

Stalin Revival In Georgia! How About Hitler?
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Putin celebrated Russia's Victory Day this year (May 9), as a holiday commemorating the defeat of Hitler.

When World War II ended, the Russian public was delirious with joy! Russians in the streets embraced Americans and Englishmen and they all got drunk together. But in the years following, Stalin stopped this celebration. He feared that the sight of all the veterans missing limbs and the heroic generals in the parades might remind the public of what this war had cost the Russian people. It might remind them of how badly Stalin had managed things. He was paranoid about any possible competition from military generals.

Now, 70 years later, Putin staged a colossal military parade, the usual exhibit of weapons and flyovers and even a new tank (where can they use a tank?), but Russia's western allies did not attend. The only big powers that came were China and India, neither of them players in overcoming the Nazis. Russia, certainly heroic in that war, and sustaining gut-wrenching losses, could not have prevailed without American military support. But because of Russia's very bad behavior today in the Ukraine, they have alienated all good will from their former Western allies.

Along with this revisionist celebration of history with no mention of the other players who saved Russia, is the beginning of resurrecting the reputation of Stalin. Strange stuff indeed. How do you resurrect a monster of such scope?

Stalin, before the "Great Patriotic War," and after it, was responsible for so much carnage in the USSR that it is difficult to imagine how anyone can lionize him today. He began his career with a deliberate famine in the Ukraine, starving to death millions of farmers in 1933-4 who refused to collectivize. He confiscated their harvest of wheat and watched even children die.

Next, whole populations were deported, such as the Tatars, sent from the Crimea to the far reaches of Siberia, where at least half died during transport. The Chechens suffered the same fate, which in part explains their dysfunction and hatred of Russians today.

Thousands of innocent Russians died or barely survived imprisonment for no reason at all in the gulags of Siberia because of Stalin's paranoid policies of divide and conquer. How strange it is to see his memory revived and revered today.

In a strange twist of history, in Georgia, once a victim of the Soviet Union and now supposedly freed from its grip, the town of Gori happens to have been the birthplace of Josef Stalin and is having a Stalin revival. A new museum dedicated to Stalin's rule (1925-1953) displays his early attempts at poetry, his boots, portraits, a death mask, and sells T-shirts and kitsch. What it doesn't cover is that Georgia's brief independence between 1917-1921 was crushed by Stalin and during the next seven decades under Soviet rule, 80,000 Georgians were shot and countless others sent to Siberia.

Gori's museum does have a small exhibit in its basement to acknowledge Stalin's human rights abuses. It displays the names of Georgians sent to labor camps, those executed, a replica of a jail for political prisoners, and photos after the city was bombed in 2008 by Russian warplanes during their recent war.

This resurrection of a villain is not unique. When Mongolia was freed from the Soviet Union, there was a burst of enthusiasm for Genghis Khan too. I found that rather hard to take. But when heroes are few and far between, what is one to do?

There has been a movement among some in Transylvania to resurrect Vlad the Impaler (Dracula) who, they say, was a hero who fought the Turks. Good Grief!

So far, we have not seen a resurgence of Hitler worship among any but neo-Nazis. Austria is not yet jumping on this bandwagon, but there are many in the Muslim world who are willing to admire Hitler's work.

We have seen Richard III getting a decent burial in England, of course, but he may not have been the villain that Shakespeare painted. This is a maybe. Stalin is not.

676 words

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