

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

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This edited volume has examined the nexus of patriotism and militarism in Russia. The set of questions driving this inquiry include the following: is Russia preparing for war? Are the Russians ready to fight? Or are the people growing more, not less, sceptical towards the hype around militaristic patriotism? Who are Russia's enemies or Others identified in this context? To answer these questions, we set out to examine formation of threat perceptions and perceptions of Others in historiography and official foreign and security political discourse, conceptualizations of patriotism in official policies as well as among the general public, and the elements of militarism in contemporary Russia. This concluding section will summarize the main findings of the research and on that basis suggest new topics for further research. To begin with, I will briefly outline the conceptual and theoretical points of departure and offer some thoughts on how to develop them further.

The concept of ontological (in)security offered a loose framework for this multidisciplinary volume. Ontological security

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refers to individual (in terms of psychology) or state (in the context of IR scholarship) psychological resilience, an ability to successfully cope with recurring critical situations that challenge the self-identity and the feeling of being secure. It is argued that this framework is useful in analysing Russia's security discourse that features both a strong sense of physical security, understood in terms of the traditional realist paradigm, and identity-based ontological security. In the case of Russia, the trauma of territorial loss due to the Soviet collapse is a source of perpetual anxiety that generates ontological security-seeking (Kazharski, 2020, p. 25; Torbakov, 2018, p. 186). This feeling of incompleteness has become an integral part of Russia's official story of itself.

On this basis, we argue that Russia's quest for ontological security translates into a set of national narratives and policies (e.g. military-patriotic education) that are used as a resource to strengthen internal cohesion (understood in the sense of ontological security) and a perception of external and internal threats towards Russia. The trauma of the Soviet collapse is used as a 'resource' (Steele, 2008, p. 57) to synthesize Russia's national narrative as perpetual search for a 'historical Russia' in opposition to the current 'incomplete Russia'. This choice brings the country into conflict with its neighbours. Each of these conflicts creates a new trauma that, in turn, increases the feeling of anxiety in society. The propagation of military patriotism offers a channel to manage ontological insecurity (security as being) and, at the same time, strengthen narratives that prepare the society for war (security as survival). In this context, patriotism is interpreted not just as love for your country but as an acceptance of an authoritarian form of government. Militarism, on the other hand, refers both to the acceptance of the use of military force in conflict resolution and the process whereby society is prepared for war.

The analyses conducted in this volume show that this nexus has been strengthened in recent years. We also show that alternative interpretations of patriotism (e.g. intimate patriotism) challenge the official policies and tell the story of Russia anew. It is likely that this friction between official and unofficial perceptions of patriotism will increase in the years to come. We offer some explanations

for this situation, but clearly this is an issue that requires further study. In the following I will briefly summarize the main conclusions of the analysis.

The first part of this volume provides a detailed analysis of enemy images as part of historical narratives and the foreign and security political discourses. The creation and manipulation of enemy images is an effective means to influence society and its individual members, especially at a time of crisis. By manipulating the feelings of enmity and fear, authorities may consolidate society for the purposes of common action. Along with the negative sentiments, positive feelings of pride and belonging can also be used in consolidation of the society and nation. As shown by Kati Parppei in Chapter 2, the medieval perceptions and images of Others have been preserved, albeit in recycled form, and provide a dualistic framing for legitimate action in the conflict. The historical image of an *infidel* archenemy and courageous Russian hero is applied in conflicts with Muslims (from warfare with the Turks to the conflict in Syria).

The inherent dualism of this image (Orthodox Christian Russians versus infidel enemies) has transformed into persistent feature of Russia's national narrative and (popular) historiography, argues Parppei. The polemical writings of Russian philosopher Ivan Il'in offer a good example of this dualism (see Chapter 4 by Katri Pynnöniemi). In fact, Il'in's typology of Russia's enemies is completely dualistic. According to Il'in, Russia is confronted by an arch of enemies who fear and despise her inherent strength and exceptionality. Today, Il'in's ideas are applied and recycled as a part of the conservative turn that sets Russia's future apart from Europe, even as a vanguard of the anti-liberal movement.

As shown by Veera Laine in Chapter 3, the conservative turn has also left its imprint on the presidential addresses (2000–2020). Analysing the image of Others in the presidential speeches, Laine shows how the representation of Others has changed over time. In the early 2000s, the image of a corrupt bureaucrat was framed as a historical and internal Other and used in legitimizing Putin's rule. At the same time, Russia's position in the world was framed in terms of constant economic and political competition. In this

framework, a stronger Western country represented the significant Other. The political transformations in Ukraine in 2004 and again in 2014 were interpreted as a threat to the Russian political system and this opened up a discursive and political space for a conservative turn in Russian politics. Veera Laine's chapter identifies this shift in the presidential addresses. Accordingly, since around the mid-2000s, the Russian state authorities have 'introduced new symbolic policies to stress external threat, and, around the same time, the addresses to the Federal Assembly started to reflect shared values as the key guarantee for it'. It was only later, after 2013, that the values Others had were portrayed as fundamentally different from those of Russia, and, moreover, an argument was made whereby Others had abandoned 'the values that once were common to Russia and Europe'. Since this change has been relatively abrupt – the references to the 'Europeanness' of the Russian values disappeared from presidential discourse between the years 2005 and 2007 – it can be argued that the change in the opposite direction could take place fast. However, taking into account insights from other chapters in this volume, it seems unlikely that this interpretation will be reversed anytime soon. The Russian state authorities invest discursive and political resources into policies that aim to unify the country against external (and internal) threats.

From this perspective, the nexus of patriotism and militarism in contemporary Russia includes elements that seem worrying. The increasing use of enemy images in the Kremlin's strategic communication, the identification of Russia as representative of true Europe, instead of one among the European countries, and the investments made to militarization of the youth are attempts to strengthen Russia's internal cohesion in the event of 'critical situations' (Steele, 2008) or conflicts. As the chapters in this volume show, the Kremlin's attempts to synthesize Russia's national narrative have brought to fore an image of Others as threats to Russia's ontological security that further contributes to the feelings of trauma and anxiety.

While historical myths and traumas can be repeated in order to foster a sense of ontological state security, there is always an

opportunity to reinterpret these myths and narratives anew. In fact, it is important to emphasize that the Kremlin does not have a complete monopoly on the way in which the story of Russia is told. The young people in particular are frustrated with the top-down interpretation of patriotism and seek to express themselves through participation in networks beyond official state structures. Occasionally, or perhaps increasingly, these activities lead the youth onto a collision course with the state authorities.

We explored this dynamism in the two subsequent parts of this volume. The articles in the second part of the volume show that, instead of only one hegemonic discourse on patriotism, there are a number of ways in which people interpret what patriotism is for them. Thus, notwithstanding the systematic and widespread dissemination of nationalistic discourses and feelings of enmity and exceptionalism, people remain sceptical of official policies and narratives supporting militarized patriotism. As suggested by Mitikka and Zavadskaya, the state's vision of being a patriot has moved from a more inclusive and civic-oriented (to be a good 'stand-up citizen') view towards a more militarized and exclusive one. Their study shows that, while people's vision has also transformed and shifted slightly closer to the state's vision, it still differs from the state-imposed version of patriotism in certain ways and remains more diverse across society. The very notion of patriotism in public opinion has remained largely the same regardless of the 'rallying around the flag' in 2014. Thus, the Soviet-style nexus between patriotism and militarism has lost its legitimacy and people in Russia 'just want to live in peace without a great idea' (Alexievich, 2017, p. 4).

Indeed, a survey conducted by the state-aligned pollster VTsIOM in September 2016 shows a growing gap between young people and the older generation's willingness to take up arms in the event of war. Furthermore, as argued by Lassila in Chapter 5 of this volume, the greatest challenge of patriotic politics and its implementation is the expectations of the youth. The youth aspires for greater autonomy from the top-down managed activities and inherent in them interpretations of militarized patriotism. In fact, Mitikka and Zavadskaya show that, 'while Russian patriotism

does contain authoritarian connotations, the connection between authoritarianism and patriotism is far from straightforward. Not all patriots share an authoritarian vision of political system and not all who prefer a stronger hand share strong patriotic views. This, in turn, might indicate that the Kremlin-promoted narratives may have been successful in activating at least some groups of Russian society but not the overwhelming majority of Russians'. This insight is important, as it suggests a greater friction between the political elites and population at large. In turn, Zhirkov's (2019, p. 430) study on Russian foreign policy elite's attitudes towards international relations and cognitive styles shows that 'militant internationalism' (the perception of an external threat and readiness to use force abroad) represents an internally consistent attitude, mirroring a similar attitude among the US foreign policy elite. While the anti-Americanism varies depending on political events, Zhirkov's analysis also shows a steady increase in militaristic attitudes among the foreign policy elite (Zhirkov, 2019, p. 428).

The elite's attitudes are reflected in the Russian security strategies, namely in the national security strategy and in the military doctrine, insofar as these documents identify the inadequate patriotism of specific groups of the population, in particular the Russian youth, as a threat to national security. On this basis, Russia has invested more discursive and financial resources into the activities that aim to shape young people's identity along the lines favoured by the state authorities. One of the main resources in this regard is the Young Army movement, established in 2015. As shown by Jonna Alava in Chapter 9, the movement is legitimated with discourse of heroism, masculinity, a beneficial and fun hobby, citizen-soldier and military traditionalism. The young people participating in the activities are represented as the 'best patriots' and the activities are clearly oriented towards raising patriotic and loyal citizens and preparing them for the army.

Indeed, according to the Levada Center's 2020 poll (2020), the armed forces are the most trusted institution in Russia, even before the president. Moreover, the public opinion polls show a longer-term positive trend in society's perception of the armed forces. Although the public perception of the armed forces fluctuates

depending on the context (international conflicts may increase or decrease trust towards the army), since late 2013 the proportion of the population that does *not* trust the armed forces has started to decline. More people also support military service (see Arseniy Svyrenko, Chapter 8, this volume). Yet, attitudes towards the armed forces in Russia remain ambiguous. The older generations tend to see the military and the military service more positively than younger people. Moreover, the positive perceptions do not readily translate into people's willingness to participate in the conflicts. As Mitikka and Zavadskaya show in Chapter 6, while trust towards the armed forces has grown, the desire to fight is prone to fluctuate depending on the political trends. The hypothesis put forward by Svyrenko is that reorganization of the military-political training within the Russian armed forces is aimed at consolidating moral and political views among the youth (young conscripts and military personnel) as well as their willingness to fight.

These types of activities fit the description provided by Patrick M. Regan (1994) on militarization as a process whereby society is prepared for war. The role of the mass media is important, as it may facilitate the spread and amplify enemy images and perceptions of external threat. To this end, Chapter 7 by Salla Nazarenko in this volume is important as it shows that perceptions of patriotism among Russian TV journalists vary significantly. The Russian state authorities rely on television in channelling the official (propagandistic) messages to the general public. Interestingly, Nazarenko's chapter distinguishes between three different types of patriotism among journalists: intimate patriotism, military patriotism and 'infowar' patriotism. The latter two subscribe to the official discourse on patriotism, whereas intimate patriotism is an expression of affection for the suffering nation, Russia.

The notion of a suffering nation and the spectre of war brings us to Chapter 10 in this volume, written by Elina Kahla. In her chapter, Kahla examines the apologetics of dying on duty, a theme that was actualized in the aftermath of the *Kursk* disaster in August 2000, and later inspired authors of cultural productions. The first cultural product, the illustrated album *Everlasting Lamp of the*

Kursk, explores the theological-mystical meaning of the disaster, and in so doing turns abstract and ideologically charged representations of military patriotism inside out. Kahla ties the question of blood sacrifice to the unresolved problem of memory politics in Russia. The belief in blood sacrifice subsidies for Russian authorities' unwillingness to accept responsibility for the disaster, and in general for the country's totalitarian past, in particular towards the victims of the Great Terror. Kahla also discusses the representation of the *Kursk* tragedy in another cultural product, the film *Kursk*, directed by Danish director Thomas Vinterberg. As suggested by Kahla, this film explores 'the blurry boundary between a domestic and a global realm' and universal sentiments of bravery and grief aroused in the *Kursk* tragedy. In the absence of a genuine dialogue on the politics of memory in Russia, these cultural products offer a view on possible futures and histories.

This volume has contributed to the ongoing scholarly discussion on patriotism and militarism in Russia. It has also set out possible new areas of research, in particular on the assumptions and blind spots of national security narratives and threat perceptions. The national threat perceptions and security narratives are constructed through the past failures and successes (Krebs, 2015) and meaning attached to them often afterwards. This meaning is rarely an objective evaluation based on all the information available but more often a process based on the political needs of that particular point in history (Gray, 2002, p. 1). To facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the nexus of patriotism and militarism, as well as the role of different stakeholders, from politicians and researchers to the general public, is an important task of future research.

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