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The Idea of War in Russian Political Thought after 1991

Abstract: As time passed, in Russian political thought after the collapse of the Soviet Union, militarism or even an apology for war came to the fore. The aim of the study was to detect the most important models of this trend, taking into account the timeline of the Crimean events in 2014, and to attempt to explain its background in the absence of significant military threats to Russia from the international environment. Four main models of post-Soviet militarism have been distinguished: a) the rational model, pointing to the effects of military action in the modern world; b) the dualistic model of a clash between the traditionalist Russian civilization and the corrupt and expansionist West; c) the fatalistic concept of war as an inevitable aspect of the maturation of societies; d) the revivalist model, where war is treated as a device of social mobilization.

Key words: Russia, political thought, war, militarism

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to offer fresh insights into the background of militarism or even an apology of war in Russian political thought after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The determinants of aggressive international behavior are of various nature. Firstly, more or less objective factors come into play, e.g. attacks or at least an obvious threat from the outside, the pressing need to achieve an economic goal, including ensuring the supply of mineral resources, defending citizens at risk abroad, etc. All of them could be read from the Russian narrative accompanying the war with Ukraine. No matter how nonsensical it might sound, the Kremlin's message emphasized for years the threat of "NATO military infrastructure approaching Russia's borders" (the use of which, however, would have to end in a nuclear war, in which the member states of the Alliance would suffer significantly).

Moscow's desire to regain control over Ukraine can be explained by the intention of deeper (re)integration of the Eurasian economic space, which, as a customs union, could effectively build a competitive mega-economy on the global market. The agricultural potential of Ukraine is not without significance, as well as the mineral resources that the Donbass and coastal territories abound in. Many declarations, including the statement issued on the morning of the invasion (Feb 24, 2022) and the address to the Federal Assembly in 2023, mention the need to protect the Russian population, which is at risk of repression by the comprador neo-Nazi regime in Kiev (Putin, 2022; Putin, 2023). In this study, however, we will focus on the strictly ideological and doctrinal factor, and specifically on the hypothetical apology of war (in any form), which may be one of the fundamental factors of Russia's aggressive behavior despite the lack of external threats to the state.

Considering the fact of recent military conflicts in which Russia participated in a direct way (Georgia 2008, Crimea 2014, Ukraine 2022) the fundamental question we are asking is therefore whether any essential pro-war concepts can be found in Russian political thought after the collapse of the USSR, which could have influenced the formation of aggressive attitudes among decision-makers. We would like to focus on *militarism* in Russia's political considerations understanding the term in a simple but useful way suggested by Megoran describing it as "the glorification of war as a good in itself, rather than simply as a means to an end" (Megoran, 2008, p. 476). Our study aims to discover the basic models of militarism and the apology of war that could be abstracted from the analysis of a representative part of Russian political thought in the indicated period. We are also in search for a relevant explanation of the examined doctrines and processes in the context of various policies conducted by the Russian Federation.

Theoretical remarks and basic literature

The significant place of war in Russian political thought is not a new phenomenon. However, none of the important works concerning former Russian political doctrines and social philosophy such as Walicki (2005) or Tomsinov (2014) has ever singled out a category corresponding to "militarism." The militaristic aspects in Russia's ideological sphere were appreciated first in the Soviet era, where it is useful to consider two important studies.

In his 1980 article Richard Pipes, probably the most distinguished historian of Russia in the 20th century, draws a remarkable image of the place of war and the readiness for it in the Soviet doctrine. Pipes points out that in the imperial period already, the awareness of the key importance of the armed forces for Russia as the only effective source of influence on the world was very high, as evidenced by the statements of not only militarists, but even the ones of such enlightened liberal politicians as Sergey Witte. Although Russian militarism was primarily caused by economic factors, later the direction of the logic reversed and the national economy was mainly geared at warfare. In the time of Enlightenment the psychology of mobilization was additionally strengthened with Peter the Great's powerful army based on conscription (Pipes, 1980, pp. 2–3).

Bolshevik ideologues, according to Pipes, added an additional value to this state of readiness. Marx saw the class struggle as a ruthless and prolonged conflict leading to the final victory of the proletariat over the class enemy, but even Marx's sentiments about liberalism were foreign to Lenin. His idea was to fight to the death here and now without taking into account the historical role of any historical or economic formation and "until that end will have arrived a series of the most terrible conflicts between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois governments is unavoidable." In the practical sense, Soviet militarism only at the very beginning of the new system referred to the necessity to fight the forces that were interested in the conservation of injustice. The Soviet state, in general, was always preoccupied with the need for cohesion and mobility of the masses (Pipes, 1980, pp. 4–6).

In the time of intensive economic development (Stalinism and the following years) the internal policies and state ideology stressed the intimate connection between indus-

trialization and defense. In other words, even the Soviet peacetime thinking concentrated on victory in war and permeated all aspects of political, social and economic life. The whole state was absolutely seriously kept in the readiness for war: the noncommunist separation of the military sphere and the rest was in the Soviet case much more blurred (Pipes, 1980, pp. 7–8).

Another interesting insight into the historical roots of Russian militarism was provided by John Keep in 1985, who sees the sources of Russian militarism in epochs much more distant than the Bolshevik period, when the authorities felt compelled to defend the young communist state in a revolutionary atmosphere. However, the “nation in arms” pattern was much older and dates back to Muscovy’s “service state”, where practically all inhabitants of the state were obliged to be ready at any time. Fights with neighbors for land shaped one of the characteristic military subcultures, which, apart from Russia, also includes Prussia, an 18th century partner eagerly cooperating with the Russian empire (Keep, 1985, pp. 5 ff.).

A typical militaristic state usually introduces a specific ideology supportive of military ideals and popularizes it through the educational system, it also spends big sums on military purposes strengthening willingness to bear high casualties in warfare. Russia fits all these characteristics, but, on the other hand, the armed forces themselves were ideologized to a small extent. In the case of ancient Rus, one can see a patriarchal state, possessed by a religious mission. Modern Russia, however, had no such thing: the officers took part in the court life with the emperors eagerly following the military lifestyle whereas the soldiers were of peasant descent and their “general docility can be explained not only in terms of their cultural isolation but also of their social and ethnic homogeneity” (Keep, pp. 12–13).

The question about the content of today’s Russian state ideology was taken up by Armin Krishnan (2019) citing the views of various researchers in recent years such as Steil (2018), who does not see any ideological controversy between Russia and the West, or Snyder (2018) for whom Russia turned fascist and openly hostile without provocation from outside (Comp. Krishnan, 2019, p. 27) Indeed, Snyder makes a far-reaching analysis, drawing attention to the contemporary revitalization of Ivan Ilyin’s political thought, whose nationalist ideas stand in obvious parallel to the views of the “Nazi lawyer” Carl Schmitt (Snyder, 2018, p. 15 nn.). What should be added to this polemic is Marlene Laruelle’s analytical study *Is Russia Fascist?*, where she rejects the commonly used cliché of Russia becoming fascist. Laruelle claims that “Russian regime does not exhibit doctrinal coherence”. It rather expresses the principle of flexibility with the purpose to attain normalcy and the lost dignity (Laruelle, 2021, pp. 160–161). This point of view correlates with Steil’s and many others, which emphasize the pragmatic rather than ideological background of Russia’s foreign policy.

This point of view creates the image of the Kremlin as a faithless mafia rather than a sect but this popular standpoint might be erratic. It is obvious that the mere analysis of doctrines in the thirty years that have passed after the collapse of the USSR is not able to explain the entire complexity of the background underlying militarism in Russia, culminating in the intervention in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2022). However, the shortcomings of a one-sided point of view can also be attributed to other approaches, such as decision-maker explanations, domestic political speculations pointing to the Kremlin’s

attempts to deflect attention from obvious failures in internal policies; ideological motives referring to Russia's identity in the international arena or strictly geopolitical and security considerations. That is why Götz (2017) correctly points to the necessity for a theoretical model where all the analyzed spheres interact in shaping Russia's near abroad policy.

The present study proposes a model of "limited interaction", where the crucial militaristic or simply confrontational ideas are placed in the context of Russia's political culture. We put forward a theoretical assumption that there is a feedback loop in this relationship. Firstly, political culture conditions the emergence of both political thought and specific policies: without it, these products could not become sufficiently effective, they would be suspended in a vacuum. On the other hand, the influx of ideas and the application of a particular policy, especially over a long period of time, lead to the formation of a political culture, which, thanks to these pressures, takes a certain shape or deforms it.

In this way, radical doctrines, including the apology of war, after some time may become (for various reasons) more attractive than ever before. Leaders who reject unilateral solutions may feel cornered and forced to take radical action. Thus, they can turn to ideas that have been marginalized so far. This also applies to entire societies, which in interaction with the ideology and policy of the authorities may provide some acceptance of violence, their impatience may lead to input formed as radical expectations, which would not take place in a situation of mental satisfaction.

The Predecessors

The glorification of a military action against another state dates back to at least the second half of the 19th century in Russia. Earlier, however, the attitude of Russian political thought to war as a glorious act was practically non-existent: war was treated rather, as in Western thought, as a sad necessity. The idea of war as a sacred obligation towards brothers appeared in various Pan-Slavic writings, emphasizing the need to liberate the Slavs from the rule of non-Slavic powers, mainly the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary (See: Danilevsky, 1890).

After that era it is the interwar time that turned out to be an interesting period for shaping apologetic visions of war. One of the most classical concepts was presented by Anton A. Kersnovsky, a military historian, whose book *A Philosophy of War (Filosofiya vojny)* provides a rather superficial insight into several theoretical aspects of war including such issues as the "nature of war", its relation to Christianity, crucial virtues of military men, or military ethic. Kersnovsky stresses the impossibility to avoid war, which is a constitutive characteristic of international relations: his book expresses definite criticism of pacifism, which is accused of causing more casualties than any military conflict. Kantian idea of eternal peace is perceived in this theory as utopian and the only way to avoid war is to build strength or at least to make out to be strong enough to resist (Kersnovsky, 1939).

A relatively apologetic narrative about war was produced by Ivan Ilyin, the famous nationalistic monarchist. Still during WW1, Ilyin writes in his essay *The Spiritual Meaning of War (Dukhovnyy smysl vojny)* about war as a collective effort that involves both

material and spiritual matters. War is the protection of one's own context, the source of collective existence. It cannot be won if the spirit is not defended at the same time. Any war is only one episode, and it is impossible to determine to what specific future it leads the nation at a certain moment. This spiritual uplift is necessary in itself, and not only for victory. On the other hand, the victory of the army will become its inevitable result. That is why a war is justified if the spiritual values of the nation are in danger (Ilyin, 1915, see also: Snyder, 2018, p. 26). Ilyin continued this kind of narrative in the following years as an émigré adding the conviction that the West does not understand Russia, which ought to materialize its national spirit according to the nation's right for self-determination.

Kersnovsky and Ilyin's considerations appeared either in the last moments of the Russian Empire or outside their motherland. However, in the Stalinist Soviet Union the atmosphere of preparations for war was noticeable as well. The purposeful ideological and moral preparation of Soviet citizens for the emerging conflict became apparent in the mid-1930s. The pathos of the coming world revolution in propaganda was replaced by an appeal to the historical traditions of the Russian state. The history course was restored in all schools as a compulsory subject. Written under Stalin's dictation, *A Short Course in the History of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks* became subject to study in all educational institutions in 1938. Although we cannot point to a particular political thinker as the leading ideologist the population of the USSR was generally instilled with the idea of a logical continuation of the imperial traditions in the Stalinist cover. Being in many ways a gross distortion of historical truth, the *Short Course* played a special role on the eve of the war. It created an integral, albeit simplified, image of the past, contributed to the formation of a patriotic worldview among young people. The continuity between the Russian Empire and the USSR in the confrontation with external enemies, in the creation of a multinational state was substantiated.

The Friendly Intermezzo

It is disputable whether the end of the honeymoon in Russia's relations with the West ended with Putin's Munich speech (Feb 10, 2007), which became a warning before the Georgian war, or rather with the Crimean events in 2014 (which took place right after the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi). Even if one takes the earlier date it is still easy to notice several Russian ideologies, where war and militarism are treated as a justified or even desirable solution.

When, after the hot year of 1991, which in the political sense ended with the dissolution of the USSR, the dust settled, in an atmosphere of initial enthusiasm, and then disappointed hopes, and perhaps even some kind of anxiety due to the uncontrolled course of the economic and social disaster, part of the intellectual world noticed that Russia, declaring independence, became independent of herself. One of the leading promoters of the necessity of a long struggle for Russian revival was Igor R. Shafarevich (1923–2017), a famous mathematician and conservative-nationalistic thinker. In his 1992 speech titled *The Third Patriotic War (Tretya otechestvennaya voyna)* he automatically militarized the dream of awakening. As he suggests, it is not possible to say how much time this war is going to take. The contemporary warriors should in a way proper for their time do what their ancestors did in 1812 to remove all enemy soldiers from the sacred land. Everyone can understand this path, this task in their own way: some – as the fate of their descendants, who still will not survive if Russia is destined to defeat: in one or two generations

they will die out from radiation, harmful industries and hunger, the others will treat it as a debt to the ancestors who built the country for more than 1000 years, passing it from the hands of one generation to the next, until it the present moment. The third way is to believe that Russia is one of God's plans for humanity. However, no matter how the imperative is expressed, the Russians will be saved if they do not betray the idea of Grand Russia in their souls. (Shafarevich, 1992) In this way Shafarevich actually repeats Nikita Mikhalkov's dream expressed by the narrator at the end of the famous documentary *Anna: 6–18*, which was released right after the collapse of the red empire.

Aleksandr Yanov in his 2016 monograph about the development of the Russian idea ridicules Shafarevich's determination to warn the Russians against the West with the US at the helm as a ruthless and parasitic civilization, which is determined to destroy Russia and also points to some other militant anti-Western thinkers. Aleksandr Zinovyev, the well-known logician and author of sociological essays is in fact a thinker obsessed with an imagined war of two worlds: Russia and the West, which first wanted to demolish Russia with Nazi Germany in the 1940s and with the idea of democracy in the post-Soviet period. A similar position was expressed by Sergey Kurginian, the film director, who believed that Russia in the 1990s was a country undergoing not reforms but destruction directed from outside. Finally, even important clergymen like St. Petersburg and Ladoga metropolitan Ioann preached about a "mean and dirty war" fought by well-paid Western agents (Yanov, 2016, pp. 222–223).

It is interesting that those from whom we could expect the most militant attitude, i.e. high-ranking military officers, used the language of their profession and even presented a certain "professional bias", did not incline to radical solutions. For example, the famous general-lieutenant, presidential candidate and governor of Krasnoyarsk Krai, Aleksandr Lebed, made it clear that the state of the armed forces should be good enough to deter a potential opponent, but generally he promoted peaceful solutions, much more favorable to all parties to a potential conflict. Not only that, this very popular politician also expressed the view that Russia had been devastated by armed conflicts to such an extent that it became a huge demographic hole and cannot afford another devastating war (Lebed, nd).

A similar attitude but in a much more imperial version was offered by the famous leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who in 1993 sought a kind of balance between the largest international players. As he claimed, Russia must focus on forming a decent power. As he believed, "no big war was needed" and negotiations were by all means possible. The warranty of peace was supposed to lie in the clearly drawn spheres of influence. This reasonable approach was expected to exclude conflicts between superpowers: between Russia and the United States, between Russia and Germany, between Germany and France, between China and India, between Japan and Russia, etc. This doctrine was in a way determined to find an option where all unrest in the world stops and the danger of a big war is eliminated (Zhirinovsky, 2016, p. 23).

Another important figure, one of the prominent Russian geopolitical theoreticians of the 21 century, Leonid Ivashov, wrote several works concerning international security but his considerations sound very general and are rather focused on systemic conditions of security, which is treated as top priority (Ivashov, 2002, pp. 389 ff.). His perception of Russia's situation in the contemporary world seemed very pragmatic and stressed the complexity of the multi-aspectual international system.

A completely different understanding of war was provided by the most conspicuous Russian theoreticians of imperialism, Aleksandr Dugin. Even his early book *The Conservative Revolution (Koservativnaya revoliuciya)* (1994) shows the world as a battlefield between Western “mondialism” or globalized liberal capitalism, a World Government, and genuine national traditions. Aware of the defeat in the Cold War with no clear fault among foreign agents, Dugin referred to Carl Schmitt’s *Theory of the Partisan* (Schmitt, 1963). The work was particularly suited to Dugin’s frustration with the collapse of the USSR, as it creates a vision of irrational fighters balancing between patriotism and criminal terrorism. The partisan struggle is directed against *Etherocracy*, against the repression of “technotronic globalism”. In post-Cold War times, the overriding imperative should therefore be a planetary fight against mondialism using all possible devices. Russia, according to Dugin, has always fought against anti-traditional movements in the world, only the means of this struggle have changed. Thus, the vision of a “nuclear guerrilla” emerges: the world has to choose between planetary collaborationism and a planetary guerrilla led by Russia, which has not yet lost its “aerocratic potential” (Dugin, 2004, pp. 204–205).

The motive of a global ideational conflict became the main pattern of Dugin’s political thought in the following years and was in a way hyperbolized in his 2004 apologetic book *The Philosophy of War (Filosofiya voyny)*. The author returns to Schmitt, whose arguments he exploited ten years before. However, war is presented in the later book in a much more glorious halo. According to Dugin, war has great value, it makes us realize the deep truth about human mortality. War also makes us realize that every single man belongs to a community. Referring to Ernst Jünger’s views he states that the victims and the decaying corpses of the fallen soldiers make us realize that humans are only dust, that the source of their existence is not in themselves; in this way war takes on a theological valor (Dugin, 2004, pp. 116 ff., 130 ff.).

In Dugin’s axiological narrative refusal to participate in war or desertion testify to a deep degeneration, an attitude of that kind leads to deep social atomization and a loss of vitality. Whoever is not ready to die for a just cause or a community is not ready to live a true life. Thus even the most peaceful Christian civilization practices the cult of St. George, a fighter for faith, ready to sacrifice his life for it, the savior of the still earthly, but Orthodox kingdom. One can be afraid of death, but the homeland is a value more important than the other ones: whoever is not ready to die for ideals is not worthy to be called a human being (Dugin, 2004, pp. 121–122).

The famous geopolitical visionary clearly defines the *casus belli*: many nations have challenged Russia to death. The West denies it the right to be a different civilization. In turn, “brothers once in one country” refuse to respect Russia, bow before its greatness, and the Asian hordes look greedily at Russian expanses. Isn’t that a motive for war? Therefore, it is necessary for the Russians to change priorities, it was not humorists or analysts who created Rus, but warriors. Therefore, only two ethics remain justified: the priestly, ascetic, referring to another world, and the warrior’s ethics, assuming decisiveness, strength of will and body, and temperament. Otherwise, a man betrays his caste. After all, it is the army that creates the state, and the nation understands this by voting for a uniform (Dugin, 2004, pp. 122–137).

This mystical understanding of war is based on a more holistic perception, which characterizes the deeply rooted Russian archetype. Fridman (2022, p. 30 ff.) is probably

right arguing that in Russia war has always been understood in a wider context, as an inherent element of society. As he claims, the Russians traditionally combined the Western, exceptionalist understanding of war with the Asian, holistic approach. This leads to at least two divides in the Russian theory of war. One is about the nature of war: for some (e.g. gen. Genrikh Leer) war as an inherent and eternal part of international relations and one of the crucial “civilizers of humanity”, whereas for the others (like generals Evgeny Martynov and Ignat Danilenko) the belief that declaring war is something inherent to human nature is an erratic assumption. The other divide is about the use of violence: for some war is inevitably characterized by violent force but some look at war in a broader sense (Fridman 2022, p. 28 ff.). In this way, of course, the latter get closer to the traditional model proposed by Clausewitz.

After Crimea

The Crimean events slightly changed the geopolitical situation in the Black Sea area and in the East of Ukraine (beginning a longitudinal border conflict) but, surprisingly enough, the main tendencies seemed unchanged. The military circles remained relatively moderate again. The aforementioned general Ivashov turns to relatively universalistic considerations warning the readers against dangerous trends in today’s security sphere rather than create a militaristic manifesto. His 2021 book *The Lost Reason (Utrachennyi razum)* illustrates the need for a tolerant paradigm of international relations, where all actors should resort to the friendliest elements in all religions in order to prevent apocalyptic events. It is a common duty of nations not to allow those who hide in the underground shelters to ever get out (Ivashov 2021, pp. 296–297).

In January, 2022 Ivashov and the members of All-Russian Association of officers in an open appeal warned the authorities and the nation against the possible consequences of the emerging war. As the authors of the address stressed, the real threat for Russia is not in the international sphere but in the fact that “vital areas, including demography, are steadily degrading, and the rate of population extinction is breaking world records. And degradation is systemic in nature, and in any complex system, the destruction of one of the elements can lead to the collapse of the entire system. But this is a threat of an internal nature, emanating from the model of the state, the quality of power and the condition of the society. The reasons for its formation are internal: the unviability of the state model, the complete incapacity and lack of professionalism of the system of power and administration, the passivity and disorganization of society” (Ivashov et al., 2022).

The Crimean events and the sanctions that followed the annexation strengthened the siege mentality among Russian ideologists. The most radical and clearly influential circle is the Izborsky Club, an anti-Western, anti-liberal and imperialistic think tank grouping many well known and conspicuous thinkers such as Aleksandr Prokhanov, Oleg Rozanov, Mikhail Delyagin or prominent neo-Eurasianists: Aleksandr Dugin and Valery Korovin. The latter’s arguments provide a typical example of a narrative, where Russia becomes the target of nearly all acts of the West’s international behavior. Even such military conflicts as the Arab Spring and its consequences in Libya or Syria are presented as one of the color revolutions, which are generally oriented on the destruction of Russian

influences and Russia itself (Korovin, 2014, p. 125 ff.). The enemy is clearly stated: what is good for the US (and NATO as its extension) is lethal for Russia (Korovin, 2014, p. 162 ff.). In other words, the neo-Eurasianist understanding of international relations is clearly dualistic, where we have to do with a civilizational struggle between the liberal global West and Russia as the main traditionalistic opponent, determined to construct a multipolar world.

A very similar point of view can be found in 2014 Nikolai Starikov's book *Ukraine: Chaos and Revolution: the Dollar's Weapon (Ukraina: Khaos i revolyutsiya – oruzhiye dollara)*, where the general message is that in order to write off America's colossal state debt, the US needs a war. That is why it set about Libya, Syria and Ukraine realizing several goals: to destroy Ukraine by creating a zone of instability along Russia's border, to push Russia out of the Black Sea by removing Russia's fleet from Crimea, to create an anti-Russian neighboring actor, and, most importantly, to take the Russian World apart. However, the Russians always rise after a collapse and the present scenario is by no means different. To destroy the Russian civilization the West directed Ukraine against her but in vain: Russian people will fight until Grand Russia becomes victorious in the geographical and spiritual sense (Starikov, 2014).

Another prominent member of the club, Mikhail Delyagin, in his 2016 book went even further, this time remaining quite congruent with the most militant Kremlin's hawks. He creates a vision of a long cold war that the West launched in order to eliminate Russia. According to Delyagin, this new war has basically only been going on for a few years, but it was preceded by a long-term "rewriting of history". At the same time, the West waged a war to annihilate the Russian economy, which resulted in a lack of funds for basic budgetary goals, such as healthcare and education. The reason for that militance, in Delyagin's eyes, lies in the fact that Russia's territory contains 20% of world's resources being inhabited by only 2% of its population. That is why it is necessary to take radical steps and "meet in Kiev and Lviv" to erect a memorial to Pavel Sudoplatov, the NKVD general who managed put down the banderites (Delyagin, pp. 92–93, 118). The inclination to rehabilitate the Stalinist model of state management and even Stalin himself in the military context occurred in Russian political publications after 2007 with increasing intensity (e.g. Isaev, 2021).

A strikingly similar but even more radical narrative is represented by Sergey Glazyev (2016, pp. 102 ff.), who wonders about the objectives of the "American aggression in Ukraine". As he claims, the US strategy in that country has actually nothing in common with the intention to revive Ukraine's economy or with its possible accession to Western structures. The junta that emerged after 2014 never expressed the national will but was appointed by Washington, and the policy realized after 2014 contradicts the idea of human rights and democracy with hundreds of Ukraine's citizens being persecuted or even physically liquidated.

The more the Izborsky Club's ideologists get involved into Russia's conflict with Ukraine and the global West, the more apocalyptic the vision of the enemy becomes. It finally takes the shape of the global Anti-System: Russia actually faces a dangerous creation – the "anti-Easter" world, a formation of extreme consumerism, sexual mania, Peter Pan syndrome, aging infantile humans, child-free couples, which place greater value on their own interests than on the life of unborn or aborted children. These imperatives

lead to the formation of a new anthropological type: the “city animal” fully focused on its selfish ends.

Moreover, the enemy challenges today’s Russia by the Anti-System agents, the westernized elite called “the small nation”, which erratically presents itself as the true people. This group of eggheads tries to discredit Russia as a country that does not deserve sovereignty and should subject to the so called “Civilization of Normality” (Averyanov et al., 2022, p. 47 ff., 102–105).

This concept is actually an old chestnut. The *Anti-System* is a notion created by Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev in another (strictly ethnic) context in his texts concerning ethnogenesis, especially in his *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of Earth* (*Etnogenez i biosfera zemli*). The *small nation* (*le petite people*) is a term created by Augustin Cochin, a French conservative nationalist, whose idea of a destructive progressivist elite was revitalized by Shafarevich.

An equally radical approach but somewhat different in the intentional sphere appears among some other dreamers, many of whom are members of the Izborsky Club. One of them, the chairman of the think tank, Aleksandr Prokhanov (2014) believes that the war in the south-east of Ukraine is “the second Spain, where fascism is testing humanity by the teeth”. The expected new Russian state grows out of the acts of the Great Victory. According to Prokhanov, in Donbass the laws of people’s war are in force, according to which every shot of the enemy, every death, every “act of fascist violence” gives rise to a reaction of rebuff and hatred. The war acquires the features of a national sacred war. However, it does not have a common headquarters, and there is no hierarchy of commanders. This is a kind of a *network war*, where “every city and every village, perhaps every quarter and house – becomes the headquarters, a center of resistance” (Prokhanov, 2014, pp. 2–3).

Another popular author, Maxim Kalashnikov (2014, pp. 204 ff.) extends the vision of the “Russian breakthrough” by a vision of new X-ray or laser weapons that could destroy the US vessels or the Chinese land troops. However, as he claims, in the same way as most Eurasianists and the members of the Izborsky Club, success is possible only on the basis of a new myth, which could strengthen the nation and incite it to search for scientific innovations.

The necessity of such a myth is a different but highly important motive underlying the Russian considerations about war as a crucial challenge or a crucial task. This aspect is in an obsessive way revealed in many texts, interviews and statements of a famous nationalist writer, Zakhar Prilepin. As he says, “we are not at war with Ukraine, God forbid. And not for Ukraine. We are at war with a rotten, well-fed, shameless, Russia for a new Russia. With Russia, which has two citizenships, real estate and deposits abroad, and all dreams abroad, and all ideals abroad. For Russia, which is here, which will never leave this place, which will never betray its children, who are fulfilling their military duty.” (Prilepin, 2022).

This kind of “purifying militarism” is present not only in the text accompanying the events in Ukraine after February 24, 2022. Several years before these dramatic moments in Prilepin’s works we find direct glorification of the uprising in Donbass, where the leader of the Donetsk People’s Republic – Aleksandr Zakharchenko and the other insurgents are presented as heroes in a fight to the death for a just cause (Prilepin, 2016).

Oleg Rozanov, the first deputy chairman of the Izborsky Club openly declares that in fact war is highly necessary to keep the nation awake. As he explains, Russia became the largest power in terms of territory “playing on defense” of the borders and the Orthodox faith. The opposite happens in the “years of obese well-being”, when Russia tends to decay. A well-fed European life with the prospect of a quiet old age does not arouse even a drop of enthusiasm among the Russians. In other words, without tiresome struggle, without great goals and objectives, the Russians usually decay from within: the commoners get drunk, the officials’ villas are knocked together, and the state loses its backbone being torn apart by “brutalized boyars”. That is why it makes sense to follow Heraclitus, who realizes that “war is the father of all things”. For the Russian people, war is not a desire, but a necessary condition for the state’s existence. Continuous geopolitical confrontation puts everything and everyone in their place: the army and navy hone their skills, strong business executives fill the treasury, women give birth to defenders, scientists invent the newest weapons, and “priests quietly pray for the God-protected country, its authorities and the army. Everything immediately falls into place!” (Rozanov, 2017, p. 25).

Outside the think tanks

The doctrines or sets of ideas presented above did not appear in a social vacuum. Although in the 1990s and early 2000s they could be located relatively far from the Kremlin’s line or even opposite the mainstream governmental narratives, in the later years they gradually harmonized more and more with the position of increasingly militant authorities. It is not only about Putin’s Munich speech in 2007 or several versions of the official Russia’s foreign policy concepts, which were known to a relatively narrow circle of people interested in international relations. The “educational militarism” was offered in ideologized movies, such as *1612* (directed by Vladimir Khotinenko and produced by Nikita Mikhalkov), TV shows and film series like *The Penal Battalion (Shtrafbat)*, and, most importantly, in youth organizations animated from the Kremlin.

The first steps were made by the Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement “Ours!” (“Nashi”), whose members were sometimes contemptuously called “The nashists” or Putinjugend. Their general goal was to “make Russia great again” and struggle against anti-patriotic trends and such as Nazism, fascism or defeatism. Officially, the proclaimed ideology presumed such imperatives as the preservation of Russia’s sovereignty and integrity, building an efficient civil society and modernization of the country through a “personnel revolution”. The main projects materialized by the movement can tell us a lot about its profile: “Our army”, “I want three” (children, J.D.), “Our common Victory – Your film about the war”. The organization was dissolved in 2019 enjoying the fame of a breeding ground for new nomenclature and agents.

An organization with a much more explicit, militaristic profile and directly moderated by the Kremlin is Yunarmiya: the All-Russia “Young Army” National Military Patriotic Social Movement Association (*Всероссийское военно-патриотическое общественное движение «Юнармия»*). The official purpose of the movement is “to arouse interest among the younger generation in the geography and history of Russia

and its peoples, heroes, outstanding scientists and military leaders”. Interestingly, not only single students but also military-patriotic organizations, clubs or search groups are allowed to participate. The Ministry of Defense tries to enhance young people to join the Yunarmiya by organizing educational trips where the “cadets” are supposed to work on the preservation of memorials and obelisks, keep the Eternal Flame, engage in volunteer activities, take part in major cultural and sports events, and, at the same time, receive additional education and master new skills.

This time the Kremlin did not even risk a coverup and openly stated that the Yunarmiya was created thanks to the initiative of the Russian Ministry of Defense and supported by the President. It is officially designed to unite all organizations and bodies involved in the pre-prescription training of citizens (Minoborony Rossii, 2023).

These were the initiatives put forward by the senders of the narratives, the moderators, who not only have ambitions to control their own society and organize its “defensive” life, but are also the main creators of more or less radical militaristic doctrines. On the other side of the message is the society, the receiver of the narrative, whose real opinion about the present conflict is very difficult to be tested reliably. There are several obvious obstacles, with the most important stereotypical supposition that the citizens of the Russian Federation, who are really exposed to serious problems if they declare views inconsistent with the Kremlin’s propaganda, will, most likely, hide their true opinions about the war and the foreign policy of the authorities.

An interesting analysis of the popular views among the Russian population was proposed by Moscow Carnegie Center in September 2015, where Andrei Kolesnikov, cites the results of an opinion poll conducted in December 2014 by Public Opinion Foundation. The task was to find out “How Russia is Viewed Around the World”. The respondents, as Kolesnikov shows, “were markedly more optimistic than they had been in a poll ten months earlier. In February, 57 percent of those polled thought that they lived in a developed, advanced country; by December, that number had risen to 69 percent. The number of Russians who believed that they lived in a rich country increased from 58 percent to 66 percent; in a free country – from 60 percent to 73 percent; in a country that everyone fears – from 68 percent to 86 percent; and in a country whose influence is growing – from 55 percent to 67 percent”, and that the only problem lies in the fact that “foreigners do not like Russia”. According to Kolesnikov, the Russian mind sees itself in a besieged fortress. Many actually enjoy their imprisonment suffering from the Stockholm syndrome and turning their unfreedom into a sacred value, which gives birth to militarism, a feature cultivated by centuries and reaching its peak in the Stalin era (Kolesnikov, 2015, pp. 5–6).

Public opinion polls conducted both by Levada Center and by VCIOM after the invasion of Ukraine confirm the earlier increase in support for Russia’s aggressive actions, despite the many Russian victims of military operations. As the Levada analyst states, the Ukrainian conflict is actually perceived between Russia and the West and helps to unite the Russian society around power. In the eyes of the majority, Russia defends its own territory and the Russian speaking population in Donbass. The image of the enemy is strictly stated and takes the shape of Ukrainian nationalists, NATO or the “Westernizers”. Such a dualistic approach in terms of “friend or foe” automatically forces most of the respondents to take sides and makes the majority immune to criticism of the lead-

ership or the military. They declare that it would be unpatriotic not to support the president” or “these are our boys, how can we not support them” (Volkov, 2023).

Does the fact that we are dealing with a specific situation that confronts Russian society with difficult challenges justify any possible undermining of the research results or even rejection of the generally exuberant attitude of the respondents? It seems that the moderate position of Elena Koneva (Free Moscow University) can at least be considered. The expert tackles five stereotypes that characterize the interpretation of current research. First, it disagrees with the assumption that research should not be conducted in a country that is in a state of war. In her opinion, this would be a mistake because there is an increased need for quantitative data. In addition, however, the policy is conducted in relation to them. Secondly, it is quite deceptive to believe that research institutions controlled by the authorities falsify data, and independent ones would give a more unfavorable picture of the military operation. In fact, all known studies show similar trends. Thirdly, it is not obvious that in a critical situation respondents hide their true opinion. So far, however, the refusal to answer remains at a similar level. Fourthly, it is not entirely true that respondents are divided into monolithic parties – for or against the operation: in fact, the groups of respondents are very heterogeneous. Fifthly, the belief that in a conflict situation respondents unite under one banner and that the potential of support has not yet been exhausted also does handle criticism well. We are dealing with a situation in which the sources of support have been practically exhausted, and the sources of opposition are in a state of increasing dynamics (Koneva, 2022, pp. 32–37).

Conclusions

All the presented opinions can be classified in various ways. In fact, it is possible to list at least four approaches of war in Russian political thought after 1991:

1. The post-Soviet “rational” concept of war, presented mainly by the militaries (A. Lebed, L. Ivashov). It stresses the threats from the 21st century innovations, especially if considering the possibility of using the weapons of mass destruction. Attitudes like that consist in warnings against unreasonable international behavior and in illustrating the challenges of modern technologies.
2. The dualistic model of civilizational antagonism, proposed by several visionaries, especially the members of the Izborsky Club such as Aleksandr Prokhanov or Mikhail Delyagin. War is comprehended there as a sacred obligation in the situation of Western dominance and alleged attempts to impose the model of globalist faithless liberalism.
3. The fatalistic concept of war as an unavoidable aspect of life, which cannot be prevented entirely. War in this model is like the “mother of nations”, and active participation in warfare reveals the genuine value of men. This point of view is less common: the most prominent representative of this “mystical militarism” is Aleksandr Dugin.
4. The revivalist model, represented not only by thinkers but also by radical politicians (such as Zakhar Prilepin), who stress the necessity to expose the Russians to permanent conflict, the only effective trigger expected to keep the nation awake. In this op-

tion only the state of war (in any possible shape, including hybrid wars or ideological offensives) leads the nation to the state of “naturalness”.

The phenomenon of contemporary Russian militarism and an obvious justification of war after the atrocities of WW2 cannot be described properly within a simplistic explanatory paradigm. The older generation remembers the atmosphere of “the struggle for peace” proclaimed in the Communist era; what has changed, then? One of the most typical explanations of Russia’s growing militarism is the perception of civilizational failure, the experience a new Time of Troubles. Inozemtsev (2018, p. 294) claims that the problem lies probably in the fact that nowadays Russia does not pose an existential threat to the United States or even a special economic interest, which Russia seems unable to put up with.

The easiest excuse when facing the feeling of guilt or inferiority before the heroic ancestors is the phenomenon of “phantom pains”, analyzed by Yevgeny Yasin in 2007. As he suggests, they “begin with the fact that everything is seen as a desire to offend, humiliate Russia. As if we couldn’t deal with Basayev just because Chechen fighters had gathered in the Pankisi Gorge. Or they do not extradite Gusinsky, Berezovsky and Zakaev to us only out of a desire to spoil Russia, and not because there is an independent court in Europe and they are watching with bewilderment the new anti-democratic turn of Russian politics. And a simple thought arises: if we had the same strength, they would hardly have dared to do this to us (at the same time, I somehow don’t remember that at one time we did the same to others). We are surrounded by enemies, conspiracies are being plotted against us. Instead of politics – conspiracy theories. This is the phantom pain of the empire” (Yasin, 2007, p. 38).

For some researchers the new Cold War completely lacks any ideological dimension (see Krishnan 2019, p. 27), which means that the attempts to create an ideology are in fact only a pretense. Peter Pomerantsev even claims that the Kremlin’s real belief is that “there is no truth.” Russia discarded any attempt of having a consistent ideology in favor of the aim to “own all forms of political discourse” by “climbing inside all ideologies and movements, exploiting and rendering them absurd” (Pomerantsev, 2015, p. 67).

This point of view leads to the supposition that the main explanation of Russia’s militant behavior does not fit the four explanatory categories mentioned at the beginning of our conclusions. In other words, the reasons for growing militancy might be strictly “geopolitical”, and the pragmatic objective to eliminate or contain the opponent may be predominant. Kerrane (2022, p. 81) correctly states that “Moscow views the Western efforts of democratization within the post-Soviet space as undermining Russian power and influence. Attempts by states to Westernize fuels the Kremlin’s fundamental belief that these actions are anti-Russian and part of a Western conspiracy.” It seems reasonable to accept Kerrane’s opinion that it is the “strategic culture” that determines Russian militaristic rationality rather than the structural realist scheme, where the need of balance and fear of the opponent growing in power is the leading drive (Comp. Kerrane, 2022, p. 71). In other words, although there is a lot of complaining that the West does not want to understand Russia, it also makes sense to stress that Russia has not made enough effort to understand that the introduction of liberal democracy in Eastern Europe and the extension of the sphere of stability is by no means directed against Russia’s military or geopolitical security.

Either way, in this interpretive paradigm, any way to hit the opponent seems good. Therefore, this principle is inherently amoral, although, surprisingly, those who use it can invoke morality. Urbansky (2022, p. 16) realizes that such an approach toward the West is in fact very Russian, and another anti-Western player, China, would never apply the Russian battle cry of a decline in values in “Gayrope”: “In Russian propaganda, Russia is a besieged fortress surrounded by enemies. Rather, China is presenting itself as a world power and is surreptitiously claiming that one day it will even become a unipolar power.”

Another interpretational line leads to much more interesting conclusions than “hard geopolitics”. Our cross-section of militant ideologies in Russian political thought led in model 4 to the supposition that Russian state militarism and pro-war attitudes among the population may be a result of the attempts to lift the nation’s spirits and mobilize the citizens in the situation of a problematic international challenge. If so, it makes sense to agree with Bodin, who claims that one of the most important characteristics of contemporary Russian policies (apart from pseudomorphosis and the phantom pains) is the use of simulacra: nothing in the state system is what it should be, according to the commonly known definition: the police is not a police, the journalists are not journalists, etc. (Bodin, 2016, pp. 175–179). In this context, the ideology of war is actually a simulacrum: it is officially directed against the enemy outside Russia but in fact it is a political technology, which serves internal purposes. It mobilizes the nation and puts it together, and the weakening leader is legitimized again. As Holmes and Krastev (2012) claim, “Putin [...] has never exercised much control over the country, but he succeeded in creating a system that was relatively stable because it made him appear much stronger than he actually was.” They also suggest that in fact Putin’s actions were not just a simple election fraud. As it was widely known that the elections were unfair, in fact, it was all about making the nation aware of who was in charge here, if he may even take possession of the truth (Comp. Pomerantsev, Weiss, 2014). In other words, Putin was the one who fitted the Russian scheme of political power, which is simply a result of a victorious fight.

The obvious success of the contemporary doctrines of war and militaristic political thought in Russia can be explained in many ways. However, there are still more questions than satisfactory responses. On the one hand, there is no evidence that the idea of sacred war in the situation of outer and internal threat was promoted by the military structures. On the other, the fact that intellectually mediocre, crude and aggressive narratives found support in numerous publications whose real popularity did not really justify the outlays of publishing houses provokes to deeper causal analyses. The question who actually sponsored the publishing initiative from Dugin’s *Conservative Revolution* to the newest products of the Izborsky Club remains without a satisfactory answer.

Last but not least, if we accept the explanation in model 4, where the war is fought just for mobilization and order, what kind of nation do the “patriotic imperialists” adore if it can only function efficiently when at war? The analyzed writings should be taken as an important message about the kind of tribe we have to do with and what can be expected from it in the coming years and decades.

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Idea wojny w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej po roku 1991

Streszczenie

W miarę upływu czasu w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej po upadku Związku Radzieckiego w coraz większym stopniu dochodził do głosu militarizm lub nawet apologia wojny. Zadaniem studium było wykrycie najważniejszych modeli tej tendencji z uwzględnieniem cezury czasowej wydarzeń krymskich 2014 roku, a także podjęcie próby wyjaśnienia jej podłoża przy braku istotnych czynników militarnego zagrożenia dla Rosji ze strony otoczenia międzynarodowego. Wyróżniono cztery główne modele militarizmu postsowieckiego: a) racjonalny, ekspercki wskazujący na skutki podjęcia działań militarnych we współczesnym świecie; b) dualistyczny model zderzenia tradycjonalistycznej cywilizacji rosyjskiej z zepsutym i ekspansjonistycznym Zachodem; c) fatalistyczny koncept wojny jako nieuniknionego aspektu dojrzewania społeczeństw; d) model „odrodzeniowy”, gdzie wojna stanowi głównie środek mobilizacji społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Rosja, myśl polityczna, wojna, militarizm