The West’s 100-year War To Destroy Russia

A good part of Western media has been telling us for years that Vladimir Putin is trying to re-create the Soviet Union and its militant, expansionist foreign policy. But what exactly was Soviet Foreign Policy about in the first place? Here to help with this historical question is Dr. Michael Jabara Carley, a prominent Canadian historian and professor of history at the Université de Montréal, specializing in 20th-century international relations, primarily the relations between the Soviet Union (USSR) and Western powers from 1917 to 1945. Links: Michael's books on Amazon: https://www.amazon.com /stores/author/B004NA4BVW Michael's University of Montreal page: https://histoire.umontreal.ca /english/department-directory/professors/professor/in/in14958/sg/Michael%20Jabara%20Carley/ Neutrality Studies substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Goods Store: https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com Timestamps: 00:00:00 Intro: Soviet Foreign Policy Goals & Continuity 00:10:37 Poland & The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 00:18:00 Japan, The Purges & Military Readiness 00:25:22 The Winter War & Stalin's Risk Aversion 00:34:30 Delaying War: League of Nations & Neutrality Pacts 00:40:30 Operation Unthinkable & Origins of the Cold War 00:46:44 The Great Patriotic War: Trauma & Memory 00:54:17 Modern European Security & West-Russia Relations

#Pascal

A good part of Western media has been telling us for years that Vladimir Putin is trying to recreate the Soviet Union and its militant, expansionist foreign policy. But what exactly was Soviet foreign policy about in the first place? Here to help with this historical question is Dr. Michael J. Carley, a prominent Canadian historian and professor of history at the University of Montreal, specializing in 20th-century international relations, primarily the relations between the Soviet Union and Western powers from 1917 to 1945. Professor Carley, welcome.

#Michael J Carley

Thank you for inviting me, Pascal.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for saying yes. I'm very impressed with your work. You wrote three major volumes about Soviet foreign policy, so who better to ask than you about what the Soviet foreign policy goals were? You looked at the early period, right—1917, the revolution. How would you describe the process of the Soviets coming into power and suddenly being tasked with managing external relations?

#Michael J Carley

Well, you know, at the beginning of the development of Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s, there was a clash inside the Soviet government about what the major objectives of the Soviet Union should be. Should it be a world socialist revolution, or should it be like any other power, protecting the borders and the national interests of the country? The German ambassador in Moscow at the time observed that there was a conflict inside the Soviet government between what he called Comrade Kominternovsky—that is to say, the people in the Comintern, the Comintern being the organization set up in 1919 to spread revolution—and Comrade Narkomindelsky, Narkomindel being the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs.

And these two comrades clashed during the 1920s. Comrade Narkomindelsky accused Comrade Kominternovsky of sucking ideas from his thumb, and Comrade Kominternovsky accused Narkomindelsky of being a total opportunist. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. This clash went on for almost the entire decade and ended at the close of the 1920s, when Stalin more or less settled it. The Comintern became less important, and the national interests of the Soviet state became paramount. Many Western historians to this very day say that the Soviet Union didn't have a foreign policy—that its policy was world Soviet revolution—but that's not true.

#Pascal

How did it go, though—like, this formation? I only read a couple of papers, and the one that comes to mind is—well, I forget who wrote it—but it's about the continuation of the politics of first the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union toward Mongolia. Mongolia is an interesting case because Mongolia, as we know it today—Outer Mongolia—became independent in 1911, and that had a lot to do with its relationship with the Tsarist Empire, because they kind of split it off from China.

And this paper—and I forgot the guy's name—shows how the first idea, especially from the Lenin wing of the Soviets, was to help these countries gain their independence. But this very quickly changed into integrating Mongolia into the orbit of the Soviet Union, although Mongolia, of course, never became a Soviet republic. It always remained independent. But the whole argument there was that the Soviet Union actually continued, more or less, the foreign policy of Tsarist Russia. Is that something your research can confirm, or how would you characterize it?

#Michael J Carley

My feeling is that there is continuity between Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. You can learn a lot about how Soviet diplomats reacted to particular kinds of problems—for example, by reading my books, my trilogy, or my "trilogy plus one" series on the period between 1917 and 1941–42. There is continuity. And, you know, I like to repeat the statement that Tsar Alexander III was once recorded as saying: Russia didn't have any friends except its army and its navy.

What he really meant was that Russia had to depend on itself to defend its national interests and its borders—whether in the Far East, in the Maritime Provinces, on the frontiers with Europe, in the South, or in the North with the Baltics. The two most important people in Narkomindel, the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, in the 1920s were Maxim Litvinov and Georgy Chicherin. Chicherin focused on the Soviet Union's southern frontiers, while Litvinov focused on the frontiers with Poland, the Baltics, and Finland.

Their primary interest was the security of Soviet Russia, and then of the Soviet Union after December 1922. Security, security, security—that was the number one concern of all three of those states. And it wasn't necessarily an aggressive policy; it was a defensive one. "Peaceful coexistence," for example, was a policy developed in the 1920s, reflecting the weakness of the Soviet state at that time. The Soviet Union always felt it was not as strong as its potential adversaries in the West, so it was always willing to improve relations with the West—always—except that the West interpreted Soviet policy as inherently aggressive, which it was not.

#Pascal

This is probably one of the biggest misunderstandings, right? Because even today, when people say, "Oh, today's Russia is like the Soviet Union—it's trying to expand," well, the Soviet Union didn't try to expand, did it? It tried to stabilize things and reach some kind of outcome, especially with Europe. But that never worked out.

#Michael J Carley

Well, if you look at the map, the frontiers of the Soviet Union, of Russia, and of the Russian Federation now—even in spite of the territorial losses after the disappearance of the Soviet Union—they're huge. Mm-hmm. They're huge. It's a huge job protecting those frontiers. And naturally, the people who are tasked with that job sometimes feel on the defensive. So instead of being aggressive, they're willing to work with other powers in order to have stability on their frontiers. That's the policy. It's so obvious when you read the archives—it jumps out. That's one of the things that's, if I can promote my own books—published, by the way, by the University of Toronto Press, mustn't forget that—it jumps out. It's obvious.

#Pascal

The argument the other side usually brings up is, "But oh, look what they did to Poland, to Romania, to Bulgaria," right? Subduing these states, installing regimes. But in your interpretation, this all happens for the sake of having buffers along the actual Soviet borders, right?

#Michael J Carley

That's in 1945. But when you mention Poland—well, Poland's an interesting case, because the relationship between Poland and Soviet Russia, and later the Soviet Union, in the interwar years was not good. The Poles always said, "We have to fear Russia, whether it's red or white." But there was a war between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1919–1920, and it wasn't Soviet Russia that was the aggressor. It was Poland, seeking to reestablish its frontiers of 1772. And during the interwar years—Poland's a good example. That's why I mention it.

You know, Poland saw itself between two great powers—potentially hostile great powers—Germany on one side and Russia, whether it was red or pink or white, on the other side. And Poland said, well, we've got to keep a balance between the two. But they didn't do that. They were more partial to the Germans than to the Soviet side. And proof of that is that the Soviet government, Soviet diplomats, sought on many occasions during the interwar years to improve relations with Poland. It's absolutely clear from the archives. And the Poles always, more or less, refused those overtures.

#Pascal

Then why is it that Stalin, in the end, agreed with Hitler in this secret additional protocol to split up Poland and divide it between the two? Why not say, "No, no, no, we absolutely need this—Hitler, leave Poland where it is"?

#Michael J Carley

That's a complicated question. But let me go back to my point from before: the Soviet Union was always seeking to improve relations with the West—with everybody. Between 1933 and 1939, the Soviet government was, in my opinion, the first government to recognize the danger of Nazi Germany to peace and security in Europe. It sought, with all the great powers—Romania, Poland, the United States, France, Britain, and so on—to improve relations and to alert them to the rising danger of Nazi Germany. Nobody listened to them.

#Pascal

They didn't even have diplomatic relations with everyone in Europe, right? Because a good number of European states at first didn't recognize the Soviet Union as the successor government to Tsarist Russia.

#Michael J Carley

Well, that's right. But during the 1920s, you know, there was a gradual process of Western states recognizing the Soviet Union—for example, France, Britain, and Italy in 1924, and the United States in 1933, along with various other European states at different points in the interwar years. I can't remember exactly when Japan recognized the Soviet government—it must have been, I don't want to say for sure, but early 1920s. So it was a gradual process. The point is to go back to the Nazi–

Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, which was the agreement that anticipated the changes in borders in Eastern Europe.

The Non-Aggression Pact was not the Soviet Union's first choice. It was the last choice after six years of trying to improve relations with the West. It was the French and the British, primarily in Western Europe, who repeatedly refused Soviet overtures to improve relations. Stalin looked at this in August 1939 and said—well, he didn't say "holy moly," but something like "bonjour moi," you know—basically, we can't trust the French and the British to form a fighting alliance with us against Nazi Germany. We could end up with the French and the British sitting on their hands in Western Europe while we fight alone against Nazi Germany. We're not going to do that.

We're going to—however, uh, however smelly the agreement is—we're going to make an agreement with Hitler, not because we want to be allies with him and Nazi Germany, but because we want to stay out of harm's way and remain neutral. And as for Poland—Poland, right up until the last day before the war broke out on the 1st of September 1939, hated the Soviet Union and refused all overtures, the proffered Soviet hand. The Poles claimed that they were stabbed in the back, that they were victims of Soviet duplicity. That's not true. They refused Soviet offers. They hated the Soviet Union. They acted as spoilers during the 1930s—spoilers of collective security and mutual assistance offered by the Soviet Union to the West. It's a fact, an irrefutable fact. So if you were Stalin, what would you have done?

#Pascal

It's geography. And I cannot—you know, one of the things that's probably difficult to wrap your head around is that when we look back today at this time, we have all these books, all these points of view, and so on. And it looks like one coherent development, right? But that's not what it was like when you were there. One of my prime examples is the Japanese. The Japanese were not precisely weak, and they were not precisely dumb. They were highly integrated into the entire system, and they completely, utterly, totally misunderstood what was happening at the time. Two of their governments collapsed because they couldn't understand what was brewing in Europe. First, when Hitler created the Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviets, that shocked them to the core.

The government collapsed because their whole idea was, "Oh, but we've got everybody lined up against the Soviets, right?" And then they turned around, and actually, about a year and a half later, they said, "Okay, fine. If the game is with the Soviet Union against the others, then it's going to be Tokyo–Moscow–Berlin–Rome." They made a neutrality pact. And six weeks later came Barbarossa and the war against the Soviet Union—and the Japanese were furious. Another government collapsed because it was so obvious that their whole foreign policy, their whole approach, had just gone out the window twice. It was extremely difficult to understand what was actually in the works.

#Michael J Carley

Well, the Soviet Union and Japan had very bad relations at the end of the 1930s. There was a major military clash in 1939 on the border between Manchuria and Mongolia called the Battle of Khalkhin Gol. At that battle, the Red Army beat the hell out of the Japanese—beat the hell out of them. I think that sort of woke up the Japanese to the fact that it wouldn't be so easy to try to take Soviet territories in the maritime provinces. I'm not an expert on Japanese foreign policy, but I know there were two schools of thought with respect to Japan and its objectives—one looking to the south, the other to the north. They ultimately decided to look to the south, and one of the reasons they did that was because they had second thoughts after the beating they took in 1939. They had second thoughts about taking on the Red Army.

#Pascal

They did. One thing not to underestimate with Japan is just how distributed power actually was and how, you know, the military could create facts on the ground and string Tokyo along. I mean, it was much less integrated and directly controlled than people would like to think. But that's a bit beside the point, because I think for the Soviet Union it was different, right? The Soviet Union actually had a pretty good grasp over its military, especially after the Stalinist purges, which were brutal, in the mid-thirties.

#Michael J Carley

That's right. Yeah. I don't buy that argument that some apologists for Stalin use to legitimize his actions against the high command of the Red Army, saying they were really getting ready to plot against his, you know, governance. I don't buy that at all. I think the purges—no matter how many historians, from wherever they are working, look at them—everybody has an opinion about why they occurred. Okay.

Uh, I don't know if we'll ever have an explanation that actually sticks about why that occurred. One of Stalin's biographers, Stephen Kotkin, said that Stalin turned against his most loyal associates—people who would have walked through fire to save him—and he turned on them. Why would he do that? What was in his mind? The answers are—who knows? I mean, there are lots of opinions about why this happened. But there'll always be opinions, in my view.

#Pascal

So you don't think the Red Army was a problem for Stalin around 1935 or so? So it's a mystery to you why he purged them? Because—can you remind me how many thousands of people were purged?

#Michael J Carley

Well, that's always a matter of debate, but according to the Soviet archives, it was around seven hundred thousand people.

#Pascal

Some of them were shot, right? And some of them were just sent away to Siberia.

#Michael J Carley

Most of them were shot, but others were sent to labor camps, and the conditions there were not conducive to long life, so many people died. According to the archives, and to a book published some years ago by Yale University Press by, I think, a man named Leno—he wrote a big, thick book based on Soviet archives—it starts with the murder of Kirov, who was a close associate of Stalin. He tries to answer the question of how many people were actually victims of the purges, and he comes up with around 700,000. But other people say it was more—who knows. But it was a lot of people.

#Pascal

So then, I mean, one interpretation of Stalin is that he was—well, a popular interpretation is that he was very aggressive. Another interpretation is that he was actually highly risk-averse, that he tried time and again to take the path of least risk in foreign policy. Would you subscribe to that?

#Michael J Carley

Risk-averse, absolutely—with one big exception: the Winter War against Finland. Right. I don't know how informed your listeners are about Soviet history, but the Winter War was a conflict with Finland that broke out at the end of November 1939 and continued until the middle of March 1940. It's a long story—the negotiations and everything that happened between Finland and the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1939. The idea was that there would be a trade of territory between Finland and the Soviet Union to move the frontier on the Karelian Isthmus away from Leningrad, because it was only about 30 kilometers away.

#Pascal

Right. This was the negotiating position before the war started, right? The Soviets said, “Give us more land, you’ll get something else in return, and we’re good.”

#Michael J Carley

That's right. And, you know, I like to look at Stalin in the summer—and I'm repeating myself here from other interviews, forgive me for that—but I think it's important to say: I see Stalin in the autumn of 1939 as someone who, well, I compare him to a gambler who goes to the casino. I'm a

little sarcastic about it—I call it the Red Star Casino. And he plays roulette, and he wins time after time after time. His number keeps coming up; he never loses. So he draws the conclusion that he can't lose. And that's the idea he took into the negotiations with Finland. Molotov—Vyacheslav Molotov, who was the foreign commissar at that point and Stalin's right arm in many things—said that the Red Army would be in Helsinki in two or three days. The high command of the Red Army said two or three weeks.

And they thought, "Oh, you know, the Finns will shoot a cannon shell across the border, and the Finns will say, 'Oh, okay, okay, we'll do a deal.'" But instead, they shot back. And the war was brutal—that's what it was. In the end, the Soviet side won out. But the Germans who were watching the war thought, "Oh, the Red Army didn't fight very well; we can beat them if we want." That wasn't exactly true. But the high command learned from its mistakes, and in the end, they forced the Finns to come to the table, because it was either deal with this now and get reasonable terms, or deal with it later and get nothing. And in fact, if you want, you can make comparisons between what happened in the Finnish war and what's going on now in Ukraine.

#Pascal

I think it's a very straightforward thing to do. And as a matter of fact, the current Finnish president, Mr. Stubb, actually did that when he went to Washington. He literally said, you know, we have experience in negotiating a peace deal with the Soviets, with the Russians. And what he was referring to was, of course, the Winter War, which then, unfortunately, was also a moment when Finland, you know, this revanchism came up—and they went back into the Continuation War. And Finland only got settled after '45, when basically—actually in '48—they agreed to sign a piece of paper saying, "Okay, fine, we will help you protect your border. In return, you don't occupy us." And that was the basis of Finnish Cold War neutrality.

#Michael J Carley

Well, that was a very good example of the flexibility and subtlety of Soviet foreign policy. You know, the Red Army could have crushed Finland in 1940 or 1944, but they didn't do that. One of the reasons they didn't was that they didn't want to upset their British and American allies, where there was a lot of sympathy for Finland. So the Soviet side offered terms. The president—or whatever he is—of Finland needs to go back to his history. In fact, maybe I should send him a copy of volume three of my trilogy, and he'll get the story right. But I don't know why Finland made such a terrible mistake. In my opinion—and this is off topic—but why would Finland want to ruin this policy of neutrality with the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation that worked for, what, seventy-five years? Why did they do that?

#Pascal

You know, but this is the thing. It's the—well, what frustrates me as, you know, somebody—not just because the channel is called *Neutrality Studies*, but also because of what I do academically—is that there's this whole track record of neutral buffer zones actually working. And there are very good arguments, also by a brilliant Austrian historian in Germany, Michael J. Carley, that even the Soviet offer in '52—the Stalin Notes of '53—for a neutral, unified Germany was meant absolutely seriously. He wrote a book, about 1,700 pages, on how serious that offer actually was. And to this day, there's another group of historians who say, no, he never meant it, it was just a ploy, they just wanted to undermine the West. I say, not true.

#Michael J Carley

Not true. That's what I say about Soviet policy and the continuity between Soviet, Tsarist, and Russian policy. There is continuity. All you have to do is take the time to look at it carefully and read the Soviet archives. Don't just read Western archives, where the authors of the papers all hate the Soviet Union or hate Russia. Read what the Russians say themselves. That's why I say these archives in Moscow are so important. You have to read them if you want to understand the Russian mentality and their perspectives. You have to do that. If you don't, you're on the road to ruin.

#Pascal

The argument by Austrian historian Peter Ruggenthaler about why the Soviets were not serious is that he goes to the archives and says, "We have no papers that would prove the Soviets actually prepared for a neutral Germany."

#Michael J Carley

I don't think that's true. I think a major issue for the Soviet side, with respect to Germany during those years, was to keep it neutral and prevent it from becoming an ally of the United States. There' s great subtlety in Soviet policy, and this idea of peaceful coexistence—which we usually associate with the period after 1945—is actually present from 1918 onward.

#Pascal

So what was it, then, that time and again kind of sabotaged this? Do you think Stalin thought he could avert war with Germany by signing the pact in 1939?

#Michael J Carley

I think he thought he could delay it—that was his objective. He felt the Soviet Union wouldn't be ready for war with Germany until 1942 or 1943, and he was desperate to stay out of the war until then. But, you know, smart military leaders always think they're not ready for war. It's always better to avoid war than to plunge into it.

#Pascal

Right. And how does it interlink with the foreign policy goals of the time? You said, "security, security, security." But beyond that, do you find other traits in what the Soviets wanted? Like, for instance, recognition—they weren't in the League of Nations, right? The League wouldn't have them.

#Michael J Carley

The League of Nations—the idea for the Soviet Union to enter the League in 1935, or was it 1934? Yes, 1934. This was a French idea, meant to help the French side justify improved relations with the Soviet Union by getting them into the League of Nations. Maxim Litvinov, who was the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the 1930s, saw the League as a potential tool against the expansionism of Nazi Germany. It was supposed to be a mechanism of collective security and mutual assistance against Nazi Germany. It's there in the papers—Litvinov states very clearly why the Soviet Union joined. And when he was talking to Stalin about these matters, as he often did when they were determining Soviet policy, that was the main argument.

#Pascal

Right. So, how do you use the international structure to get what you want? And you say it was about external security. That's right. I mean, the one pact that actually worked very well for the Soviet Union was the Neutrality Pact with Japan. It held for four years. That's right, it did work. And in the end, I mean, the Japanese were very, very bitter that the Soviets threw it away a year before its supposed expiration. Until the very end, the Japanese believed that the neutral Soviets would help them make a separate peace with the U.S. And of all the peace feelers, this was the one they believed in the most. How do you assess that one?

#Michael J Carley

I think that Stalin was looking ahead to the post-war period. He wanted to protect and continue cooperative relations, especially with the United States, but also with Britain. And Roosevelt, as early as 1943, had approached Stalin about coming into the war against—against Japan. In fact, Roosevelt first raised that idea with the Soviet side when Litvinov had just arrived in Washington in 1941 as the Soviet ambassador.

#Pascal

Which month was that?

#Michael J Carley

It was in December 1941, just after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He wanted the Soviet Union to come into the war against Japan. The Soviets said, no way—we've got our hands full with the Germans, we couldn't possibly come in now. And Roosevelt said, yes, if I were in your shoes, I'd say the same thing. But he came back to it in 1943 to get Stalin to agree, and ultimately Stalin did agree—three months after the end of the war with Nazi Germany in Europe. So it wasn't really duplicity toward the Japanese; it was more Stalin's hope to give something to Roosevelt that would encourage continued good relations between the two countries after the war.

#Pascal

Interesting, interesting. So, as a way to smooth this transition period, okay, I agree to backstab this one, which has already lost anyway.

#Pascal

Do you think—what do you think happened in '45–'46? What sabotaged that vision that some people still had, even in 1944? Because I should just repeat, in 1944, at Bretton Woods, the Soviet Union was at the table. There was this idea of creating a common global structure. And that, of course, didn't become a reality, but it didn't really dawn on people until about '47 or '48 that there would be a kind of Cold War split. So in '45–'46, that was very much a moment when we could have had a common security structure—but we didn't. What happened there?

#Michael J Carley

Well, I would argue that's not so. I'd say the most shocking event of 1945 was Churchill's order to his high command to prepare a contingency plan for war against the Soviet Union in July 1945. That plan was called Operation Unthinkable. It was kept top secret until 1998, when it was finally declassified and people could read it at the National Archives in Kew, just outside London.

#Pascal

Churchill prepared for war. He told them, "Prepare for war," although he then immediately lost power—right? Like, just after that.

#Michael J Carley

Well, he was defeated in the elections in July of that year. The point is that the Soviet Union played the major role in the war, in destroying the Nazi Wehrmacht. The estimates are that, by the end of

the war, 80% of the casualties on the German side were inflicted by the Red Army. The Soviet Union was a valuable ally—was the most important ally in the war against the Axis powers. And here is Churchill ordering his high command in April 1945—the war wasn't even over—and he's thinking about contingency plans for a war against the Soviet Union, to push them back toward the east and to push them out of Poland. A war. It would have been—when I think about this issue of Operation Unthinkable, I think it's a scandal. It's scandalous. And the readers of the archives in the Foreign Office should have got rid of that document, because it's a stain upon the honor of the British government at the time.

#Pascal

Why? Why is that? I mean, does it come from a different place than just visceral hate?

#Michael J Carley

It's this other issue about when the Cold War began. Most people say it began after 1945, but I say it began after 1917. And my argument is very simple. I say, look at the major characteristics of the Cold War after 1945, and you'll see them already in 1918 with respect to Soviet Russia. What are they? Cordon sanitaire, the Red Scare, peaceful coexistence. Look at the iconography of the interwar years and compare it with the iconography after 1945—exactly the same. The Soviet, the Bolshevik—the classic image of the Bolshevik after the end of World War I—is this disgusting, dirty-looking, vile individual with a knife clenched between broken, foul-looking teeth. You can almost smell the foul odor of perspiration from this Bolshevik, whose knife is clenched between his teeth and blood is flowing from the corners of his mouth, dripping from his dagger. And it's the blood of the innocents of the bourgeois West. That's the image of 1918–1919.

#Pascal

You're absolutely right. Actually, these people were not so much afraid of the Russians—they were afraid of the ideology. That's why they started shooting their own leftists, like in Germany, right? Rosa Luxemburg and so on. They were afraid. And this scare carried into the '20s and '30s. The Swiss were afraid of this ideology spreading.

#Michael J Carley

They were afraid. Look at the Spanish Civil War in 1936. In the British archives, you'll find these ridiculous documents where they're talking about the danger of Bolshevism spreading from Spain into France, and that the French were in their "Kerensky period" before the seizure of power by the communists. Kerensky, of course, was this right-wing socialist in Russia in 1917 who, for a few months, controlled the so-called provisional government. He was a right-wing socialist opposed to the Bolsheviks. The British saw France as being on the threshold of a communist revolution. In 1936, they were afraid of communism and its spread.

#Pascal

Question—because a lot of things depend on how we frame them, right? We're used to framing it as the First World War, then the interwar period, and then the Second World War. But if I'm listening to you, it would actually make more sense to frame it as the Great War, then the beginning of the Long Cold War, and then the hot phases within that Long Cold War. And, you know, one of the things is that the Second World War was not one war—it was a multitude of various wars, right? Do you think it makes more sense to think of it as a hot phase of the Long Cold War?

#Michael J Carley

Well, if you take my view of it, there were periods not only of Cold War but of hot war as well. For example, the foreign intervention from 1917 to 1921 by the West to try to overthrow the Soviet government—that was a hot war. Yeah. But the Grand Alliance of 1941 to '45 was an interregnum in my long Cold War, and it was based on a very simple principle that dates back to, I don't know, classical Greece or Rome: the enemy of my enemy is my ally. Right. And that principle was applied. On the Soviet side, some of its diplomats would say that the big question of the 1930s was, who was enemy number one—Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union? And all the elites in Europe came up with the wrong answer.

#Pascal

Hmm. But so, where does this leave us, right, with regard to how the 20th century developed? Maybe also the question of framing—since the Russian side still, even today, frames the Second World War as the Great Patriotic War. Do the Russians not also think of it as just a continuation of the first one, which our version alludes to? How do they see it?

#Michael J Carley

The Great Patriotic War?

#Pascal

Yeah. Why do they call it the Great Patriotic War and not the Second World War? How does modern Russia understand that history?

#Michael J Carley

This war was so terrible, so traumatic. Nobody really knows how many people were killed—civilians, soldiers—but the current estimate is around 27 million. If you talk to any Russian people you meet, say in Moscow or while visiting, and you get to talking about that period, they'll say, "Oh yeah, my grandpa or my great-grandpa was a Red Army soldier," or, "Yeah, my family in Ukraine was wiped

out by the Germans." Almost everybody will say, "Yeah, I had relatives who were killed during the war or who fought in the war."

#Pascal

And I haven't talked to a Russian colleague yet who doesn't know of relatives who died in that war. I haven't met one. They all have stories. Yeah.

#Michael J Carley

It was a true, a traumatic—uh, a traumatic experience, and an extraordinary one, because in the first five months of the war, the Red Army lost the equivalent of 177 divisions—around three million soldiers. Three million. The Red Army was pushed back to the outskirts of Moscow before they defeated the Wehrmacht in the Great Battle of Moscow and pushed them away from the capital. That was the first time in the war, the first time that anyone on what became the Allied side inflicted a strategic defeat on the Wehrmacht. It was a remarkable victory. And of course, Stalingrad, Kursk, and Operation Bagration were also remarkable victories against the Wehrmacht.

And from June 1941 until the summer of 1943, the Red Army fought alone on the European continent against the Wehrmacht. Fought alone. So, you know, just to finish— for Russians, this was like beating the Mongols in the 14th century. What was his name? I forget... I can't remember the Moscow prince—shame on me—I can't remember his name, the one who defeated the Mongols in the 14th century. That's the kind of victory it was. And it's remembered to this day. Hell, you can go to a concert in Moscow now and they sing this war hymn called *Svyashchennaya Voyna*—*Sacred War*. Everybody stands up, and you look at the people in the audience and you can see the tears coming down their faces, just tears. Incredible. Yeah. Incredible experience. That's what it is.

#Pascal

This is the kind of thing—all of it—that the current political establishment in Europe and America just brushes away. It's like, "Ah, they're just pretending." I mean, because we know how the war was—because Normandy. Like, you have no clue.

#Michael J Carley

They don't get it.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Michael J Carley

They don’t get it, and it’s very dangerous. Very dangerous.

#Pascal

Very, very dangerous. Maybe just to bring it back—one of the things I keep repeating, time and again, is that there were so many offers to create a common security structure, not just from Gorbachev. The CSCE, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, was a Soviet idea, sold via Finland to the rest, and then, after a five-year process, it led to a great outcome. We had the reunification of Germany under a neutral framework idea of ’53. And even before that, as you’re saying, in the ’20s and ’30s, we had these ideas from Stalin about how to create some form of stability on the continent. Do you think the Europeans have it in themselves to actually, at some point, take that seriously? Or is Europe kind of dooming itself to constantly screw it up?

#Michael J Carley

Constantly screw it up—absolutely. It's hopeless. Well, I'm not going to say it's hopeless. Maybe it's not hopeless. But if you listen to the foolish things that are said by the French, or the British, or the Germans—you know, I think to myself, these guys are playing with fire. They're playing with fire. They don't know what they're doing.

#Pascal

But they're just a continuation of Churchill, right? It's the same thing.

#Michael J Carley

Well, Churchill’s... Churchill’s a complicated guy. You know, in the 1930s he was an important advocate for better relations with the Soviet Union. He was a flip-flopper. He believed in the principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my ally.” And to the question, who was enemy number one? He got the answer right—Nazi Germany. But as soon as the danger passed, after the victory of the Red Army at Stalingrad, he began to relax. And when he relaxed, he let his old demons take over again—his anti-communist demons. That’s Churchill.

#Pascal

Thank you very much for this. It’s really fascinating—the way you frame the long Cold War history since 1917. Last point, last question: do you think that period has ended, or are we still living in the post-1917 world?

#Michael J Carley

I wouldn't frame it that way. I think the issue is the West's problem with getting along with Russia. And they just—well, you know, there's a book by a Swiss author who claims that Russophobia is a thousand years old. I can't think of his name; the book was published in French. The West's problem is that it doesn't know how to get along with Russia. It's anti-communism, Russophobia, the unwillingness of Russia to just roll over and accept Western domination of the world.

#Pascal

I mean, the insane thing is, even if you marry the highest echelons of the elite into Russia, it doesn't work. I mean, Tsar Nikolai was a cousin of Wilhelm and a cousin of—what's his face—George. They were all grandchildren of Victoria. And even that didn't stop them from going at each other's throats. That's right. Okay. It's a problem. It's a problem. Maybe we need to add some psychologists to this discussion to dig deeper. Michael, for people who want to find your books, they should, of course, look for them online. But is there a place—a homepage or something—where all your work is gathered, where people can find your collections?

#Michael J Carley

Well, I have a website. I have, how should I say, pages on academia.edu and ResearchGate, and also on the University of Montreal's website. The books are available at almost all good bookstores and on Amazon. And sometimes the University of Toronto Press has good sales going on—they can look there, too.

#Pascal

I'll put the links to your books in the description box below this video. Everyone, please check out Michael J. Carley's fantastic historical work. Michael, thank you very much for your time today.

#Michael J Carley

Thanks for inviting me to talk with you.