

## Never again? The Drumbeat of War<sup>1</sup>

*The Cloak*, June 2022

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.” With this line, the imprisoned Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, closes a CNN interview which aired his story on Sunday evening, April 24.

On one of our bookshelves I found an inscribed copy of a book titled *A Time to Speak* by Helen Lewis. She was my late husband’s – Leon Levy’s – cousin. As a Czech Jew, she also was the survivor of Nazi concentration camps where she experienced not only incredible brutality, but also some occasional and surprising kindnesses along the way – including a safe passage note received from a German officer that allowed her a safe escape from the war zone. The book was published in 1992, and in 2001 a signed copy of that book was sent to Leon – two years before we traveled to Cambridge, England, for my sabbatical – and where we met Helen’s two sons and their families that summer.

I read this book for the first time last month, and with all that is going on now in our world, it was in fact hard reading. In its Foreword, Jennifer Johnston points out how easy it is to categorize all terrorists as “monsters” and thugs and murderers ... but we also should remember that although Hitler, Stalin, and yes, Putin, are monsters indeed, the majority of them and their followers are ordinary people with families and friends. She writes:

*What happened to turn those men and women from the paths of humanity can happen again and it is important that we do not forget, and that we do not allow our children to forget, the terrors we have seen in our lifetime. The suffering of millions in the camps of Hitler and Stalin, in the prisons of Romania, South Africa and Chile, the disappeared, the despairing, the prisoners of conscience [such as Alexei Navalny in our own day before our very eyes] and of political expediency must all be remembered ... to ensure that such things will never be allowed to happen again.*

Some weeks ago Bret Stephens, a columnist with *The New York Times*, wrote an op-ed piece titled, “This is How World War III Begins.” Stephens points out that despite the fact that the traditional date for the beginning of World War II is Sept. 1, 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland, that invasion was merely one of a series of events that might have seemed unconnected. From Japan’s invasion of Manchuria to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, WWII gathered steam over the early years – like water rising until it breaches a dam. And then he points out the obvious:

*We too have been living through years of rising waters, though it took Russia’s invasion of Ukraine for much of the world to notice. ... Before the invasion, we had the Russian invasions of Georgia, Crimea and eastern Ukraine; the Russian carpet bombing of Aleppo; the use of exotic radioactive and chemical agents against Russian dissidents on British soil; Russian interference in U.S. elections and massive hacks of our computer*

*networks; the murder of Boris Memtsov and the blatant poisoning and imprisonment of Alexei Navalny ... [Stephens concludes that the West has basically spent 22 years placating Putin] ... through a long cycle of resets and wrist slaps. Ukraine's devastation is the result. ... How does the next world war begin? The same way the last one did.*

Obviously I have no answer to that. I'll just close by repeating Navalny's words while praying he doesn't die in prison: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." Well, praying isn't nothing. And we all might wind up doing a hell of a lot more than that before this is all over.

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1. See my May 4, 2022 blog for a fuller treatment of this subject.