

The War in Ukraine and Russia: Selected Social and Psychopathological Aspects

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ABSTRACT

The declared reason of the Ukraine invasion was the anti-separatist activity in the Donbas since 2014. Apparently, this activity has been exaggerated. Countering separatism within national borders is justifiable, exemplified by Russian activities in the Caucasus. The 1991 borders of Ukraine were recognized by all nations, including Russia. Admittedly, a majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking while some people were disappointed that their region had not become a part of the Russian Federation. The invasion of Ukraine has overturned the internationally agreed status quo. Should the world become multipolar, armed conflicts may become permanent. In some ways, this would be a return to the 20th century or earlier times. A constructive alternative is a global leadership concentrated in the developed parts of the world, based on humanism and modern science. Gigantic projects could be realized by united humankind instead of rivalries and military expenditures. Wars within Europe testify to the courage of soldiers and irresponsibility of some leaders. The winners are those who remain outside. In conclusion, Russian leadership should cooperate with European neighbors and other developed nations.

Keywords: Religion, Ukraine, Armed Conflict, Atheism, Psychopathology, Russia

Introduction

The declared reason of the Ukraine invasion was the anti-separatist activity in the Donbas since 2014. Apparently, this activity has been exaggerated [1]. In principle, fighting separatism within national borders is justifiable, exemplified by Russian activities in the Caucasus. The 1991 borders of Ukraine were recognized by all nations, including Russia. Admittedly, a majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking whereas some people were disappointed that their region had not become a part of the Russian Federation.

Morality is inseparable from religion [2]. Anti-religious propaganda in the former Soviet Union was efficient, a majority of young people being nonbelievers. Atheism has been easily accepted after 1917 not only due to the propaganda, but also because the faith was not as deeply ingrained as it is sometimes supposed. The crack in Orthodox life had been noticed before 1917. Empty churches were among the causes of the revolution [3]. Faithful citizens were predominantly members of the middle class that was disrupted and newly formed since that

time. Vladimir Lenin rejected religious ethics, emphasizing the subordination of morality to the interests of class struggle the latter implying expropriation [4]. Some today's functionaries are descendants of rural proletariat who burnt mansions in 1917. and committed all kinds of violent crimes. This approach has been adopted by many people, which has evolved to kleptocracy. It was Lenin who solidified the borders of the Soviet Republics and their right to secede from the Union, which was repeatedly confirmed by the Soviet Constitutions. Accordingly, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been accomplished on the legal basis.

The campaign of illiteracy eradication in rural areas, started 1919, was atheistic. Soviet propaganda claimed successes in tearing people away from the Church [5]. In Ukraine, the communist rulers were concerned about religious revival in the late 1920s. Closings and demolitions of churches, repressions of clergy and parish activists were implemented [6]. Khrushchev's antireligious campaign met obstacles in the Ukraine where some citizens resisted not only the secular state but also the Moscow Patriarchate [7,8]. Religion is an efficient contributor to morals. Outside religion, it is hard to see how the recognizing that an action is right or wrong should provide a motive for doing right [9].

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If a child goes to church, he or she may become believing and carry faith through the whole life despite scientific education. In Russia, many people understand only a small part of the liturgy, due to it being in Church Slavonic. Probably for that reason they are more affected by ritual and tradition rather than by preaching and Bible study [10]. In other countries, parishioners are seated with a text in front of them, understanding everything what is said. Standing upright at lengthy services is a health problem; it is contraindicated, especially for aged people. The somewhat archaic language of the Synodal translation of the Bible (19th century) is not easily understandable in some places. The English Standard Version is more comprehensible. The modern translation by the Bible Society is not uniformly approved as many people are accustomed to the Synodal translation. Lacking knowledge of the Bible facilitates political demagoguery e.g. "Universal Orthodoxy is a threat to Western globalism" [11].

Religious revival in the Russia has been partly insincere, superficial and tribute to fashion. The hypothesis is presented here that a majority of today's churchgoers, priests and clerical officials are atheists or agnostics, habitually following prescribed ideologies. This pertains also to Patriarch of Moscow, who approves the invasion of Ukraine, demonstrating no willingness to seek peace and painting the war as an apocalyptic battle against "evil forces" [12]. In fact, this is a continuation of the anti-American and anti-European (read: anti-Christian) policy of the Soviets. The militaristic interpretation of Orthodox Christianity is a part of the official ideology [13].

Atheism in the Church and Society

According to the theological literature, faith is a divine gift. Appearance of religious beliefs in an adult would formally correspond to some definitions of delusion. However, the prevailing psychiatric view is that religious beliefs are not delusional if they are culturally accepted [14]. The acquisition of faith is conceivable within the concept of holy foolishness [15]. Blessed idiots are infrequent in contemporary societies; in some countries of the former Soviet Union, they risked being diagnosed with a mental disease, stigmatized, compulsorily hospitalized and treated [16]. A holy fool is simple in his judgments, interpreting Biblical passages literally; he can proclaim anathema to the clerical functionaries approving of the fratricide. According to the Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of October 01, 1993, anathema should be proclaimed to those who shed innocent blood [17,18]. On the basis of observations, the author assumes that many churchgoers, priests and clerical officials in Russia are atheists or agnostics. When preparing for the end of the communist regime, the party and military functionaries, so-called Nomenklatura sent their children to theological academies; some students being transferred directly from Marxism-Leninism faculties [19].

For inside observers it is obvious in retrospect that the party leadership prepared the end of the communist regime since mid-1980s at the latest in order to privatize the state property into their own pockets, which was in fact accomplished in the early 1990s. The most efficient tools to destabilize the communist society were the following.

1. Shortage of consumer goods (the word "deficit" is used in Russian): empty shelves in shops and long queues

everywhere. The situation was somewhat better in Moscow and certain Soviet republics but generally bad everywhere especially in the period 1986-1990. This was also a disguised inflation: salaries and prices in state-owned shops were kept stable but the shops were empty while prices at markets were much higher. This is obviously explained by market economics. Shops would never be empty if prices were set by supply and demand. Waiting hours in queues is a cost. Today the prevailing insiders' opinion is that the shortage was planned and arranged intentionally.

2. Chernobyl accident contributed to the destabilization of society. The accident has been exploited to strangle the worldwide development of nuclear energy thus supporting high prices for fossil fuels. Negligence and disregard for written instructions were among the causes of the accident [20,21,22]. The number of control rods in the reactor was only half the minimum required for the safe operation. Reactor safety systems were disabled in order to carry out an experiment [23,24], which may be a pretext for covering the sabotage.
3. The anti-alcohol campaign (1985-1989), which ended with a failure, resulting in the use of surrogates. After the campaign there was an upsurge of drunkenness that anesthetized the populace during the privatization of state property.

The exaggerated care of war veterans is showcased today. They enjoy advantages in the healthcare and everyday life; there are, however, misgivings that the veteran status has been awarded gratuitously to some individuals from the privileged milieu. Those who have participated in the Ukraine invasion, factually or on paper, will occupy leading positions without adequate training and selection. Many military veterans were factually maltreated in the period 1985-2005. The healthcare deteriorated at that time. In 2008, the difference in life expectancy between men in some West European countries and Russia was estimated at 20 years [25]. It is known that percentage of alcohol consumers is relatively high among veterans. During the anti-alcohol campaign (1985-1989), they were compelled to stand hours-long queues at retail outlets and/or to drink surrogates. After the failure of the campaign, the country was flooded by technical ethanol sold in vodka bottles through legally operating shops and kiosks. There have been mass poisonings by legally sold beverages [26]. This can be designated as patricide on a national scale. It's going on with the fratricide in Ukraine.

Psychopathological aspect

Certain phenomena can be designated either in psychiatric or in theological terms. If a war instigator or terrorist believes that he or she is acting according to the divine will, it is compatible with the Kandinsky-Clérambault syndrome - a clinical entity in which the patient believes that his or her mind is controlled by external forces [27]. The syndrome is treated by antipsychotic drugs. Unfortunately, antipsychotic treatment of all terrorists and war instigators is unfeasible. In theological terms the condition can be designated as possession. "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29). The emphasis on prayer shows that it is faith that works; a possessed individual can be helped if he or she truly believes. "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23). It may be reasonably assumed that church officials supporting the war are not believers but Soviet-nurtured atheists acting in accordance with political directives.

Psychiatric aspects of the war in Ukraine and bellicosity of some leaders have been discussed previously [28]. Here is an updated summary. The psychopathological approach to politics is successful if it identifies politicians with impaired mental competence [29]. Vladimir Putin's saying "If a fight is [perceived as] inevitable, you must strike first" may be a trace of juvenile ways of defending against bullies, presumably related to an intergenerational traumatic chain [30]. Physical abuse of children is a well-known problem in Russia, often neglected by teachers and authorities, who not always reacted to known cases of child abuse. In Soviet times, violence in families was a taboo theme, ignored or denied and not a subject for public discussion [31]. It has been estimated recently that 14% of all children are exposed to violence, two million are regularly beaten by their parents, and 10% of them die from such treatment [32]. According to another source, 40% of children are beaten in families [33]. The prevalence of family violence in Russia during last decades has been estimated to be 45-70 times higher than, for example, in England and France [34]. Yet in 2017 some forms of family violence has been officially decriminalized in Russia.

Both bullying and family violence have been described in biographies of Vladimir Putin. His father is said to have beaten the boy [30,35-37]. There is evidence supporting an association between childhood trauma and bullying with various psychiatric symptoms, including persecutory delusions [38,39]. Reportedly, the worse a child is treated, especially by his father, the more frequent are paranoid ideations observed in the adult life [40]. Putin is sensitive to hints of bullying and fears its re-enactments. In fact, it is not so much the Russian population who perceive external threats as it is their leader who is re-enacting his puerile experiences [30]. Aggressiveness may be a way to defend self-esteem, blaming others in order to maintain a positive self [38,41]. In regard to the demolition of the Ukrainian infrastructure including churches [42], Putin may be in grip of the idea that the "denazification" can be achieved through extensive devastation; otherwise the Phoenix could rise from the ashes [43]. There is an opinion that Putin's phantasm of Ukraine's denazification is an *idée fixe* based on entangled memories of what he has heard about the World War II. Putin wants to resist the imagined attack from the West; in the process, he may strive to become a new Stalin by completing the latter's unfinished business of conquering Europe [37,43]. Many people subscribe to delusions at large. It is possible for a majority to be deluded and minority not to be deluded [44] (Fig. 1). Homogeneity of thinking is a predictor of conformism that is conducive to dictatorship [45].

Paranoid rulers tend to promote mentally abnormal individuals and rely on their opinions [46]. An example is Aleksandr Dugin, called the "Putin's Brain" who preaches Russia's westward expansion resorting to religious and mystic vocabulary [47]. His writings have been analyzed previously [28]. Dugin's delusion-like ideas include the "Western plot to undermine Russia" and "Eternal struggle between Land and Sea" the latter probably being a reminiscence of the novel "1984" by George Orwell [48] (Fig. 2). Admittedly, more recent Dugin's writings contain reasonable conclusions. Criticizing globalization, he noticed that for a national bureaucracy (read: Nomenklatura) it would imply a loss of status [49]. This seems to be the main motive of the anti-globalist ideology prevailing in the Russian officialdom these days.



Figure 1: Activists near the Kremlin calling for air raids to Washington D.C. The author told them that there are museums and libraries there. After that, New York was discussed.

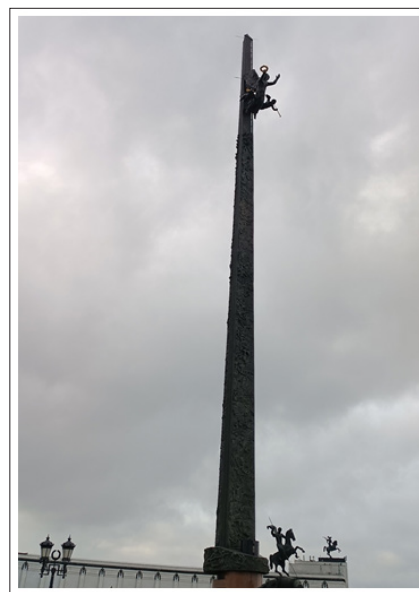


Figure 2: The Victory Monument at the Victory Park in Moscow can be seen as materialization of George Orwell's "1984", where the word Victory is often used.

Paranoid individuals are often self-centered, arrogant and vulnerable at the same time. In a sense, paranoid grandiosity is a shield for a fragile ego. The insecurity of a paranoid ruler may contribute to violence. A belief that others intend harm leads to aggression. Paranoia is generally characterized by a hostile disposition and aggressive behavior against perceived enemies. Paranoiacs are motivated to prove that they are right but have limited abilities to test whether their beliefs are realistic. Their thinking is characterized by jumping to conclusions. This bias may lead to mysterious and religion-related ideas. Certain war instigators and terrorists are paranoid in their tendency to

present themselves as prophets and world saviors. Some of them are aggressive against delusional goals, as is the case with the “denazification” of Ukraine. Of note, such ideas are virulent. Mentally healthy people can be susceptible to appeals supported by religious rhetoric, a predisposing condition being fear of strangers and projection of hatred upon them. This susceptibility is exploited by the propaganda.

In the former Soviet Union, paranoia was recognizable both in authorities and in the whole society [50]. Paranoid politicians search for new enemies and resuscitate old hatreds. This is what we are observing today. The more different a stranger, the more suitable is he or she as a target for externalization. The enemy becomes a reservoir for negated aspects of the self. A lack of knowledge regarding other countries, misleading propaganda, suppressed shame and envy contribute to hostility. Moreover, envious people blame those who make them feel ashamed by comparison. Some functionaries are descendants of the rural people who burnt mansions in 1917 and committed violent crimes, envy being one of the motives. As mentioned in the Introduction, this has evolved to kleptocracy.

The psychological projection in paranoid individuals is regarded to be an aberration of shame; being unable to tolerate shame, they project it onto others and thus disown. In its turn, intense shame confers vulnerability for paranoia [51]. Repressed shame may cause aggression [52]. Shame was described as the affective core of paranoia [53]. Shame confers vulnerability for paranoia and amplifies the latter's association with stress [51]. Shame is associated with different psychiatric conditions and symptoms. There are reasons to be ashamed in today's Russia, as reflected by a comparatively low life expectancy mainly due to the suboptimal healthcare [54].

Defensive behaviors in some paranoiacs and neurotics may include attacking weaker persons and submitting to dominant ones [38]. The latter seems to be reflected by Putin's relationships with Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic, who is a dominant personality. There has been a stereotype of “chechenophobia” in Russia [55]. The most important topic in this connection is the inter-ethnic difference in birth rate and migrations, which is largely avoided by Russian media and officials today. In November 2022, Vladimir Putin awarded the Soviet-era medal for “mother heroines” to Kadyrov's wife, who has more than 10 children. The Caucasus receives considerable federal funding.

Discussion

An autocratic or military management discourages criticism. In the healthcare, attributes thereof include the paternalistic approach to patients, bossy management, and harassment of colleagues if they do not collaborate. Under conditions of paternalism, misinformation, disregard of the principle of informed consent, and compulsory treatments are deemed permissible [56]. The following features of Russian reality must be stressed: comparatively low life expectancy, medical science not repelling falsification, inefficient medications advertised and prescribed, invasive procedures applied without indications [54].

If the power in Europe shifts to the East, it would come along with losses of liberties (Fig. 3). History teaches that rejection of

liberalism and human rights leads to usurpation of the rights and freedoms by unscrupulous individuals. The concept of human rights presupposes the cultivation of rightness *sensu lato* [57]. Russian officialdom and media talk dismissively on liberalism and human rights.

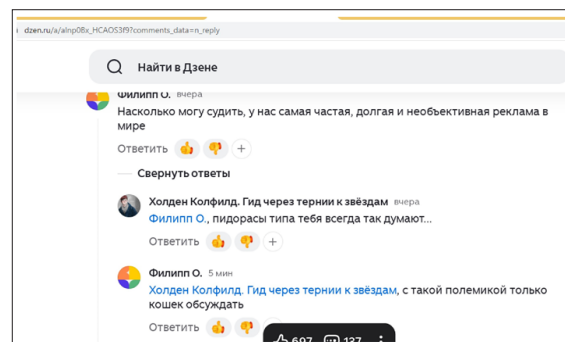


Figure 3: The “freedom of speech” in the online chat. Even mildly critical comments are either erased or encountered by verbal abuse and threats.

Freedom is a precondition of any morality. Only to those who are free, the moral discourse can be directed. Wherever freedom is lacking, there is no moral consideration [58,59]. People who are not free will do as commanded. Whatever is done to inhibit freedom, inhibits morality. Freedom is essential for realization of the concepts of merit and guilt. The restriction of freedom through fear or coercion, blackmail or intimidation, makes this impossible [60].

Autocratic regimes tend to be kleptocratic [61]. Strong dictatorship monopolizes corruption, which becomes systemic rather than coincidental. Corrupt bureaucracy is endowed with licensing privileges [62]. Apparently, systemic corruption cannot be rooted out without political changes. Elimination of dictatorship in a society, which is unprepared to liberalism, may lead to anarchy, illustrated by the events in Russia after 1989 as the communist regime broke down [63]. This tendency is generally known, discouraging the opposition. The latter is further discouraged by mass intimidation.

The intimidation policy with exaggeration of crime-related dangers is perceptible in Russia since the last decades. People have been systematically intimidated by the media, TV series, extortion e.g. by plumbers performing repairs in private apartments. The media factually propagandize criminal behavior, among other things, approving of violence and lynching in prisons. In a popular TV series, the showman Leonid Kanevsky reiterates phrases like: “He didn't survive his jail term. Prison inmates don't like such people”. Adam, one of the sons of Ramzan Kadyrov, has been promoted and decorated after he had publicly beaten a prison inmate [64]. Adam's sojourn in the prison was illegal but arranged by the authorities. Thereafter, Vladimir Putin personally met Adam. Many people in Russia live under supposed or real threat of assault and battery. Intimidated citizens are easy prey for a dictator.

There are predictions that Western alliance will undermine the Russian economy. This is improbable in view of abundant resources and the population accustomed to live and work in hard conditions. Another perspective is the shift towards eastern

neighbors, China in the first place (Fig. 4). As a result, Russia may enter into a covert subjugation. The widespread atheism is a predisposing factor for such development. Apparently, an optimal solution would be the membership of both Russia and Ukraine in the European Union with the latter's extension to the Pacific.



Figure 4: Chinese visitors in Moscow.

The appeals to use nuclear weapons and declarations of jihad emerged on the basis of the ingrained Soviet atheism, while religious vocabulary is misused for political purposes [65,66]. It can be reasonably assumed that many clerical functionaries supporting the war in Ukraine are atheists acting in accordance with political directives. Certain non-Russian actors within and outside the Federation are interested in a continuation of the fratricidal war; and there are misgivings that Vladimir Putin has come under their influence. The above-mentioned Alexandr Dugin opined: "Every civilization has the right to decide about... death, good and evil" [67]. Indeed, some terrorists made such decisions. A preferred alternative would be leadership centered in the most developed parts of the world, based on the principles of mercy, modesty and mutual help, aimed at preserving human life and health.

Conclusion

Russian leaders are currently blamed for aggression. Should the world become multipolar, armed conflicts may become permanent. In some ways, this would be a return to the 20th century, or even earlier times. A constructive alternative is a global leadership concentrated in the developed parts of the world, based on humanism and modern science. Gigantic projects could be realized by united humankind instead of rivalries and military expenditures. Wars in Europe testify to the courage of soldiers and the irresponsibility of some leaders. The winners are those who remain outside. Kleptocratic, corrupt, bigoted, and mendacious Putin-regime is to blame. Those responsible and wirepullers, deserve the death penalty not less than persons

sentenced in the past as war criminals. Elections would not offer a way out: the majority would vote as usual for the current leader. The best solution appears to be the succession to the throne by the Head of the Russian Imperial House. In conclusion, Russian leadership should cooperate with European neighbors and other developed nations.

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