

Quite apart from Yezhov’s forced confessions, his extreme and especially drunken behavior was known at the time among the Stalinist elite.⁶⁰ Yezhov was shot in 1940, not for his homosexuality or drunkenness, but because, even in captivity, he knew too much and had to be liquidated. Lavrenty Beria replaced him.⁶¹

Here it is appropriate to comment on Beria’s sexuality as a means of determining how Stalin’s inner circle, and the NKVD itself, viewed sexual behavior. Beria was a serial rapist and murderer of women and girls. Yezhov was forced to admit only to consensual homosexual relations, as if they themselves were sufficient to stigmatize and humiliate at a show trial. One would conclude from available evidence that Yezhov was a repressed homosexual who led a public heterosexual life. On the other hand, Beria made no effort to hide from his comrades the fact that he was a depraved heterosexual predator on a large scale. For him and the Stalinist inner circle, there was no shame in raping girls and women. Nor would there be in the Soviet Army as a whole, where gang rapes of Polish and German females of any age⁶² were so common during World War II that Soviet troops raped as many as 100,000 girls and women in Berlin and 2,000,000 in the Soviet-occupied part of Germany in 1945.⁶³

The denial, shame, or suppression of sexuality in the Soviet security apparat was suffered by those in isolation or denial, and that meant homosexual men.

Under Yagoda, Yezhov, and Beria, Stalin introduced the cult of the “chekist,” the secret police officers and agents named after the NKVD’s Bolshevik antecedent known by the acronym CHEKA. Stalin built chekism as a professional cult of personality around the late Bolshevik Cheka founder Feliks Dzerzhinsky. From that point to the present day, being a chekist has been the bureaucratic DNA and professional ethos of every state security and foreign intelligence officer in Russia.

Vladimir Putin devotedly calls himself a chekist, honors the September 11, 1877 birthday of Dzerzhinsky, and officially observes every December 20—the date of the Cheka’s founding in 1917—as “State Security Workers Day” or “Chekist Day.”⁶⁴ Meanwhile, it was the KGB’s job of enforcing the Stalin/Yagoda-era law against male homosexuality until it was abolished in 1993 after the Soviet collapse.

Putin, the internal security officer, had spent his entire life in the KGB as part of the anti-gay enforcement machinery.

Pavel Svyatenkov wrote in *Vzglyad* in 2013, later reprinted as a Radio Liberty report, about the KGB’s use of male-on-male rape as a form of intimidation and control at the time Putin was an internal security officer:

“From the perspective of the criminal underworld’s philosophy, it was shameful to be a passive homosexual, or a *petukh* [rooster] as they were called. However, an active homosexual was described as ‘a real *patsan*’ [fella]. There is a status in labor camps known

as being ‘dropped’ [victim of rape] but there isn’t a concept of ‘dropper’ [rapist]. [...] Since you would have to have strength and power in order to be able to ‘drop’ somebody, homosexual relations in labor camps mirrored the structure of power; the relations of authority and submission. The labor-camp philosophy infected all of Soviet society, particularly the siloviki [armed officials] and the intelligence services.”⁶⁵

Allen Dulles, who ran the CIA from 1953 to 1961, wrote in his landmark work, *The Craft of Intelligence*, about the extent the Soviet foreign intelligence services went to establish gay agent networks abroad and recruit foreign homosexuals, usually because they were closeted by social or political necessity and could be blackmailed.⁶⁶

John Barron’s classic 1974 book on the Soviet intelligence service described how the KGB abroad recruited “the particular homosexual who, while more or less a functioning member of his society, is nevertheless subconsciously at war with it and himself. ... Being different, he easily rationalizes that he is not morally bound by the mores, values, and allegiances that unite others in community or society. Moreover, he nurtures a dormant impulse to strike back at the society which he feels has conspired to make him a secret leper.”⁶⁷

This was a key trait that the KGB sought not only for its own officers, especially in the internal repressive apparatus, but for foreigners to be recruited as controlled agents. Note the distinction here: The KGB did not recruit gays because they were gay; it recruited repressed gays because they were either considered

vulnerable to blackmail or tended to feel a need to fight back at their real or imagined oppressors and to become empowered. In Barron’s KGB assessment, “To such a man, treason offers the weapon of retaliation.”⁶⁸

The KGB did not recruit repressed Soviet gays as its own foreign intelligence officers. Part of the reason is why most intelligence services, including the CIA today, would not generally recruit a repressed homosexual because of susceptibility to blackmail; it is his fear of exposure, not his homosexuality, that presents the vulnerability. This is why U.S. intelligence services require gays to inform their families and friends of their orientation prior to being considered for the intelligence profession.

What the KGB foreign intelligence service did do was to recruit Western repressed gays because it regarded them as resentful and more willing to “get back” at their societies by working for the KGB. This is not the same as sexual blackmail, which the KGB, like other foreign intelligence services, historically have done as a matter of course.

In Stalin’s time, when gays in the West who were not in denial but still had to live a parallel life, Soviet intelligence targeted “underground” gay networks in Western diplomatic services. Former Soviet intelligence officer Alexander Orlov, a former aide to Stalin’s secret police chief Lavrenty Beria who defected to the United States in the 1950s, wrote in 1963:

“Considerable success was achieved among foreign diplomats tinted with homosexual perversions; it is no secret that the biggest concentration of homosexuals can be found in the diplomatic services of Western

countries. Those of these who agreed to work for the Russian network were instructed to approach other homosexual members of the diplomatic corps, a strategy which was remarkably successful. Even when those approached declined the offer to collaborate, they would not denounce the recruiter to the authorities. Soviet intelligence officers were amazed at the mutual consideration and true loyalty which prevailed among homosexuals.”⁶⁹

Here, the vulnerability was related to the fact that the diplomats’ own governments or societies would not accept them as gay, thus fostering a latent resentment of the countries they represented, fortified by a loyal gay underground network that would never snitch. The best-known historical case study was Beria-era recruitment of the Cambridge Five spy ring that included Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess.⁷⁰

Let’s revisit NKVD/KGB attitudes toward gays in internal security or political repression and enforcement work. As we have seen, the KGB and its predecessors recruited gays as informants through coercion, and under threat of being sent to the forced-labor camps. However, informants were not agents, any more than a drug-dealing informant is a police officer, and few people recruited under coercion become the most reliable assets.

We make a distinction here between recruitment of internal political informants through fear or force, and recruitment of volunteers as actual professional KGB officers. The purpose in actively recruiting repressed Soviet gays for professional KGB work was to exploit and channel resentment among those living

in the society that would never accept the men for who they were, and to empower them in the service of the Communist Party and the Soviet state.

The KGB did recruit repressed gays as volunteers to go through formal vetting and training and become disciplined, uniformed internal security officers with all the authority and prestige of any KGB officer.

Beyond the recruitment stage, the special relation between the KGB and male homosexuality continues.

Svyatenkov, the Putin critic, speculates that the “vertikal of power” that attracts Putin could not function without this KGB psychology brought into the Kremlin. He continues, “The patsan is an active homosexual, respected in labor camp, not the pathetic petukh. Why is this cult necessary? Because people are afraid. They are afraid they will be ‘dropped.’ And in order not to be ‘dropped,’ you have to ‘drop’ others first.”⁷¹

This brings us back to Putin’s alleged membership in the male rape gang during his adolescent years in Leningrad, which we will discuss further.

A Russian leader like Putin, who upheld the ethos of the Chekist while crowning himself as the state patron of Russian Orthodox Christianity, coming out would be politically and socially impossible.

Multiple Identities

A third reason to believe that Putin is hiding a tormented sexual orientation in a manner affecting international security and diplomacy is related to his multiple identities as various Kremlinologists such as Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy have documented.

These multiple identities could be a means of

coping with a world that would never accept the real Vladimir Putin. “Another coping strategy may be for people with an identity conflict to acquire additional identities in which they can positively evaluate themselves,” according to a 1996 article in the *Journal of Homosexuality*. “The larger a person’s set of identities and the broader their scope, the better he or she will be able to deal with individual threats to self-concept.”⁷² Indeed, changing identities seems second nature to gay men who faced homophobia, ostracism, and hostility, and these “psychological defenses become highly elaborated to bind the accompanying chronic anxiety and to maintain a tenuous and brittle false identity,” according to a 1982 article in that same gay-affirmative academic journal.⁷³

The Hill and Gaddy psychological profile of Putin also notes a multiplicity of personalities and fabricated identities in the “elusive” Russian president.⁷⁴ That biography and others presume that this facility with false and changing identities comes from Putin’s years in the KGB. From a professional standpoint, this is not the case. Changing identities was a narrow discipline within the KGB’s First Chief Directorate, its foreign intelligence service.

Putin was never the “spymaster” that many Western observers have played him up to be. He never served in a clandestine capacity abroad that required derring-do and a false identity. Indeed, he was never a spy at all. He never served as a foreign intelligence officer in the KGB First Chief Directorate.

Putin never made it to the prestigious First Chief Directorate, spun off from the KGB in 1991 and now called the External Intelligence Service (SVR). He only made it to the Second Chief Directorate, which was split from the KGB in 1991 and is now known as the Federal Security Service (FSB).

Putin’s only posting outside the USSR was in East Germany. He had the dull and un-prestigious job of supervising a local Stasi secret police unit. Almost all of his KGB career was spent inside the USSR, performing basic internal security functions in the Second Chief Directorate. This must have been a dissatisfying experience for the ambitious Putin. Some former KGB officers have said that Putin, who learned German and some English in preparation for training as a foreign intelligence officer, was denied his chosen career track during a deep background investigation while attending the Yuri V. Andropov KGB Higher School. That standard investigation is said to have revealed Putin’s repressed gay orientation and adolescent gang activities that were known to others. That, and the fact that some of his peers knew about it back in Leningrad, are believed to have been the factors which prevented Putin from becoming a foreign intelligence officer.⁷⁵

Litvinenko, the FSB officer who defected to London in 2000, learned it differently. He said that the KGB prevented Putin from becoming a foreign intelligence officer in the First Chief Directorate “because, shortly after his graduation, his bosses learned that Putin was a pedophile.”⁷⁶

From a KGB security standpoint, the stories are plausible. With something in his background or latent in his personality that had to be repressed, Putin was subject to foreign blackmail and recruitment as a double agent. Denial of sensitive posts for a talented person with such vulnerabilities were the KGB security practices of the time and remain standard in most of the world’s major intelligence services. However, Putin had the drive, talent, instincts, and temperament beneficial for KGB service. It thus suited the KGB’s purposes to place such a repressed individual in the internal security services to more easily oppress the

population of a society that was oppressing him.

So Putin's facility with false and changing identities is not explained by his KGB training or work. It can be explained, however, as part of a coping strategy of gay men who faced devaluation growing up.

Further to these false and shifting identities, Bergler wrote decades earlier that his repressed gay patients "excel in circumlocution" and attempt to make logical dialogue difficult.⁷⁷ German Chancellor Angela Merkel, after dialogues with Putin following the 2014 attack on Ukraine, complained that Putin lives "in another world,"⁷⁸ and other Western interlocutors have also complained of this habit of circumlocution by the Russian leader. Many who have interacted with Putin in politics or diplomacy find him capricious, trifling, saying the opposite of what he means, and using circumlocution to mask his intent. Former U.S. president Barack Obama described Putin this way in his latest memoir:

... Putin launched into an animated and seemingly endless monologue chronicling every perceived injustice, betrayal, and slight that he and the Russian people had suffered at the hands of the Americans. ... With the fastidiousness of a teenager on Instagram, he curated a constant stream of photo ops, projecting an almost satirical image of masculine vigor ... all the while practicing a casual chauvinism and homophobia⁷⁹

Obsession with Poison

Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, offers a fourth reason to believe that Putin may be

hiding his sexual orientation: An evident obsession with poison. On the surface such reasoning seems irrelevant or malicious, but Jung's students found a relationship between repressed homosexuality and obsession with poison.

Jung of course was the pioneer of archetypes and how powerfully they hard-wire our fears, behaviors, reactions, identities, and dreams. It turns out that an analysis of poetry written by homosexuals shows an unusual abundance of references to poison.

For its value as a medium of artistic expression, neo-Jungians analyze poetry as an accepted tool of diagnosis of anxieties and psychopathologies. In a 1997 anthology of gay poets that psychoanalyst Fredo Arias de la Canal (father of one of the authors) published, the word "poison" or a poison-related archetype (say, scorpions or snakes) appears in 56 out of the 84 poems, or two-thirds of those studied.⁸⁰ The archetypes of puncture, mutilation, and dismemberment appear in most of the rest.

In his 1943 OSS psychological profile, Langer noted that Hitler "has a pathological fear of poisoning by mouth. . . ." ⁸¹ Primary source information surfaced decades later to confirm Langer's assessment. During the war, the Führer had young women serve as his personal food tasters. "Hitler was so paranoid that the British would poison him; that's why he had 15 girls taste the food before he ate it himself," 95-year-old Margaret Woelk revealed in 2013, after 70 years of silence. The secret had never gotten out, she said, because "Later, I found out that the Russians shot all of the 14 other girls."⁸² An early 21st century discovery in Moscow archives found transcripts of NKVD interrogations of Hitler's SS valet who said, according to The Guardian, that in his final days,

Hitler “demanded that his toilet water” be “constantly analysed for traces of poison.”⁸³

Hitler’s contemporary, NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov, showed a similar fixation with, or fear of, being poisoned. Earlier it was shown how he accused his predecessor, Grigori Yagoda, of trying to poison him with mercury. At his show trial, Yagoda was accused of murdering anti-homosexual Soviet writer Maxim Gorky and his son with poison—not necessarily a fixation, but an established fact. We are on thin ice here, because the Soviet secret police had been developing poisons as weapons of assassination since the 1920s, but we mention it as a marker for further research.

Putin presided over a revival, of sorts, of employing poison as a weapon of assassination. Many of Putin’s high-profile critics were murdered with several types of poison. Aleksei Navalny is about the tenth poisoned high-profile Putin critic, a disturbing trend that began with anti-KGB journalist and parliament member Yuri Shchekochikhin in 2003, three years after Putin took power.⁸⁴

Mutilation and puncture are also themes that crop up often with Vladimir Putin—another admittedly thin data point, but one marked nevertheless for future reference. As a child, Putin reportedly cut off the heads of ducks for fun.⁸⁵ As Russian leader, Putin often uses mutilation and puncture metaphors. He famously answered a journalist’s critical question after a failed EU-Russia summit: “If you want a circumcision, come to us, we have specialists on this procedure. I will recommend them to do it in such a way, that nothing ever grows back there for you.”⁸⁶ When Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet that overflew its territory, Putin accused Turkey of a “stab in the back,” even though there was no betrayal involved.⁸⁷ In that case,

instead of taking diplomatic or other actions against Ankara, he groveled up to the Turkish government in a defiant gesture against the United States. Instead of projecting Russia as strong and united under his rule, Putin frequently accuses outside forces of attempting to mutilate and dismember Russia. He did so in his state speech in December 2014 and in other speeches and interviews.⁸⁸

Consequences of Putin’s Psychosexuality

Russians as a nation seem to think that centralizing power into one person assures more protection against Russia’s (real or imagined) enemies. This is a line that Putin and his adulators use often to justify their authoritarian moves and eliminate critics and institutions in general.

However, as others have learned the hard way, a “macho” dictator with awkward secrets (and they all have them) is not good for the country’s sovereignty. The reasons are obvious, but Russia still has yet to learn this. What if a foreign power has learned of that deep, dark secret of the dictator? That foreign power will have captured the leadership of the country.

This is why the Russian government, like the governments of the more influential Western democracies, do full-field background investigations of military and civilian personnel who will assume sensitive positions of trust in their respective societies. Dictators are especially vulnerable, though, for as powerful as they might be as rulers, their type of rule lacks the checks and balances that vet them or at least protect them from what the Russians call *kompromat*.

What if Beijing learned of Putin’s past? Could the “state secret” price for Russian gas or military

technology have been given to China as a result? Could Putin be induced to look the other way as the eastern half of his country is kept open to massive Chinese colonization?

What if the United States or United Kingdom had such information? Would policymakers be too reluctant to make the information work in their national interests, or the interests of NATO or the Five Eyes? Would one presidential administration be more likely than its predecessor to use it?

Bergler, the psychoanalyst, noted that gay men in denial, in addition to the panoply of masochistic relations with other people, sometimes also practice what he termed a “Herostratic act.” This act of great destructiveness is named after Herostratos, who burned down the temple of Artemis in ancient Greece with the sole purpose of gaining fame.

Some of Putin’s great risks that Russia-watchers may have interpreted as fulfilling some logical (at least for his goals) political purpose just may have been Herostratic acts. We may yet see even bigger such acts as Putin faces pressure and feels even more vulnerable by events around him as Russia continues to decline into the third decade of his rule.

As mentioned earlier, the idea that Putin has a repressed homosexual history, and that this personal trait has policy consequences, is more widespread among American Kremlinologists than is apparent by their writings. They cannot write this overtly because they believe it would adversely affect their careers in academia or government given the politically and emotionally charged environment on gay issues, especially within the gay community.

For example, Kuchins, the scholar whose 2015 posting speculated openly that Putin’s repressed homosexuality

may explain Russian policy paradoxes, wrote a long policy memo for president-elect Donald Trump in late 2016 in which Putin’s psychosexual identity appears nowhere.⁸⁹

Academic Self-Censorship

At academic events, the question would be discussed offline and out of sight. Fellow members of the annual “Putin Panel” at the scholarly convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), would speak privately about this topic but failed to bring it up (despite co-writer Arias-King’s encouragements) at the panel itself. However, these experts do convey this idea discreetly by weaving the well-known symptoms of gay men in denial in their writings on Putin, perhaps as Hill and Gaddy did in their biography (on the multiple identities), Khrushcheva did with Putin’s knack for injustice-collecting (a central Berglerian “telltale sign”), and Goscilo did in her description of Putin (very similar to Carl Jung’s description of homosexual psychology), among others.

Hill, before writing her Putin biography, had served as the Russia expert at the National Intelligence Council and had access to classified materials on the Russian president. She later served as special assistant to the president for Russian affairs on the Trump National Security Council. Even though the authors collaborated for years with Hill in the journal *Demokratizatsiya*, it is not revealed whether Hill was aware, while writing her book, that her descriptions of Putin show a high degree of coincidence with the literature on the psychopathologies of gay men in denial.

Other colleagues also occupied the top posts in Washington handling Russia. When the authors and

others approached them with perspectives on Putin after 2016, they got the sense that the Russia policy people already knew this information about Putin, and even seemed slightly disappointed that they had lost their monopoly on that knowledge.

The authors of this article jointly wrote a policy memorandum for the Trump national security transition team in late 2016, describing how the U.S. could exploit Putin's repressed personal traits to temper his authoritarian personal rule and subversive international behavior. That memorandum did circulate among the first Trump National Security Council staff. However, the turmoil of the NSC transition team in 2017, compounded with the controversy and chaos surrounding the "Russian collusion" allegations and the administration's ineffective handling of that issue, leave questions about how the document was received and whether its policy recommendations were implemented.

On the other hand, we see how Trump used his uncanny and unorthodox business methods ably to gauge the psychological profiles of both allies and adversaries in his personal high-level, behind-the-scenes actions, and other unconventional politics to innovate in certain forms of personal statecraft with world leaders. Throughout his presidency, Trump maintained an uncharacteristically low-key approach toward Putin as he reluctantly signed congressionally-mandated tighter Magnitsky sanctions on Russian oligarchs, and then enthusiastically broke precedent to send lethal weapons to Ukraine, pressed reluctant and unwilling NATO allies to live up to their share of the mutual defense burden, strengthened NATO's most anti-Russian allies like Poland, reversed his predecessor's support for Russian military presence in Syria and even used armed force to kill Russian combatants there, began a more robust ballistic

missile defense system, and squeezed Russia's gas-export economy hard by opposing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany—all without visibly antagonizing Putin or incurring his retaliation. Did Trump have something personal on Putin? History will tell.

Final Observations

It is striking how Russian history is replete with instances of minorities coming to power with a burning desire for revenge. Lenin's Latvian or Lettish guards, whose motivation in part stemmed from their mistreatment by tsarist authorities (as did Lenin's) and protected their patron with a vicious loyalty while he unleashed terror upon the land. This is true of most empires, as the medieval English did in Scotland, or as the more modern British did in Arab and African conquests and in India to empower aggrieved minorities to rule over those who had oppressed them.

Russia's minorities (ethnic, religious, ideological, cultural, sexual) occasionally come to power. How those minorities were treated by the average Russian will likely influence how they govern Russia. Putin, as many KGB officers before him, seems to have set out to mistreat a Russia that "conspired to make him a secret leper" all his life.

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Fredo Arias-King is the founder (in 1992) of *Demokratizatsiya*; a member of the Advisory Board at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University; president of Prague-based CASLA Institute; and collaborates with the Berlin-based Cinema for Peace Foundation. He also organized and chaired for several years the panel on contemporary Russian politics (the so-called "Putin Panel") at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), the global association of scholars studying Russia and Eurasia. Mr. Arias-King wrote the sections of this article concerning psychology and Kremlinology.

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