



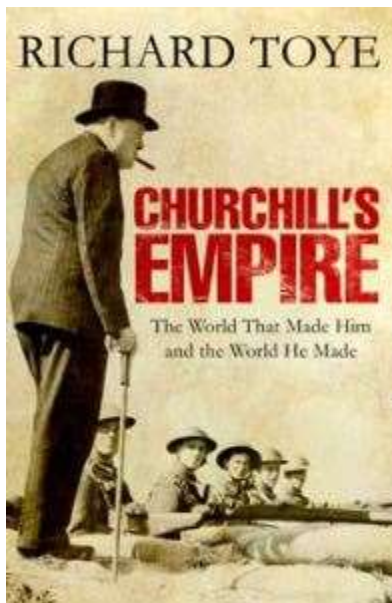
WRITER'S TALK

Professor Richard Toye

Thursday 3 December 2020 at 5pm

Churchill and Russia

"Churchill's Great Game: rethinking the origins of the Cold War"



Richard Toye is Professor of Modern History at the University of Exeter. He is a specialist in the history of rhetoric and is the author of numerous articles and several books, including *Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2013) and *The Roar of the Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill's World War II Speeches* (OUP 2013). His book *Winston Churchill: A Life in the News* was published in 2020.

In a radio broadcast given in the autumn of 1939, a month after the outbreak of the Second World War, Churchill told his audience: "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest." What Churchill meant was that the Soviet Union was acting on traditional Great Power lines, in a rational and predictable way. This was a striking, and remarkably sanguine, thing to

say just a few months after the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet pact. The pact had clearly not disrupted his conclusion, reached earlier in the thirties, that the USSR was a potentially responsible actor with which it was possible for Britain to collaborate. That conclusion was in marked contrast to Churchill's attitude in the fifteen years after 1917. To him, in the aftermath of WWI, the Bolsheviks were 'the avowed enemies of the existing civilization of the world'. This talk explains the long-term evolution of his attitudes, showing how Churchill's view of the USSR and his actions during the early Cold War intersected with his views of traditional Anglo-Russian tensions and the legacy of the Great Game.

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