



Left Skewed Investment Management

Beyond Narratives: Towards A Model

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The following article will serve as an introduction to a new series of Articles set to be released within the next month about the Russia and Ukraine conflict.

The following is meant to explicate the importance of adopting a model as a necessary alternative to ad hoc narrative creation.

Over the last month - spurred on by the Russian Invasion of Ukraine - Self-aggrandizing “Eurasian experts” from all walks of life have arisen out of the weed works to share their two cents. In the United States, If you turn on any cable news show, scroll through any of the major social media sites, or visit online discussion boards, you will find yourself swamped by the sheer volume of contributions of geopolitical analysis to the Russia and Ukraine war.

Although taking diverse forms, and varying remarkably in overall rigor and sophistication, on both the right and the left, the politically active and the politically passive, there is an overwhelming consensus against Russia.

In a country, as polarized as the United States, it is astonishing to see such considerable agreement on anything.

Conversely, if you visit Russian media outlets, watch translated news clips on YouTube, or visit popular Russian discussion boards, you will see the same thing: overwhelmingly one-sided support of Russia.

On a cursory examination, it would seem reasonable to attribute this drastic divergence to chauvinism, since it is fair to assume a significant proportion of the citizenry of a country will support their own country's foreign interests, regardless of whether they are right or wrong.

This phenomenon, however, is waning in the digital age. Blind patriotism is a thing of the past. In the global age of information, blind consent from the populous is no longer an expectation. It must be fought for and won.

This is a consequence of the “annihilation of distance” resulting from the technological advances of the last few decades, the most notable of which has been in the

Technosphere. These advances have undermined more local, traditional community structures throughout the first world, and have replaced them with virtual networks wherein participants have adopted more niche, fragmented, and transnational identities.

These networks feed off the production and consumption of information, and some of the most, if not the most, popular content on these websites is political. A lot of this has to do with the exponential increase of people engaging in political discourse on the internet since the early 2010s, mostly as a result of the adoption of smartphones. Networks have become highly politicized.

It would be fair to say that the phenomenon of drastic political change, and increased polarization in our country, is an outgrowth of these networks.

As you would expect, the control over the substance and proliferation of the content on these sites is of untold importance for people in positions of power. The momentum generated in these spaces, if unchecked, has the capacity to completely delegitimize, or conversely—further enmesh, the current embedded societal structures.

Given these facts, it should then be taken as self-evident that disparate coalitions of power monitor the digital zeitgeist very carefully and intervene in creative ways at opportune times.

The digital space holds the key to power in the 21st century.

NATO, and by extension the United States, represent a coalition that is explicitly antagonistic towards Russia, Conversely, Russia and its allies represent a coalition that opposes the west.

The resources and coercion that the Russian and U.S power elite can leverage is unfathomable.

Neither Russia nor America is impartial, and by extension, neither are their media outlets. There is not a single political site on the internet that we can fairly categorize as a neutral third-party marketplace of ideas. These hubs are a war zone - where gaining a monopoly over competition is favored over allowing the fair expression of ideas.

The feeds of respective American and Russian citizens represent armies, manufactured and conscripted by their state departments, entwined with one another, battling over “the facts”.

Each side, animated with a righteous vigor and the clarity of a Manichean, believes that the other side is lying.

However, if one engages with the more sophisticated arguments made by either side, as a non-biased observer, they will likely surprise themselves to discover how many of these arguments are made in good faith. What is implied by “good faith” is that these arguments, on both sides, are often bounded to the relevant, consensus, facts.

This may come to people as a shock, should not the facts tell an objective story? How can the facts tell two stories?

As an investment firm, inherently neutral on politics, should we not look for the plain facts without the fluff?

The problem is that facts in themselves are unimportant without narrative. It is the control over the narrative that is under contention, not the facts. You will be hard-pressed to find uncontextualized “facts” being posted anywhere since they are completely useless. Facts in themselves tell you nothing without a context, and the context that the facts are given is dependent on the picture that the one interpreting them wants to paint.

It’s a subtle point, maybe even obvious, but fully comprehending it and all its implications makes all the difference in the world. Given the same facts, and a crafty storyteller, a compelling case can be made for almost anything.

Thus, If you’re only being exposed to a single perspective – by account of your filter bubble - you’re only receiving half-truths, and by assuming that these half-truths, as factual as they may be, are full truths – you are in danger of making misjudgments about

the future course of events, and making educated judgments is the *raison de'tre* of our firm.

In order to demonstrate the saliency of this observation, I will attempt, with the consensus facts in mind, to fairly summarize both the Russian and the Western positions.

This will be done in order to show how problematic the mantra of “just sticking to facts” can be for anyone,

We have on one end – Russia.

Russia has been the objective underdog in its historical relations with the west. Beginning in the 13th century with the Teutonic Invasions of the Rus, the last 800 years have been an existential battle of survival.

In the last 300 years alone, Russia has been the victim of 4 major Invasions by western powers – the first in 1709 by Sweden, the second in 1812 by Napoleon, the third by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1914, and the 4th by Hitler in 1941 - the last of which led to the death of over 27 million Russians. Besides the invasion by Charles xii, which could fairly be considered a monarchical dispute over territories, the three latter were wars with the intention of annexation.

In 1945 - following the surrender of Nazi Germany - A bipolar world was erected which brought the USSR and the Western countries into conflict. The era of the cold war would once again feature an opposition between Western powers and the Eurasian bloc.

This conflict would engulf all the world and last nearly half a century, ultimately resulting in a Soviet defeat.

This defeat could be in large part attributed to economic pressures exerted on the USSR by the west through first-strike weapons programs, and the funding of proxy forces in support of their policy of containment.

Following the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union faced total disintegration. This disintegration was reinforced by the west's actions, an example of one of them being "shock therapy" economic policies.

During the Yeltsin era, the West was very influential in the transition of the Russian economy towards a market-based system. These programs led to the plundering of the Russian domestic economy by foreign nationals, and elite Russian citizens, through corrupt auction bidding which ultimately led to the creation of the Russian oligarchy. Poverty and massive inequality followed.

Over the next two decades following the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO began to expand into countries formerly within the Soviet orbit.

It is important to remember that NATO was a defense pact created solely to oppose the USSR. The very fact that it wasn't dissolved after the cold war was perceived as an act of hostility. NATO's expansion does not seem so benign when you take into consideration the fact that it refused to incorporate Russia, any expansion towards countries previously within the Russian sphere of influence, is perceived interpreted as an act of hostile encroachment.

In 2022 Russia is now a country with an economy less than Italy, with a history of being the victim of western aggression, and fears of being surrounded by a defense pact that was created with explicit aims contrary to their best interests.

Many Russians today believe that the west wants internal change within Russia. They believe that the West views Russian society as not sufficiently western, and therefore, fundamentally backwards. There is the widespread belief that the West has both economic and cultural ambitions in the east and that their appearance as a benign hegemon is merely a superficial ploy to hide their true imperial intentions.

This is best demonstrated by their support for color revolutions, and their undermining of other eastern domestic political structures that do not comply with their vision of the “open society”.

They look towards the examples of regime change wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

The expansion of NATO into Ukraine appears to them as a stepping stone for greater ambitions in the region. These ambitions range from a gradual loss of autonomy, the overthrowing of the Putin regime, the imposition of western liberal democracy, and even the possibility of a hot war.

These fears are also held by other conservative and traditional eastern countries. They view the West's support, in the form of both soft and hard power, for the imposition of liberal democracy and privatization within foreign nations as covert forms of imperialism, racism, economic exploitation, and cultural superiority.

This is surely a reductive and overly simplified version of a narrative that is often articulated by the pro-Russian side, but a full exposition would be beyond the scope of this article.

Now on the other end – we have the Western side.

The west contends that the era of great power politics, as conducted in the past, is an anachronism that belongs in the annals of history.

For the West, the end of the cold war did not just demarcate the endpoint of a conflict - it also marked a boundary point between the old era and the new era.

The old era was totalitarian and backward, while the new era is to be democratic and progressive.

This new vision is to become the default for the governments of the world, regardless of whether they themselves or their populace share this sentiment.

The “end of history” as articulated by Fukuyama, or the “open society” as envisioned by Karl Popper is, in the western vision at the close of the 20th century, inevitable.

This viewpoint appeared to be vindicated by a topical examination of the recent history, i.e, the transition of the bipolar world – which featured the competing vision of Totalitarianism and Liberalism – towards the Unipolar “Hyperpower(Krauthammer)” moment of America.

It is merely an appeal to naturalism to say so. Just as irreversible mutations result from the evolution of a species by natural selection, the defeat of fascism and communism by Liberalism in the 20th century would lead to the global adaptation to Liberal Democracy - the only surviving political ideology.

This monopoly of influence would allow the imposition, by hard or soft power, of what George Bush Sr referred to as a “new world order”, i.e, the spread of liberal democracies, the strengthening of international institutions, increased multilateralism, and the restriction of domestic political autonomy in countries that violated liberal principles.

Given such ideals, It would make sense why the west would view the rise of an autocrat like Putin to be a direct challenge.

Putin represents a bygone era, and therefore, any increase in his influence will slow the progress of mankind.

Some have even gone so far as to characterize Putin's "revanchism" as having a Hitlerian bent.

They see in Putin's ascension to power in 2000, in a disintegrating once-great power, and his attempt of the reintegration of former territories through something akin to what Bismarck coined "blood and Iron", as analogous to Hitler's mission in the 1930s in Germany - a country with revanchist claims towards former territories lost following the treaty of Versailles.

In Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine analogies have been made between the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the Anschluss, and Sudetenland.

There is great fear in some quarters that Putin will have his own "Danzig moment" and send us into the 3rd World War.

These two examples are meant to demonstrate how flawed relying on factual narratives, on either the Russian or American side, can be for making the proper judgment.

It is so easy to see how "objective facts" can be used to argue persuasively for both sides. You see – historical facts, without context, are just meaningless data points.

Facts only derive meaning when they are strung together with other facts in order to tell a story.

Narrative building is the telling of a story in order to give context to facts. It is a translation code, or an algorithm, to bring coherence to events that would otherwise appear random and unrelated.

At Left Skewed Investment Management, we want to go beyond this “political theater”. Instead of relying on our Eurasian Analysis from either “CNN” or “RT”, we will introduce our own “model” as a counter concept to politically motivated narrative building.

The telos of this series will be the discovery of such a model, through the examination of the most relevant competing alternatives.

The models will be judged according to our main criteria - whether they are capable of interpreting past and current events, as well as anticipating future events, with a degree of accuracy and speed.

The two main models that are to be contrasted during this series are Realism and Constructivism.

Other alternative positions are to be broached only insofar as they are ancillary, i.e., relevant to the general perspectives taken by Realism and Constructivism.

For example, we may spend time examining the works of thinkers who have appropriated the main tenants of either Realism or Constructivism and have adopted a unique Weltanschauung.

Kernels of truths will be accepted wherever.

This series will differentiate itself from competing theories by including within it the very process of discovery. This will help the readership get better acquainted with the function

of theory, expand their overall knowledge base, consider the relevant critiques, and better interpret the different hermeneutics that underlie the competing visions of the 21st century.

It is also to be processional because this series is an open-ended adventure, wherein the readership is invited to participate. Although the most perfect model is to be the aim of the series, we are limited to the past and present, and thus, always in danger of becoming rigid, and antiquated, thus to combat this - new information and new perspectives will be integrated to alter our algorithmic code. Acknowledgment of this fact is crucial if our theorizing is to have any staying power, i.e., exit the Heideggerian Axial of destruction, or be forever relegated to Derrida's "Grammatological fabric"

This will, however, call on us to play the position of geopolitical artist, geopolitical visionary. We will, thus, be called upon to use our tact - that is - our capacity of penetration to mine all of the nuggets of truths from the corpora of Constructivism, and Realism, into a synthetic, holistic, structure.

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