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Russia and war

The Cold Civil War

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“I hate your beliefs, but I am ready to give my life for your right to express them” is the thought of Voltaire, one of those that form the core of my life principles. The trouble is that the question of the war in Ukraine for me is not a matter of belief, it is simply a matter of humanism. I cannot support inhuman convictions, but in the same way, for some, my convictions look like a betrayal of the Fatherland. We all just tolerate each other now. For now. For the time being.

Every day I see how quite normal and decent people support the war, how they do not see any problem in the massacre of civilians, or how they mutter something about “not everything is so simple.” Or they justify the cruelties of this war which is disgusting to those with some higher goals, who truly hope for the good of the Motherland.

I do not mean the “professionals” working for propagandists, or those building a career on patriotic enthusiasm. I’m not talking about those who always sing along with the authorities and salute in response to anything, even the most ridiculous or criminal order. I’m talking about those who sincerely believe that our country is in danger and threatened by “Ukrainian Nazis” in collusion with NATO and the insidious “collective West”.

By my observation, there are much more such people than the oppositionists think - both liberals and leftists. They confidently predicted that the Putin administration would not survive mobilization, that “this will be Putin’s last order,” that the people would rise up and sweep away the Kremlin regime. So far, it has turned out differently: hundreds of thousands of young men from big cities, mostly capitals, have rushed away from mobilization: to Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia. But hundreds of thousands dutifully went to the slaughter. The mobilization is chaotic, it has been carried out with a multitude of violations, videos with indignant mobilized people constantly appear on the internet: there are no weapons, no food or uniforms, and sometimes the conscripts even have nowhere to live, they sleep in the open. But no uprisings predicted by opposition experts have begun. There are drinking parties, fights happen, but there are no uprisings.

The partial mobilization announced on September 21 did not unite the Russians, but, on the contrary, divided them even more. But if earlier disunity was based on some kind of tacit agreement that everyone is fighting for the well-being of his family, now hostility is penetrating our atomized social world. But this is not a consolidated indignation directed at the authorities that started this obviously criminal war. No, an atomized society breeds atomized hostility: those who recognize this war as righteous or at least inevitable, those who could not avoid mobilization, begin to hate those who are against the war or simply fled from it. This hatred will grow, funerals and other hardships of the war will strengthen it, and it will not disappear by itself, and will not become the impulse of a popular uprising. This hatred now has no common object, it is chaotic, and therefore fruitless, although still dangerous.

The antagonism between opposing political forces is formed in a society which actually involves politics, where there are forces that recognize themselves as political, ready to fight for power and dominance in society. In Russia, politics has been killed, the opposition has been scattered both physically and morally; but in order to take the country back from the brink, this is clearly not enough. So cracks are running through our society - through families, friendly companies, professional communities. Cracks of the cold civil war.

What’s happening?

It is very important for a sociologist to capture in the lens of his analysis the intersection of personal biography and

social history, about which the American rebel sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote so vividly and passionately. It is at this intersection that the secrets motivations of individuals and masses are revealed to the researcher; here, the paths of History, the intricacies of personal motives and social processes become mystically comprehensible.

So what do we have today at this intersection?

It cannot be denied that propaganda has done a good job of working on Russian society. But why did it work at all, and why did it work the way it did? Our propagandists do not have any special skills, and the authors of the famous “manuals” from the ideologues in the Presidential Administration are also mediocre thinkers. But it was their ignorance and intellectual poverty that helped them to hit the nerve, and stupid and greedy propagandists managed to awaken bright and pure feelings in their audience, rousing a disgusting obedience to war.

I repeat, this is not a propaganda wonder, this is ordinary theft.

Modern Russian propaganda, much like the entire modern Russian state itself, continues to parasitize off of the Soviet Union. The cult of the Great Patriotic War and the cult of victory were created in the USSR. In Yeltsin’s time, it faded into the background, but it quickly became clear that this cult was necessary to, if not create, then to imitate national unity. True, this cult, which once so enriched both Soviet and world artistic culture, was greatly distorted in the Putin era. Sympathy for the suffering endured by the people, admiration for the national spirit, a natural internationalism and a love of freedom, saturated the best films and books about the war. All of this was squeezed out, but victorious fanfare remained, as did chatter about the greatness of the country, and some vague feeling that the world did not sufficiently reward the Soviet Union and its successor, Russia, for the victory it alone achieved.

Propagandists pulled on this nerve. Soviet symbols, Soviet slogans, even posters from the Great Patriotic War are used. For example, the slogan that penetrates straight into the historical subconscious of most Russians is “The Fatherland is in danger!”

None of the rational arguments sounding from the screens can be repeated verbatim and without going astray, and not a single admirer of the authorities, nor a single supporter of the war can deny it. Arguments don’t matter, emotions matter. And the emotions that Russians experience when they watch and listen to endless propaganda broadcasts are not at all caused by the squeals of Skabeeva and Simonyan, or the theatrical roar of Solovyov, or the Jesuit speeches of Kiselev. Emotions are caused by constantly invoked associations with the Great Victory, with the achievements of the Grandfathers, with the merits and hardships of the Motherland.

Of course, if an individual had political convictions before February 24, he would have a strong immunity to any propaganda, and he would be able to separate the real good of the country from the manipulations of propaganda. But in an anti-political and atomized society, how many Russians would even have clear political convictions?

Today, it is even more difficult for political convictions to be born: there is no habit of conscious resistance to the authorities, but there is a habit of eternal sabotage. And the spectre of “the fatherland is in danger” begins to interfere with sabotage. And irritation rises against those who wish for the defeat of their own country, which goes against all the rules and principles of a civilized mind.

What can happen?

The bloodless option is a traditional Russian coup from above. A new leader will come who, continuing the song about “the fatherland is in danger”, will explain that the danger is not in the West and not in Ukraine, but, quite the

contrary, in the wrong policy of his predecessor. Will the newly appeared “messiah” be able to wipe out all the cracks in our society? Very briefly. At best, the Kremlin coup will help our society to come to its senses and form in a hurry something like political beliefs and movements that will finally enter the historical stage and be able to withstand real dangers for our Fatherland.

But there is a bloody option. The cracks will grow, the society split by them will collapse into the nightmare of a civil war, and no sane expert can predict its outcome.

Of course, there is always a third option, such as a series of temporary strikes, widening cracks, and various local clashes, a slow revival of political forces, a real political struggle and, finally, the victory of sane forces. The victory of the insane forces would be a defeat not only for Russia.

These are the thoughts of a sociologist.

And I, a person standing at the intersection of History and personal destiny, can only exclaim: “My God, they are normal people!” Well, and also, of course, the eternal plea: If only you are willing, Abba Father, Allow this cup to pass me by today.

30 October 2022

Source [Russian Dissent](#).

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