

THE RUSSIAN HOLY WAR AND MILITARY STATEHOOD

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Abstract. The article tests the hypothesis according to which Russia's military strategy and the ideas of the country's main ideologists can be linked to a war waged for the sake of religion. The author also attempts to assess to what extent such a link finds practical confirmation in the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The research focuses simultaneously on the analysis of two different areas: firstly, what is expressed in words, what is declared, and secondly, what is manifested in actions.

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1. Introduction

There are three main characteristics that make a religious war¹ a special kind of warfare. Firstly, what is the war waged for, and for what purpose, i.e., how is victory defined. Secondly, who is being fought against, i.e., who defines the enemy and on what justification. Thirdly, how the war is fought, i.e., what means are used and what the rules are. In the case of religious warfare, all three boil down to religion

¹ Hereinafter, the terms religious war and holy war will be used as synonyms because they are all characterized by defining victory and the enemy through religion and establishing the rules of warfare. At the same time, religion itself can also appear as a quasi-religion or even as a special form of atheism.

– that is, war is waged for the global victory of a religiously defined community, war is waged against religious enemies, and the means of warfare, the rules, have allegedly received approval from the superhuman realm. War thus becomes sacred, and religious warriors are convinced of the (unlimited) powers given to them by God (Lewis 1990).

In the tradition of Russian warfare, elements of a religious war, the number of which increased exponentially after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the spring of 2022, can be detected at first sight. Religious war is indicated by the activities of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which consecrate weapons that are used to attack Ukrainian cities and kill people. In his sermon on 25 September 2022, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, approved all the actions that the Russian occupiers are carrying out in Ukraine and, should they perish, promised them the forgiveness of their past sins by God (Russkaja Pravoslavnaja Cerkov' 2022). Already in 2014, the Russian Orthodox Church announced that it considers the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a religious conflict (Riistan 2016: 207- 208). The Russian Orthodox Church regularly creates basic arguments for the Kremlin authorities to justify the military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Kilp and Pankhurst 2022).

On the Day of National Unity of Russia, the former President of Russia and Deputy Chairman of the State Security Council Dmitry Medvedev posted on social media, “Why our cause is right”. Medvedev announced: “We listen to the words of the Creator in our hearts and obey him. These words give us a holy purpose. The purpose is to stop the supreme ruler of hell, whatever name he goes by – Satan, Lucifer, or Iblis because his purpose is death. Our purpose is life. His weapon is a blasphemous lie. But our weapon is the truth. That’s why our cause is right. That’s why the victory is ours!” (Medvedev 2022).

The article tests the hypothesis according to which Russia’s military strategy and the ideas of the country’s main ideologists can be linked to a war waged for the sake of religion. The author also attempts to assess to what extent such a link finds practical confirmation in the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The research focuses simultaneously on the analysis of two different areas: firstly, what is expressed in words, what is declared, and secondly, what is manifested in actions. The divergences between Russian ‘military thought’ and ‘military actions’ can be large and fundamental while still being informative.

2. Russian religious war and Islamic Jihad

In Russia, religious war has not reached a level of conceptual development comparable to Islamic Jihad. As a doctrine, the ‘holy war’ during Putin’s era is inferior also to the ideological ‘great achievements’ of the era of Marxism-Leninism (e.g., Lenin as the prophet of the proletariat’s struggle for freedom, the Soviet Union as the centre of the global peace struggle). Bolshevik messianism was widely known, although it was disguised as modern by first trying to conduct a futuristic

experiment with its own country and people, the results of which were to expand and be pioneering for the whole of humanity (Pipes 2001). The Bolshevik world revolution and the class struggle for the new world (worldwide communism) can be considered as a holy war. It is not difficult to see that the so-called internal and external class struggle was for the Bolsheviks the same kind of religious undertaking, which included warfare with the capitalist giants in their own consciousness, as well as armed struggle for world revolution, just as Jihad in its various forms has been for Muslims (Saar 2014: 282-287).

The Kremlin's religious war of today is fought in the name of a religious community defined as the Russian World (Russkii Mir). Mir as a term simultaneously denotes a community, a village community, or a village government, but in Church Slavonic, it also means society, the world, and the state of peace.² The Russian World represents a cultural-civilizational, geopolitical and religious concept. It is eclectic and created in a so-called post-modernist key from contradictory components from different stages of history to substantiate the imperial ambitions of the Putin regime. The Russian World embodies the idea of a supranational sphere of Russian civilization called Holy Russia, which includes the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus (occasionally also Moldova and Kazakhstan), but also all ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people who have embraced Russian culture around the world (Public Orthodoxy 2022).

The Russian World, like the Islamic *ummah*, has no physical borders; it has a direct concern with all lands, countries, and territories where Russians live or where there is a tradition of using the Russian language. In this regard, since Sergei Karaganov presented his 'concept of near abroad' (Karaganov 1992), Kremlin ideologists have started to use the (Russian) language as a weapon in a hybrid war. For people in the Western world, the attempt to politicize the use of language was shocking, but for those who lived in the Soviet Union, where the Russian language was purposefully used as a means of Russification, such an approach was not surprising.

The Russian World embraces all those who, according to Moscow, should belong there. No one is called to the Russian World individually by God, as in Islam, but certain groups of people are made aware of their collective membership. Each member of the group would be obliged to obey such a 'collective call'. Instead of religious equality, the doctrine emphasizes the duty of obedience and self-sacrifice. Not much is known about birth right belonging to the Russian World in addition to Russian citizenship. Refusal to belong to the Russian World means treason with corresponding consequences.

The religiosity underlying the Russian world is not as clearly in place as it is in Islam, where the believer has definite religious obligations. The Russian World, unlike the Muslim *ummah*, is centralized and hierarchical, i.e., directly related to subordination to Moscow as the centre. The Russian World has one and only one common political centre (Moscow, the Kremlin), one common historical, spiritual

² The Soviet-era Russian slogan 'miru mir!', which was translated as 'peace to the world!', therefore acquires completely different meanings, similarly to the concept of the 'house of peace' known in Islam – for example, that final peace in the world is possible only when communism has won the global showdown.

source (Kyiv as the ‘mother of all Russia’), one common language (Russian), one common church (the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate) and one common the patriarch (Patriarch of Moscow) who works in ‘symphonic harmony’ with the president, that is, the national leader (Putin), maintaining a special common spirit, morality and culture (Public Orthodoxy 2022). With the help of the Russian Orthodox Church, they want to fill the void left after the disappearance of the CPSU as the ideological support of the Bolshevik state from the arena of history, doing so with similar militancy.

On 5 September 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced Russia’s new foreign policy doctrine called the Russian World (Putin 2022a). The doctrine states that Russia must ‘protect, secure, and promote the traditions and ideals of the Russian World’. The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad to realize their rights, ensure the protection of their interests and preserve the Russian cultural identity, the doctrine says. According to the document, Russia must strengthen cooperation with other Slavic nations, as well as China and India, and strengthen ties with the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa.

Ukraine, as a sovereign state, has no place in this concept. In the holy war, it is the kindred nations who refuse to participate in a global religious event that are treated as traitors. Already Putin’s declaration of war immediately before 24 February 2022 presented the motives of the holy war when he, in the name of the interests of Holy Russia, denied the existence of Ukrainians as a people and the right of the Ukrainian state to life (Putin 2022b). The Kremlin’s claims about the ‘Banderians and neo-Nazis’ who seized power in Kyiv are an example of the demonization of the attack that goes along with the religious war. In addition, the crimes against humanity and war crimes systematically carried out by the Russian military are aimed at the peaceful population, i.e., all Ukrainians, for the sole reason that the occupiers were not welcomed in Ukraine with bread and salt.

3. Waves of Russia’s religious war in the 20th and 21st centuries

Russia’s religious war, like Jihad, continues without interruption (Khadduri 2005: 55-73), but active combat occurs in waves, alternating between periods of calmer and active warfare. From Moscow’s point of view, the Great Patriotic War was a hot phase of the religious war, to which the Second World War created a favourable background. Nazi Germany was an asymmetric weapon for Stalin, and the aid provided by the West was ultimate to be used in the fight against the West itself. Before the outbreak of the World War, the Bolsheviks worked closely with their enemies, who were later brought to trial (the Nazis). The satanic stratagem was to make the class enemies fight each other first, to win the great war essentially with the help of the enemies, and at the end of the war, together with one group of enemies to judge and punish another group of enemies.

One of the cornerstones of today’s identity of the Kremlin is the desire to experience religious pride and sacred enthusiasm for the victory achieved at that time. ‘Immortal

regiments' and 'holy tanks' placed on a pedestal consecrate the sacrifices that were made for the sake of victory. The constant return to the greatest geopolitical triumph of the 20th Century, the Great Patriotic War, is logical because the Great Patriotic War is Russia's last great victorious war, which is why it is also sacralised. Such a vision completely coincides with the Muslim attitude towards religious martyrs and completely ignores the possibility that the Red Army fighters did something bad (e.g., committed war crimes) in addition to destroying Nazism.

Waging a religious war allows a better understanding of the ever-increasing war cult in Russia and the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, even though 80 years have already passed since the Second World War. On 9 May 2015, when the 70th anniversary of the victory was celebrated, the main hero of the parade was Sergej Šojgu, the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation. Before receiving the parade, he took off his uniform cap and crossed himself in front of TV viewers all over Russia. Communist and Orthodox traditions merged into one and thus formed an unprecedented sacral ritual (Zögar 2016). Symbolizing that the earlier Bolshevik class struggle in the name of world revolution has been replaced by the religious struggle for the Russian World.

The Cold War, which ended in 1991, represents shame and humiliation, the defeat of the Red Empire. In Russian media, the periods of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's rule are depicted as a time of inferiority, turmoil, or confusion (in Russian 'smuta'); when taking advantage of the temporary weakness of Russians, the latter was virtually brought to their knees by their enemies. Along with the loss of the former superpower status, the position of a real alternative provider, the so-called honourable place in the global presidium, was lost to Western liberal democracy. In Russia today, the view of globalization as the unfair subjugation of the entire world to one superpower, i.e., the West, predominantly to the United States, is widespread.

A new trend towards Ukraine (i.e., Europe) appeared in 2014 when the more active phase of Russia's religious war against Ukraine began, and Russia's political and economic ties with the countries of the Western world began to decrease. Crimea and large areas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions were taken from Ukraine under the threat of a full-scale military assault. The West reacted passively to the action, like the reaction to the annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia, carrying out the so-called 'Operation of pacification Georgia' (Asmus 2010).

Russia's religious war against Ukraine (the West) continued, firstly, as support for military activities in territories occupied by Ukraine. Secondly, the Kremlin tried to finally confirm the annexation of territories illegally occupied by Ukraine. The increase in tensions in the areas bordering the European Union continued in summer-autumn 2021 when a mass attempt by migrants from the Middle East to enter the European Union took place on the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Russian officials expressed support for Belarus in its opposition to Poland and the Baltic states by spreading propaganda against Poland and the European Union. Putin criticized the European Union and accused the West of betraying humanitarian ideals, separately emphasizing the use of riot gear by the Polish authorities to repel

migrants from the border (Margesson, Mix and Welt 2021). It was essentially a series of hybrid attacks against the European Union and NATO, aimed at the “weakest points of resistance” of the enemy.

Putin has publicly justified why Russia pressured Europe, concentrated many troops on the Ukrainian border at the end of 2021, and then launched a large-scale invasion. He opened the historic Russian mission in a treatise published in July 2021, claiming that Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians are all descendants of peoples who inhabited Ancient Russia (Rus). They share a common territory, language, and religion. Allegedly Ukraine has never been a sovereign state except for a few failed attempts in history, and the emergence of the Ukrainian state after the collapse of the Soviet Union is allegedly comparable in consequences to the use of a weapon of mass destruction against Russia (Putin 2021).

Putin repeated the same thesis in a speech just before the start of the military action. According to him, Moscow has the right to dominate Kyiv due to the long and close historical intertwining of Russians and Ukrainians. Russia was forced to assert its hegemony as Ukraine, and other neighbours posed a threat to Russia’s borders by cooperating closely with the European Union and NATO. Russia was robbed of its ancestral territory when the Bolsheviks created the Ukrainian SSR separate from Russia in 1922. According to Putin, the West has used Ukraine as a platform to threaten Russia and supported the so-called neo-Nazis coming to power in that country. At the end of the speech, Putin concluded that Ukraine’s sovereignty is possible only in partnership with Russia because ‘we are one nation’ (Putin 2022b).

Symptomatic are the thoughts of Vladislav Surkov, a Kremlin confidant, in an interview given in 2020, which reflect his extreme, not to say Russian fascist (Rashist) contempt for Ukraine and Ukrainians. “Ukraine does not exist. There is Ukrainianness, that is, a special brain activity disorder... Such a bloody foreign view. Dusk instead of a country. There is borsch, Bandera, and bandura, but there is no nationality... Forcing them to a fraternal attitude towards Russians is the only method that has proven to be effective in Ukrainianness-oriented activities” (Česnakov 2020).

In the Spring of 2022, the Russians planned to repeat the action of 2014 on a larger scale, which was supposed to be a significantly longer step towards achieving the goals of the religious war. Now the stake was the inclusion of nearly 40 million people in the Russian population and the possibility of the future expansion of the empire to the dimensions of the Soviet Union. Moscow tried to hide the scale and ambitions of the military actions under the relatively modest name ‘special military operation’.

4. Hybridity and asymmetry of the Russian religious war

The concept of Russian hybrid warfare was displayed to the wider public in an article by Valerj Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation (Gerasimov 2013). When analysing this or another text of Russian origin dedicated to the military sphere, one must not forget the principle of governance there, where all

power is concentrated in the person of the ruler.

Even the highest military officers are not independent experts in the military sphere; their only task and defining role is not to get into conflict with the divine will of the ruler. The Russian way of governing includes a specific use of words and the dependence of the meaning of words on the proximity of a person to the top of power. Nobody's position is permanent and can change in an instant in any direction, which also changes the assessment of his or her entire activity. To evaluate the meaning of each published text, we should know the author's position as a subject of the ruler (Putin), who may have ideas and visions, the coincidence of which with the understanding of the ruler must be complete.

The rulers of Russia continue to be influenced by the notion that all wars waged by this country are always justified, i.e., just. Peace will come only after the final victory over the enemy. Moscow has been seen as the Third Rome; there will be no fourth, so either victory or the destruction of the entire world is possible (Toynbee 1960). Even in the 21st century, the principle applies in Russia, according to which the tsar can figuratively speaking, begin to implement in the morning what he dreamed at night (von Gentz 1968: 80). Such a ruler is basically infallible, which is why it is also completely excluded that he could ever or under any circumstances admit the fallacy of his earlier decisions. Due to the presence of direct contact with God, they simply cannot exist, and even error always contains great wisdom.

It is the duty of the subjects to obey the ruler's word as a statement of divine wisdom and not to doubt his authority. Russia does not and cannot have a well-formulated and well-justified grand strategy or military doctrine with a coherent meaning, which would be the basis for the country's consistent activities in the military sphere, as is customary in modern countries of the Western world (Posen 2014: 1). In addition, Russia does not have a holy book like the Koran, which lays down the general principles of waging (religious) war. The military doctrine as such resides in the ruler's head, and what it exactly contains, only he knows.

Noted security expert Mark Galeotti thoroughly analysed Gerasimov's article back in 2014. He concluded that despite the use of the so-called defence narrative, Gerasimov had the opposite in mind when describing the dangers to Russia in connection with the West's new type of warfare. He was talking about a new type of warfare that Russia would have to take on. Galeotti called this approach Aesop's language, where defending means attacking and repelling an attack means attacking. By distorting the events of Arab Spring as the result of covert Western intervention, he proposed developing Russia's ability to damage and destroy countries without large-scale military intervention (Galeotti 2014).

This approach to Russia's hybrid war earned strong condemnation from Moscow. Later, Galeotti issued a public regret and essentially apologized to the Kremlin, saying there was no new strategic doctrine. According to him, it was a good old 'political warfare', in which the West has been engaged for several decades. "The Gerasimov doctrine has never meant anything and does not mean anything now. It's time to leave this issue in the past," Galeotti said at the end of his letter of apology (Galeotti 2018a).

Based on the pained reaction of the Kremlin, it can be concluded that Galeotti touched a tender spot. The said doctrine represents an attempt to compensate for military technological deficiencies in an asymmetric way when seemingly hopeless confrontations can be resolved with the support of war tactics (including the deliberate creation of the so-called fog of war). This is also known to be the tactic of Islamic religious warfare, from targeted atrocities with the aim of intimidating the enemy and forcing them to surrender (Khadduri 2005) and ending with fundamentalist terrorism as a ‘weaker party’s weapon against the stronger party’.

The Russian private military company Wagner, with which the Kremlin officially denies any involvement, has received a lot of international attention (Mackinnon 2021). Today, active recruitment into Wagner units takes place in prisons, when criminals serving sentences are offered the opportunity to have their sentences quashed and other bonuses (Sukhanin 2022). Such a practice is unthinkable within the framework of today’s principles of warfare in the Western world but is entirely appropriate in the context of a holy war. Similarly with Jihad, one can be forgiven by God for one’s past individual sins for participating in the Russian holy war because even by committing crimes, one can be a Russian patriot and render invaluable services to the homeland (Galeotti 2018b).

Asymmetry manifests itself primarily as an attempt to compensate for one’s weakness because asymmetry in warfare can mean anything, but its main content is the use of all kinds of means as weapons (Galeotti 2022). Among others, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke about the ‘asymmetric response’ of the Soviet Union to the American space wars program back in the 1980s. In his book “The Philosophy of War”, Aleksandr Dugin emphasizes the need for the development of the doctrine of asymmetry, which results from ‘new challenges to world security, which are obviously asymmetric’ (Dugin 2004: 13). The tactic of this kind of religious war is ‘looking for the weak link or the weakest point of resistance’ in the enemy’s camp, which takes place both in individual countries and in the case of the entire Western world.

For a long time, the Russian side denied the presence of Russian special forces operating in Crimea in 2014, which was later publicly confirmed by President Putin. Tactically, the activities of the ‘little green men’ looked like something between a border warfare and a spontaneous rebellion, but the practical result was the annexation of a strategically important region to Russia. The population growth of 5 million inhabitants was also not insignificant. However, what is most important, and which was also noticed by Western military analysts, was the fact that in the case of this kind of action, there is no clear moment when NATO’s Chapter 5 should be applied, i.e., the entire organization’s defensive action against an attack. Thus, such a hybrid war model could also be well suited for use against NATO member states.

Hybrid military measures include the distortion of (international) law and the use of legal arguments as a weapon for controversial purposes (lawfare). For the Putin administration, legitimizing the Russian stronghold in its unchanged form into the legal and political space of Ukraine was supposed to be a means of destroying Ukrainian statehood from the so-called inside. On 7 February 2022, when commenting on the Minsk agreements, Putin used a pun with an uncensored ulterior

motive (Čunihina 2022). It is obvious that these agreements were only intended to hide the real ambitions of the Russian leaders.

The implementation of the so-called non-linear war (Pomerantsev 2014), which is opposed to linear war, allows for great flexibility in defining the enemy and determining the limits of military action. It is known that the principles of religious war do not include the inadmissibility of genocide. In this way, the Russian army is not only at war with the Ukrainian army, but the entire population of Ukraine is the legitimate target, which is bombed and attacked with various types of weapons, and the country's infrastructure and civilian objects are purposefully destroyed. The aim is to increase dissatisfaction with the central government in Kyiv and to cause war fatigue, although, in essence, these are war crimes committed on a regular basis. According to the Human Rights Ombudsman of Ukraine, at least 1.7 million people, including 276,000 children, had been deported from the occupied territory of Ukraine to Russia as of 14 July 2022 (Khoshhool and Raymond 2022).

5. Military statehood of Russia

The Russian military statehood tradition, as well as the religious warfare, goes back to Muscovite state in the 15th century when it was transferred from the state of Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde. According to the basic idea of a military state, a state is independent only if its army takes responsibility for two fundamental functions: protection from external enemies and ensuring internal order. Thus, the immanent characteristic of today's Russia is to be an effective means of defence and attack (Surkov 2019). On the wall of the Academy of the Russian General Staff is said to be a quote from Tsar Alexander III from the late 19th century: "Russia has only two friends in the world: our army and our navy" (Mihkelson 2010: 186).

According to several authors, the entire later Russian state is the actual spiritual and organizational heir to the Golden Horde as an empire. The original Ancient Russian state organization, which developed in Novgorod and Pskov, was destroyed by the Muscovites. Historian George Vernadsky has argued that the centralized state of Muscovite (Muscovites) was created on the basis of the Golden Horde; its rulers were subordinates of Genghisides³ and, thus, their legal successors. The substantial influence of Islamic rules on the Russian state comes directly from this source because the official religion of the Golden Horde was Islam from 1312 when the reign of Khan Muhammed Uzbek (Öz Beg) began (Udam 2011: 71). This approach has also been supported by the founders of the Eurasian school, Nikolai Trubetskoi, and Pyotr Savickij, the historian Lev Gumilëv has fundamentally discussed the dimension of Inner Asia in the formation of Russian statehood (Gumilëv 1988). Russian military statehood theorists include, for example, Danilevskij (1991), Gumilëv (1994), Dugin (2002, 2004), Surkov (2014, 2018), and several others.

³ The Genghisides were the rulers of the states founded by Genghis Khan and his sons, that is, dynasties consisting of representatives of the bloodline of Genghis Khan (See Vernadsky 1970). Later the representatives of these Turkish-Tatar families converted from Islam to Orthodoxy.

A military state is in constant state of war, interrupted by short periods of peace and periods of preparation for a new war, still only fighting or preparing for war. “Our country is under siege by enemies; therefore, we must unite and put aside internal differences” is the mobilizing call for action. Russia’s military statehood tradition establishes that this country is constantly preparing for the next war. This complex includes the centralization of state power, a rigid vertical of power, and the mobilization of the population as a renewable resource. Also, the immoderate glorification of the last victorious war, which also means an attempt to nullify the crimes against humanity committed during the period of Stalinism. Russia has never held Nuremberg-style trials, fully denounced Stalin’s cult of personality, or undergone South African-style truth and reconciliation trials.

While the patriotic and mobilizing chants of the military states may endlessly repeat the liturgy, à la ‘as long as there is no war’, ideologically and practically, the military states are always and forever preparing for their main activity, i.e., warfare. Defending peace with a gun sounds contradictory, oxymoronic, and euphemistic. In Soviet-era military parlance, this reached a kind of absurdity because the Red Army existed and supposedly acted only in the interest of protecting the peace. This was just empty rhetoric because in a totalitarian state, which is structured like a military one, the army, as the embodiment of real force, becomes a central factor in the life of the state, and the logic of military mobilization spills over into other spheres of life as well. The biggest problem of military countries has always been a long period of peace because the military and the military-based government structures and military industry destroy the material and spiritual wealth of society as a vampire during peace. Since Russia is still an empire functioning as a military state, limiting its expansion and a lasting state of peace means moving towards inevitable disintegration.

Agreements between countries do not mean much for a military state because clientelist logic dominates there. Accordingly, there is a constant struggle for existence in the world, a test of strength, weighing who is stronger and who is weaker, who must obey whom, and who takes the lead; the world is as if a ‘jungle full of predators and prey’. The loser becomes the legitimate capture of the winner: ‘we were weak, but the weak can be beaten’ (Putin 2004). Therefore, Russia has learned to seek security only in a patient but life-and-death struggle for the complete destruction of every competing power, without ever thinking of reaching an agreement or finding a mutually beneficial compromise.

The peace agreements concluded by the Russians are not long-lasting because the state of peace ends when this country (head of state) waging a permanent religious war feels that it has enough strength to resume active warfare. By starting the war in Ukraine, the Russian political leadership apparently found once again that the time was ripe for the active phase of the holy war, for which preparations had lasted for some time. Already at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin implied to the international community unequivocally that the end of the peace treaty presented by the Russians to the West was near. Putin’s speech directly showed his understanding of the Western world as a treaty breaker and a partner that betrayed the Russians’ expectations (Putin 2007).

The parallel with the Islamic law is obvious because it is known that the peace agreements concluded there are also considered unilateral acts, during which the ruler of Islam ‘gives peace’ to the enemies at the latter’s request. The instrument of peace in the Ottoman Empire was the *ahdname* – a Bill of Oath through which the ruler bound himself to the duty of maintaining peace. The covenant partner was not the other party (unbelievers) but God. The ruler had the unlimited power to freely decide that the unbelievers had violated their obligations, with which the agreement also became null and void (Kolodziejczyk 2000: 4, 68, 80-85).

Militancy and patriotism still go hand in hand in Russia, and efforts are being made to strengthen this connection with intensive and uninterrupted ‘military-patriotic education’ or essentially war propaganda aimed at the population. One of the prerequisites for waging a religious war is the general readiness of the population to fight even in peacetime, declaring all those who raise objections to be enemies of the people, traitors, and apostates. The purpose and meaning of war have been sanctified so that every bloodshed is sacred, and the losses are sacrifices of redemption. The greater the number of victims in a religious war, the holier the war becomes. Martyrs, and religious heroes are in the foreground, and everyone else must join in the fight (Lewis 2002: 159).

Fuelled by propaganda, Russians often believe in an irrational way that Western world supremacy has been achieved at the expense of their country’s decline. In such a context, ‘holy Russia’ is once again in the position of a victim, and by embracing globalization in the way proposed by the West, it would seem to be moving towards self-destruction both in the national and cultural sense (Rožanova 2003). The West, on the other hand, is in the role of an evil and ruthless wrongdoer whose goal is to weaken Russia, destroy its statehood and subjugate it, and then rob it. The conspiracy-theoretic idea of a global conspiracy against Russia finds constant reproduction both in the mass media and in the curricula of the educational institutions of the power structures.

Since the religious war is fought against Satan and his minions, this also results in the treatment of terms for the military authorities when labelling the opposing side. One is also free to change and reformulate specific targets because Satan is constantly changing his face. For example, today, Russia is verbally wholeheartedly against the Great Satan, that is, America, which as a country embodies the idea of Western arrogance, treachery, and malice. The ideologist Dugin states: “We hate America because we hate her, we want her gone, we want her hidden away, tucked away in a distant box, bolted across two oceans. Anti-Americanism is a serious matter” (Dugin 2004).

In fact, the anti-Americanism of Russians is a very non-serious thing because the phrase ‘adoration of America’ is also suitable for expressing this feeling. This comes out clearly on a behavioural level because of the numerous Russian communities that have emerged in America and essentially all countries of the Western world in recent decades. This is where wealthy people, ideological front fighters, and high government officials educate their offspring. Every Russian who knows a little about the world dreams of getting to the West (especially America). Restrictions on travel

to the West for Russian citizens are received as a gross violation of their inalienable rights, discrimination, and a manifestation of Russophobia.

Cognitive dissonance consists in the irreconcilable divergence of individual and collective identity, where Russians, on an individual, behavioural level *en masse*, approve of the benefits of the Western world. Above all, the consumption that Western welfare societies allow people to enjoy, but also individual freedoms, i.e., those related to lifestyle. The collective identity is opposed to the individual one with its demands, which makes one accept as truth what is said from the direction of the Kremlin, no matter who is currently in power there, because power comes from God, and there is no arguing with God. The centre of gravity of Russia's religious war lies in the collective component of identity. Collective loyalty prevents them from condemning bad deeds and even serious crimes committed by 'their own people' and forces them to find irrational explanations and justifications for them.

The geopolitical discourse that characterizes military states does not allow for long-term mutually beneficial alliances with any foreign partner because, by the side of a military state, one can only be in conflict, vassal, or swallowed up (Kennan 1946, 1947). In essence, such a relationship stems from the doctrine of permanent religious war; the hostile relationship with other countries is not politically defined but has deeper intrinsic roots that extend to religious understandings. Since an empire created on the principles of a military state can only grow or shrink, the Russian Empire's centuries-long expansion into new areas lacked an understanding of the natural boundaries of this country. As a neighbour, Russia scares other countries and nations because this country has had territorial disputes and conflicts with essentially all its neighbours throughout history. A revived, strengthening Russia can be unmistakably recognized by the growing desire of its state leaders to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and the volume of pretentious and aggressive outward-directed rhetoric.

6. Lessons learned from the Russian-Ukrainian war

At the end of 2021, Moscow presented an ultimatum to NATO, i.e., the Western world, but the military attack was committed against Ukraine, which as a country is not a member of NATO or the European Union. In the attitude towards the self-determination efforts of its lesser so-called Slavic brothers, even today, a great sense of superiority and a special ruthlessness emerges unintentionally from Moscow. Together with the 'offer of protection', some nations are placed among the so-called state-capable and others among the so-called state-incapable, who lack political individuality and are at the stage of ethnographic material. This is how in the second half of the 19th century, the Russian historian Nikolaj Danilevskij openly expressed himself, and it fully resonates with the rhetoric of today's Moscow (Danilevskij 1991).

In the opinion of the Russian authorities (decision-makers), the international lifestyle had moved from a Western-centred, American-led unipolar system to a polycentric world, where the position of power is significantly more equally

distributed among a wider circle of states. From the Kremlin's point of view, such a change was not only inevitable but also desirable, as it was supposed to lead to greater global balance and prosperity and give Russia a more prominent role than before as a regional leader and great power. It was also stated that the transition period itself is likely to lead to growing geopolitical instability and an increase in potential conflicts, including those that represent the interweaving of internal unrest and external aggression (Charap et al. 2021: 14).

The greatest benefit made of the Western world to the entire world after the end of the Second World War has been the 'long peace' (Pinker 2011: 300-347). A period of several decades without the outbreak of large-scale military conflict has allowed an increasing number of countries to focus on developing their economies and improving their technology and human development. However, those countries that have remained in the trap caused by the military statehood that inhibits general development are struggling with scientific-technological stagnation and backwardness. Russia's centuries-long military state tradition is the root cause, due to which Russia has not had enough spiritual and material resources to build the country's economy competitively, but it has always had enough means for a larger type of destruction.

It is logical that the military state tradition has not provided Russia with military superiority over the West. Economic and technological backwardness ultimately inhibits military capability as well. The systemic contradiction manifests itself in the attempt to copy the general principles of warfare, which in the Western world develop hand in hand with technological progress and human development, and essentially transfer them to the socio-cultural environment of a developing country. As reality shows, in principle, this pursuit cannot succeed. In this sense, the Russian leadership has once again acted as an eternal apprentice since precisely the inability or unwillingness to create something completely new and original, together with the willingness and attempt to use the foreign experience to establish its superiority, is one of the main consistent features in the history of Russia (Inozemcev 2018: 42-43).

Russia's direct military capability and the military-scientific innovation of its commanders have turned out to be a big bluff. The so-called invincible Russian army, about which Russian propaganda created similar images for years, was a mere bubble. When Russia's political and military leadership, focused on waging a hybrid war, collided with the need to wage a conventional armed struggle, a linear war where 'the guns talk', Russia's real misery in the military sphere became clear.

By now, Russia's inability to wage a long-term, large-scale war with NATO is obvious. The substantial lagging behind the West in military technologies manifested itself so that no smart, science-based Western-style warfare can be seen on the Russian side. Nuclear deterrence, which was effective for several decades after World War II, remains firmly in place today. The fight continues with traditional methods like in the Second World War, where one's military personnel as a renewable resource is sacrificed with no hesitation, and the motivation of the military remains low.

The halt in the growth of Russia's defence budget by the 2020s did not lead to a decrease in the country's military ambitions. It is unlikely that Russia would

have been able to implement several military priorities simultaneously: military action in Ukraine and Syria; raising the readiness of army personnel to a new level; modernization of conventional military forces; modernization of nuclear weapons; development of hypersonic and other next-generation weaponry; training for large-scale combat operations, which Russia began in 2014. Insufficient economic resources and a lack of political influence have not allowed these goals to be realized (Charap et al. 2021: 167-173).

The blitzkrieg, which was supposed to quickly end with the return of Ukraine to the ‘friendly’ bosom of Russia, did not materialize. First, the Ukrainians surprised with their bold resistance, and then the West with large-scale military and economic support for Ukraine. Assessed from a rational position, the attack on Ukraine meant that ‘the liars believed their own lies’. The Russian-Western hypothetical confrontation preached by Moscow-based hate speakers became a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ because if something is considered real, its consequences are real (Thomas and Thomas 1928: 571-572). We see a similarity with Islamic *katman*, a deception that is supposed to lead the enemy astray (Milosz 1981). But there was also a belief characteristic of the Russian mentality and Islam of the ‘word coming true’, especially when the speaker is the ruler as a person close to God.

The general attitude is characterized by an article by journalist Petr Akopov, which was briefly published on the RIA Novosti portal at the beginning of the war. The author of the article celebrated Russia’s unachieved victory and was sure that the world had entered a new era. “The multipolar world has finally become a reality – the operation in Ukraine cannot rally anyone but the West against Russia. Because the rest of the world sees and understands perfectly well – this is the conflict between Russia and the West, this is the answer to the geopolitical expansion of the Atlanticists, this is the return of Russia’s historical space and place to the world... Russia has not only challenged the West but has shown that the era of Western global dominance can be regarded as completely and definitively over”, he wrote (Akopov 2022).

7. Conclusions

The hypothesis stated at the beginning of the article was confirmed: The basic pattern of Russian foreign policy and the tradition of warfare are still based on the main logic of waging a religious war. At the same time, the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church are hypocritically trying to convince the whole world of their peace efforts. This includes permissiveness and demonizing and dehumanizing opponents, gaslighting and lying, and looking for all kinds of justifications for one’s actions. The religious warfare is used both to mobilize the population and to increase the ability of the fighters. The attempt to consolidate the territories conquered from Ukraine under Moscow’s rule is also based on the same idea.

The religious war waged by Russia in the 21st century is absurd and irrational, and the West must be prepared for the fact that the Russian leadership mystically

hopes to receive support from 'higher powers' to win the war. This not holy but rather 'unholy war' is waged against the 'satanic West', and it is based on a so-called quasi-religious position that resembles the atheistic religiosity of the Bolsheviks. It is not surprising that the so-called orthodox Chekists in the top Russian leadership, led by President Putin, are mostly ex-communists. Opportunism, at an unprecedented level, turns the alleged deep religiosity of the Kremlin society and the religious war into a pseudo-religious farce. Unfortunately, this war is accompanied by many real human casualties and huge material losses.

The war in Ukraine is something much more than a conflict between two countries, where one is the aggressor and the other the victim because, from the point of view of Russia, it is a justified war. An attack on Ukraine means, at the same time, an attack on the Western world and the post-World War II international system. In Ukraine, we see the rhetoric and practice of religious war in its classic form, where Russia is carrying out a globally important mission of reuniting the ancestral Russian lands, which in the long run will allegedly lead the nations of the entire world to the right development tracks. The struggle has obvious eschatological aspects, as only victory or death is possible. If some of those considered among the 'us' refuse to recognize it, Moscow uses coercive force.

From the point of view of Ukraine, this war is placed in a different context because right now, the Ukrainian nation is being born together with the democratic (national) state of Ukraine. In essence, the Ukrainian War of Independence is currently taking place, and such wars are familiar to the countries of the Western world and sufficiently legitimized, which is why the Western world's support for Ukraine is obvious and natural.

Today's Russia poses a great threat to its neighbours, the Western world, and, therefore, the entire world. This threat does not come only from specific persons in power, and going astray, but behind the threat are the deeper undercurrents of the Russian religious consciousness and mentality. This is where President Putin's essentially unlimited decision-making freedom and the complacency and submissiveness of the Russian population come from.

Against such an attack, the Western world must implement comprehensive measures, which are not limited to military ones and whose common goal is to bring Russia to order. A country threatening the world with a nuclear war must be isolated, and their war of destruction in Ukraine must be turned into a strategic defeat of that country. Before entering a new stage of development, Russia must undergo a 'purge' like the denazification of Germany after World War II. A show of weakness by the Western world in the confrontation would only increase the Kremlin's ambitions and lead to increasingly severe consequences for the entire world.

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