

Russian Ideology and Its Believers

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The main ideological framework for Russia's current political regime and its war against Ukraine is flexible and dynamic. This article tries to pin it down, identifying some common denominators in what seem to be torrents of messages and metaphors. It also draws parallels with past ideologies. In the second part, the article analyses four groups of Russians who either support or reject Russia's war against Ukraine and mainstream ideology. It demonstrates the dynamics of changes in the wake of the war's routinization.

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“Russian Ideology” was the title of a book written by a Russian hierarch, Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev (1881–1950), in the interwar period. The book was first published in 1939 in Sofia,¹ during the royal dictatorship of Bulgarian King Boris III (1894–1943).² The book advocated for a royal dictatorship as optimal for the Russian people. The Russian Orthodox Church recognized Seraphim as a Saint in 2016.³ This was one of several political canonizations, starting with the canonization of Tsar Nicholas II in 2000, which effectively endorsed a “Russian ideology.”

However, the ideology endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church in recent years is not completely identical to the interwar “Russian ideology” of Seraphim Sobolev. While both promote Russian exceptionalism, the latter advocates for hereditary classical monarchy, while the former stands for a hybrid monarchy that pretends to be a republic.

Another difference between the old and new Russian ideologies is that the former was more systematic and doctrinal, while the latter was more nebulous. From this perspective, it is closer to the ideological frameworks of earlier reactionary movements, which identified themselves as

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¹ Архиепископъ Серафимъ (Соболевъ) [Archbishop Serafim (Sobolev)], *Русская Идеология* [Russikaya Ideologiya, Russian Ideology], (Sofia: Rahvira, 1939).

² See Mark Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War, and Political Violence since 1878*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.

³ “Act of the Sanctified Council of Bishops on the Glorification among the Holy Bishops of the Archbishop of Boguchar Serafim,” <https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4367229.html>, accessed August 2, 2025.

fascist. Sobolev's ideology also featured a clear affinity with the interwar fascisms, but unlike the latter and the modern Russian ideology, it was more defined.

In modern perception, fascism is an ideology, i.e., a comprehensive system of ideas. By contrast, early fascists argued that fascism was not an ideology like others. By others, they meant comprehensive systems of ideas based on the ideas of Karl Marx and other leftwing thinkers, who indeed tried to develop a "grand theory" that would explain society in its totality. The fascists did not even try it. What they tried was not to explain society but to transform it. For that, they did not need a grand theory. Hugh Trevor-Roper was right that fascism, "unlike communism, [...] has no agreed doctrinal base."⁴ Fascists did not even want to have such a basis. This applies to the Italian prototype of European interwar fascism, as well as to its smaller copies, including the Orthodox fascisms in the Balkans. Various sorts of fascists preferred to call their views a "worldview,"⁵ something that implies lack of dogmatism that characterized the Marxist doctrine. Remarkably, this is also one of the keywords in the political vocabulary of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, who is a co-demiurge of modern Russian ideology. However, he persistently avoids calling it an ideology.

Instead of ideas, the interwar fascists preferred gestures and symbols. They rendered their "worldviews" through quasi-liturgical rituals and quasi-icons. As Robert O. Paxton noted, fascism "sought to appeal mainly to the emotions by the use of ritual, carefully stage-managed ceremonies, and intensely charged rhetoric. The role programs and doctrine play in it is, on closer inspection, fundamentally unlike the role they play in conservatism, liberalism, and socialism."⁶ Current Russian ideology also features a minimum of doctrine and a maximum of rite.

The Moscow Patriarchate has become one of the main providers of both meanings and rituals for the Russian ideology. Its hierarchs, including the Patriarch of Moscow Kirill, try to rationalize the war against Ukraine and explain it using quasi-theological arguments. For example, in his address to the Russian Parliament in January 2024, Kirill claimed that Russia leads the global resistance to anti-Christ.⁷ Russian officials use

⁴ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Letter to Tibor Szamuely on 6 March 1970," in *One Hundred Letters From Hugh Trevor-Roper*, eds. Richard Davenport-Hines and Adam Sisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201.

⁵ See Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (New York: Knopf, 2004), 15.

⁶ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 16.

⁷ Patriarch Kirill, "Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the 12th Christmas Parliamentary Meetings in the Federation Council of the Russian Federation," January 23, 2024, <https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6096443.html>, accessed August 2, 2025.

a similar rhetoric.⁸ Russian ex-president Dmitry Medvedev, for example, posted a claim in November 2022 that the ultimate Russian mission “is to stop the supreme lord of hell, whatever name he uses: Satan, Lucifer, or Iblis.”⁹

Patriarch Kirill ensures that the meanings he sees in the war are communicated through the rich liturgical traditions of Orthodoxy. For example, he introduced a prayer for the Russian victory in the war to the liturgy: “Arise, o God, to help Your people, and give us victory by Your power!”¹⁰ Those priests who refuse to read this prayer in the liturgy or substitute the word “victory” with “peace,” are severely punished.¹¹

There are quasi-religious rituals on a larger national scale. Such are the processions held in every Russian city and town on May 9. Since Soviet times, Russians have been celebrating the end of what they call the “Great Patriotic War” on that day. The Russian Orthodox Church seems to endorse these processions so much that it accepted them to override its traditional paschal processions. The Orthodox Easter in 2024 was late, on May 5. In Moscow, on that Sunday, there were scheduled rehearsals for the solemn parade in front of the Kremlin. The Moscow Patriarchate decided to cancel its paschal liturgies in the center of the capital to facilitate the rehearsals.¹²

While the Western slogan for World War II is “Never Again,” the Russian one is “We Can Repeat.” Indeed, most Russians believe that waging war in Ukraine is fighting the assumed Ukrainian and European

⁸ Andrey Kordochkin, “Бог войны и демоны: как идеологи придумали битву России с Антихристом” [Bog voyny i demony: kak ideologi pridumali bitvu Rossii s Antikhrustom (The God of War and Demons: How Ideologists Conceived Russia’s Battle with the Antichrist)] *Novaya Gazeta*, June 10, 2024, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2024/06/10/bog-voyny-i-demony>, accessed August 2, 2025.

⁹ Dmitriy Medvedev, “Почему наше дело справедливо. Ответы на простые вопросы в День народного единства” [Pochemu nashe delo spravedlivo. Otvety na prostyye voprosy v Den’ narodnogo yedinstva (Why Our Cause Is Just: Answers to Simple Questions on National Unity Day)], Telegram, November 4, 2022, t.me/medvedev, accessed February 9, 2023, trans. С. Н.

¹⁰ Patriarch Kirill, “Prayer for the Holy Rus’,” September 25, 2022, <https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5962654.html>, accessed August 2, 2025, trans. С. Н.

¹¹ See Marina Maya-Govzman, “«Церковное подполье». Как живут российские антивоенные священники и кто им помогает” [«Tserkovnoye podpol’ye». Kak zhivut rossiyskiye antivoeyennyye svyashchenniki i kto im pomogayet (‘The Church Underground.’ How Russian Anti-War Priests Live and Who Helps Them)], *OVD-Info*, tinyurl.com/, accessed August 2, 2025.

¹² See Pravoslaviye i Zombi, “православная пасха” [pravoslavnaya pascha (The Orthodox Easter)], Telegram, April 28, 2024, t.me/orthozombies/, accessed July 27, 2024.

fascism. They are enticed to believe so by Russian propaganda, which usually ascribes to others what Russia does itself.

As the war progresses and the Russian ideology evolves, it becomes more articulate. The process of its articulation is a result of synergy between several protagonists. The most important one, no doubt, is Vladimir Putin and the circle of his ideologists. The church is another important protagonist, sometimes even more advanced and sophisticated in promoting Russian ideology than the Kremlin. Last but not least, the Russian people is an active co-demiurge of this doctrine. Putin's regime is intrinsically populist and eagerly responsive to the impulses coming *de profundis* of the Russian *psyché*. In this point, it is again coherent with the classical forms of fascism, which, in the words of Trevor-Roper, "means what people want it to mean."¹³

Despite the apparent fluidity of the current Russian ideology, it is possible to pin down some of its tenets. One of them is dualism. This worldview goes far back to human pre-history, constituted the orthodoxy of most pagan religions, and continues to be smuggled to Christianity.¹⁴ Early Christian theologians, such as Irenaeus of Lyon, identified it as heresy.¹⁵ I would define it as an arch-heresy, which now is resurfacing in the Russian ideology. Indeed, the world seen through the lens of this ideology is mostly black and white. Russia is a white part of it, while the collective West is black. The evil embedded in the West, according to modern Russian ideologues, is ontological.

One of the most revealing examples of such a dualistic worldview is an article published by a member of the Russian Parliament, Igor Ananskih, in the peer-reviewed journal *Juridical Science: History and Modernity*. In this article, titled "Russian Family as a Foundation of the Russian Statehood,"¹⁶ he argues, among other things, that there are two deities who have created two human races. A "good God" has created human beings in his image and likeness, but only some of them. An evil deity (whom the Russian MP calls "Elohim Jehovah") created other, not-so-good, human beings from Earth. The two kinds of people are two ontologically different species. This fantastic story resembles the Gnostic

¹³ Trevor-Roper, "Letter to Szamuely," 201.

¹⁴ See Cyril Hovorun, *Eastern Christianity in Its Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 738–47.

¹⁵ See Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses*, Sources chrétiennes 100*, 152, 210, 263, 293, eds. Adelin Rousseau, Bertrand Hemmerdinger, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969–1982), especially book II, 10.

¹⁶ Published at fonduniver.ru/wp, and later removed.

fairly tales about good and evil deities, as well as about insurmountable differences between the people who were born as “spiritual” and “sarkic.”

Similarly dualistic were the classical interwar forms of fascism. Its Italian version, in the words of Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, was based on “the dualisms of community and society, tradition and modernity, past and present/future, as well as sacred and profane.”¹⁷ Fascism also radically and violently counterposes “us” versus “them” and ascribes to “them,” be they communists, socialists, or Jews, ontological evilness. One of the early ideologists of the German version of fascism, Carl Schmitt, argued that society needs an enemy to be healthy.¹⁸ Dichotomization between enemy and friend is a feature of his “implicit but untenable metaphysical dualism.”¹⁹ This standpoint resembles Putin’s, who hates the West as much as he needs it – to consolidate and mobilize the Russian society in supporting his wars.

Current Russian ideology is reactionary – just as classical fascism was. The latter developed by critiquing the left side of the ideological spectrum. Russian ideologues do the same. Putin himself has declared liberalism as “obsolete” and such that “has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population.”²⁰ Patriarch Kirill corroborates his criticism by declaring liberalism a heresy.²¹ It is noteworthy that both began their public careers as open-minded and liberally thinking figures – just as Mussolini had started as a socialist.²² Then, they switched to the opposite side of the ideological spectrum.

The third feature of the current Russian ideology is its promise to the Russian people to secure a privileged relationship with history. The latter has also been identified as a feature of fascism.²³ Putin and Kirill render this feature as a unique Russian civilization that saves the world from

¹⁷ Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, “Afterword: Memory and the Past: Fascism, Spectacle, History,” *Classical Receptions Journal* 16, no. 1 (2024): 112.

¹⁸ See Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 190.

¹⁹ Richard A. Cohen, “The Power of Carl Schmitt: Fascism, Dualism and Justice,” *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019).

²⁰ See Putin’s interview “Vladimir Putin says liberalism has «become obsolete,”” interview by Lionel Barber, Henry Fox, and Alex Barker, *Financial Times*, June 27, 2019, [ft.com/content/](https://www.ft.com/content/), accessed February 11, 2024.

²¹ Interfax, “Patriarch Kirill calls for protection of faith from «global heresy of man-worship,”” March 20, 2016, interfax.ru/russia/, accessed August 2, 2025.

²² See Spencer Di Scala and Emilio Gentile, eds., *Mussolini 1883–1915: Triumph and Transformation of a Revolutionary Socialist*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²³ See Deutsches historisches Institut in Rom and Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich, Germany), *Der Italienische Faschismus: Probleme und Forschungstendenzen* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1983), 59.

falling into the abyss of decadence. This is one of the points in which the current Russian ideology coincides with its more classical ancestors, such as the one articulated by Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev. All generations of Russian ideologues, from Fyodor Dostoyevsky through Vladimir Solovyov and Ivan Il'in to Aleksandr Dugin, preached one or another form of civilizational exceptionalism.

In its radical versions, the Russian civilization is so exceptional that the rest of the world is not even worth it. This conclusion leads to a specific eschatology of the current Russian ideology. It was articulated by Putin himself, when he asked the Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov a rhetorical question in his documentary “World Order 2018”: “Why do we need such a world if there is no Russia in it?”²⁴ The Russian president later explained what he meant by this phrase:

The conversation was about whether we are ready to use the weapons which are at our disposal, including weapons of mass destruction, to protect ourselves, to protect our interests [...]. Yes, [...] we are waiting for someone to use nuclear weapons against us, while we do nothing ourselves. But then the aggressor must know that retaliation is inevitable, that he will be destroyed. And we – the victims of aggression, will go to paradise as martyrs, while they will just die, because they won't even have time to repent.²⁵

A similar eschatology is preached by Patriarch Kirill, who claimed, for example, that the Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine are automatically forgiven their sins and admitted to paradise.²⁶

This brief and non-exhaustive analysis allows us to taxonomize the current Russian ideology, which underpins the war in Ukraine, among fascisms. It took a long time for the interwar fascists to state clearly what they believed. It took even longer for the scholars to identify and classify

²⁴ See report on Putin in Solovyov's movie, “«Зачем нам такой мир, если там не будет России?» Путин – о глобальной катастрофе после ядерного удара,” March 7, 2018, *Meduza News*, meduza.io/news/, accessed August 2, 2025.

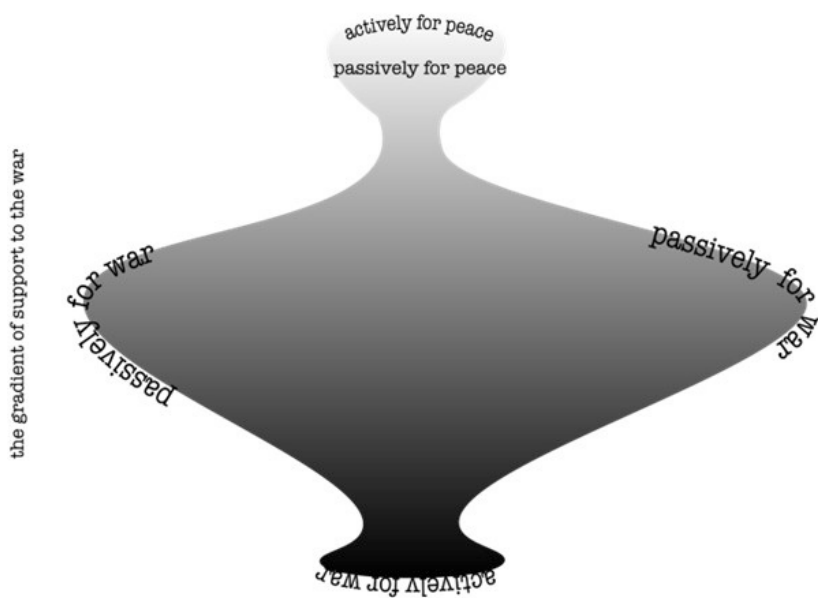
²⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Владимир Путин принял участие в XV Ежегодном заседании Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай». Стенограмма пленарной сессии” [Vladimir Putin prinyal uchastie v XV Yezhegodnom zasedanii Mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba «Valday». Stenogramma plenarnoy sessii (Vladimir Putin took part in the 15th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the plenary session)]. An interview by Fyodor Lukyanov, *Valdai Club*, October 18, 2018, ru.valdaiclub.com/events/, accessed August 2, 2025, trans. С. Н.

²⁶ “Смерть в Украине смывает все грехи?” [Smert' v Ukraine smyvayet vse grekhi? (Does death in Ukraine wash away all sins?)]. Posted by *Euronews*, September 27, 2022, youtube.com/watch, accessed February 11, 2024.

those beliefs. They still argue about the nuances of such a classification. They also argue whether the taxonomies of interwar fascisms can be extrapolated to our days.²⁷ We believe there is sufficient evidence that there are common denominators between the old and recent forms of fascism, including the one that ideologically frames the current political regime in Russia and its wars.

So far, we have analyzed who is on the emitting side of the current Russian ideology. Now, let us analyze who is on the receiving side. There is no reliable statistical data. Therefore, we can only speculate on the numbers of those who are for or against the war. It is easier to speculate on the approximate proportions between them. One can assume four categories of various attitudes to the war among Russians. These categories also apply to the Belarusians, as the political and social situation in Belarus is not much different from Russia. The attitudes can be presented as a Greek amphora.

A vast majority of the Russians and Belarusians support the aggression against Ukraine. They correspond to the part of the amphora below its neck. Within this majority, a minority supports the war actively. It



²⁷ See Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?," *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–17.

corresponds to the amphora's stand. They publicly participate in various pro-war campaigns and in the war per se. They are also the most devoted consumers of Russian ideology. Some of them actively contribute to it. As time passes, this active minority within the majority of the war supporters is shrinking. Some of them get killed in the war, and others become more passive.

The majority of the war supporters endorse the war passively. This is the largest social group in Russia and Belarus, and it corresponds to the widest part of the amphora. People from this group also consume the Russian ideology but do not translate it into their lives. Since early 2022, their daily routines have not changed dramatically.

Here I would like to briefly answer the question that one may ask: Is it about putting blame on all for supporting the war? I believe only those who personally support the war are to be blamed. However, those who personally support the war constitute the majority of the Russian and Belarussian population. They accept and even praise it when Russian projectiles kill Ukrainians indiscriminately or deprive them of life-supporting infrastructure. All Ukrainians are affected by the Russian war, and not just those who the Russians call nationalists. This is the most violent form of imposing collective victimhood and punishment.

In contrast to those Russians and Belarusians who endorse it, the Ukrainians believe there are Russians and Belarusians who are not to be blamed for what is happening in Ukraine. They are represented by the small upper part of the amphora.

Like in the case of the war supporters, the group of the war opponents is divided into two parts: active and passive ones. The active minority within this minority finds ways to help the Ukrainians, including Ukrainian Armed Forces, speak up against the war publicly, and criticize the Russian ideology. The passive majority of the minority feel sorry for the Ukrainians. They feel even more sorry for themselves because they cannot live their lives with the same self-confidence. Yet, they try to preserve their daily routines with minimal disruption, which is the main reason for their passivity.

The map of the Russian attitudes to the war and Russia's political regime cannot be presented as black and white.²⁸ It is a gradient that

²⁸ Maria Snegovaya's analysis of the public support for the war in Russia published by the Atlantic Council, corroborates the hypotheses of this paper and provides a detailed analysis of the social structure of this support: "The reluctant consensus: War and Russia's public opinion," *Atlantic Council*, December 17, 2024, atlanticcouncil.org/content, accessed August 2, 2025. See also the study by the Chicago Council on Global

spreads from the bottom to the top of the amphora. Even among the most devoted supporters of the war, there are more and less radical groups. The former, for instance, supported Yevgeniy Prigozhin and believed that Vladimir Putin was too soft in conducting the war. A similar gradient applies to the opponents of the war. Their rejection of the aggression against Ukraine can be a common denominator, but their views about the causes and desirable consequences of the war vary dramatically. For example, some accept some collective responsibility for the war, while others refuse to take any responsibility.

In the meantime, the Russian aggression against Ukraine began to be perceived as a routine by most. On this point, the war in Ukraine is not different from any other war. When protracted, sooner or later, any war becomes routinized. The routinization of war has been studied in sociology since the founder of this discipline, Max Weber,²⁹ introduced the concept of routinization in his treatise *Economy and Society*.³⁰ He developed it further in his deliberations on the formation and evolution of religious groups, some of which became known as churches.³¹ Weber reconstructed the social dynamics around charismatic and prophetic figures in detail. Eventually, he argued, groups gathered around such figures would settle down and become institutionalized: charisms turn into routines. The German sociologist observed that not only “revelation” but also “sword” constitutes an “extraordinary power” capable of turning people’s routines and perceptions upside down. Eventually, similarly to religion, violence ossifies and becomes routinized.³² This is an extraordinary observation that draws a striking parallel between the might of religion and war.

A paradox of the routinization of war is that the more images of violence and destruction flow in, the more routinized the conflict becomes.³³

Affairs, “Three in Four Russians Expect Military Victory over Ukraine,” published on February 11, 2025 at <https://tinyurl.com/3yjzv4e>, accessed December 16, 2025.

²⁹ See Stephen Kalberg, “Routinization,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, vol. 2, 712–14.

³⁰ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1925); English translation by Günther Roth and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968); new English translation by Keith Tribe, *Economy and Society I: A New Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). See p. 337, 378, 387, and 389.

³¹ Max Weber, “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” in *From Max Weber*, eds. and trans., Hans Heinrich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 2009), 267–301.

³² Weber, “The Social Psychology,” 297.

³³ See Robert Hariman, “Watching War Evolve: Photojournalism and New Forms of Violence,” in *The Violence of the Image: Photography and International Conflict*, eds. Liam Kennedy and Caitlin Patrick (London: Routledge, 2019), 157.

The war in Ukraine is the most documented and visualized in human history. People in every corner of the world could follow it online in real-time. They have seen more of the war than even those on the battlefield or in their destroyed hometowns. They have seen more images than they could digest. People are so well informed that they become overinformed and eventually do not want to know anything more. The more details and hues on the canvas of the Ukrainian war, the more people want to avert their eyes from it.

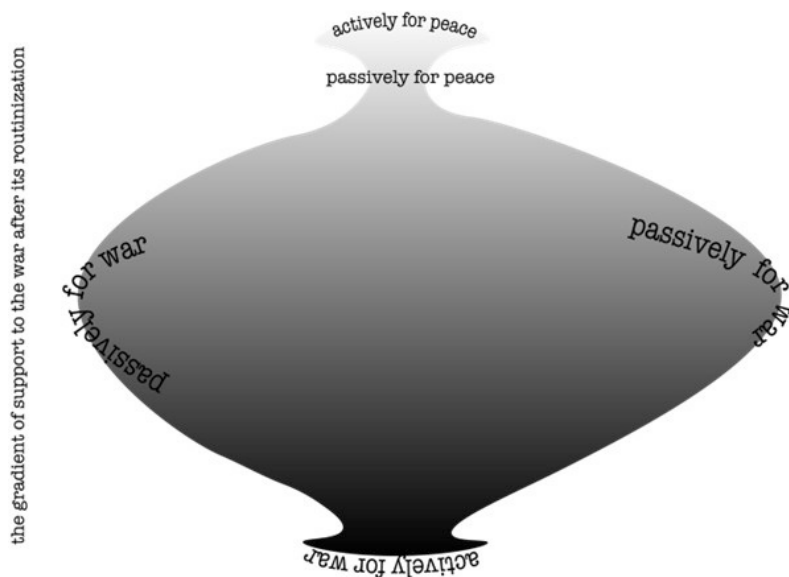
Many are relieved to be distracted by other conflicts. This probably explains why the outburst of violence in the Gaza Strip that followed the slaughter of October 2023 has apparently attracted more global attention than any previous outburst of seemingly endless violence that ravaged the region for decades. Such a switch of attention is likely to be a symptom of the routinization of the war in Ukraine. In the meantime, the war in Israel is also returning to its usual routine in the perception of the global masses and media.

Scholars researching the routinization of wars have concluded that *all* groups involved in intractable conflicts sooner or later begin perceiving them as routine.³⁴ For most Ukrainians, those who left the country and those who stayed, the routinization of the war has had a soothing effect. It relieves some pain, without healing the wounds, however. Missile and drone attacks, sirens, blackouts, ruins, and even death have become interwoven in the everyday life of almost everyone in Ukraine. When they stop, it will cause a significant disruption in people's lives.

The Russians and Belarusians, those who left the country and those who stayed, have been affected by the routinization of the war as well. The shape of the amphora that represents the structure of their approval and disapproval of the war has not changed. What changed is the proportions of the amphora's parts.

As the war takes longer than expected, the amphora's main pro-war body expands, while its anti-war tip shrinks. Quite a few of those who were against the war in its beginning, most of them passively, now gradually become its supporters, also passive. This drift from the amphora's top downwards is quiet. People who switch sides do not usually make statements or announcements. They would not even acknowledge that they switched sides. They just accept the apparent inevitability of the war

³⁴ Daniel Bar-Tal, Guy Abutbul-Selinger and Amiram Raviv, "The Culture of Conflict and Its Routinisation," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology*, eds. Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Catarina Kinnvall, Tereza Capelos, and Henk Dekker (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 383.



and do not want to accept its consequences for themselves. As a result, the small minority of Russians and Belarusians who are against the war is becoming even smaller.

Only the tiny group of active opponents to the war seems to remain unchanged. However, even this group has been affected by the war's routinization. Most of its members were shocked and lost at the beginning of the big war. They faced a severe identity crisis: To what extent could they and should they remain Russians? Many tried to play down their Russian identity. Those who could, adopted new identities: Jewish, European, American, etc.

A discussion within this group started about how deeply the war is rooted in Russian history, culture, and spirituality – what has been called “Russian psychê.” Indeed, without asking these questions, a formula for sustainable peace in Ukraine would be hardly possible. However, these discussions have been mostly put on hold among the Russians. Maybe they became scared of how much needs to be revised in the Russian mind and soul to make future wars impossible, or just the war's routinization took its toll. As a result, the dynamics of self-reflection have changed from active to passive.

Instead of answering the question of what was *wrong* in Russian history that led to the war, they now try to answer what was *right* in this history that could and should be continued after the war. Some say that

Russia is not different from other European nations that also waged wars and committed atrocities in the past. Some claim that Putin and his war are merely an anomaly of Russian history's otherwise healthy trajectory.

In this and some other points, the anti-war Russian discourse diverged further from the mainstream Ukrainian perception of the war. In contrast to this discourse, most Ukrainians believe that the war is not an accidental deviation from Russian history. There is a direct causality between the war and the centuries of this history. This does not make the war inevitable, yet, if the destructive forces pertinent to the "Russian psyché" prevail, they make such destruction possible.

The war that started in 2014 and escalated in 2022 is probably the cruelest episode in the history of relations between Russia and Ukraine, but not the only one. This history includes:

- the annihilation, including women and children, of the Ukrainian capital Baturyn by Tsar Peter Romanov in 1708, which resembles a similar annihilation of Mariupol in 2022;
- the slavery work of the Ukrainian Cossacks who were forced to build Russia's new capital, Sankt Petersburg, and many of whom died there from hardships, which resembles how the Russians force the Ukrainian PoWs to build their military infrastructure;
- dismantling of the Cossack republic of *Sich* under Catherine II who then recruited the defeated Ukrainians to her military service, which resembles how the Russians dismantle all Ukrainian structures of self-governance in the occupied territories and recruit locals to their military units;
- the oppression of the Ukrainian culture and language during the rest of Romanov's dynasty, when the leading figures of this culture, such as Taras Shevchenko, were imprisoned or exiled, and now the Russians burn the books and destroy the statues of Shevchenko and others;
- the great famine – *Holodomor* – orchestrated by Joseph Stalin, which Vladimir Putin tries not only to bring back to Ukraine but also to extrapolate to the Global South by destroying Ukrainian grain and bombarding ports of its export.

The list of parallels could be continued. It demonstrates that every aspect of violence against the Ukrainians in this war had precedents in past Russo-Ukrainian relations.

To break the vicious cycle of precedents, the Ukrainians demand an in-depth revision of these relations and of the very Russian identity.

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Redefining what it means to be Russian to the extent capable of reducing the potentiality of repetitional Russian violence in the future would be incomplete without Ukrainian participation, because misleading definitions have contributed to the war. Misleading identities constitute parts from which the Russian ideology, the engine of the war, has been assembled. Current Russian self-reflections on the driving forces of the war do not seem to be sufficient, especially given impediments caused by the routinization of the war. Therefore, the Ukrainians are now legitimate stakeholders in the process of reflecting on and correcting the Russian identity.