

CHAPTER I

Introduction

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Formulation of the Research Problem

The nexus between patriotism and militarism is multidimensional, even contradictory. As the subsequent chapters in this volume vividly demonstrate, there is not one but many interpretations of what patriotism is in contemporary Russia, ranging from military patriotism (Lassila, Chapter 5, this volume) to intimate patriotism (Nazarenko, Chapter 7, this volume) and ‘patriotism of despair’ (Oushakine, 2009). Where the concept of patriotism carries with it a positive connotation, militarism or militarization is usually judged negatively. The latter two concepts are often used in a normative sense, to criticize excessive military spending (Naidu, 1985; Wolpin, 1983) and disproportionate coercive power in the domestic sphere (Hall and Coyne, 2013). More recently, James Eastwood (2018, p. 97) has conceptualized militarism as ideology, and Bryan Mabee and Srdjan Vucetic (2018) have suggested a typology that distinguishes between nation state

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militarism, civil society militarism and neo-liberal militarism. In the Russian context, the concept of militarization has been used with reference to the increased role of military considerations in both the domestic and foreign spheres (Golts, 2018; Sherr, 2017).

In this edited volume, we will investigate the consolidation of the nexus between patriotism and militarism in Russia, but also factors and processes that open up space for alternative framings of patriotism and militarism. The conflict in Ukraine has an important role in the formation of this nexus. First, it has provided a context for the elaboration of the ‘war myth’: a public perception according to which ‘Moscow’s wars are just, defensive, triumphant, and preventive’ (Kolesnikov, 2016, p. 2). Second, it is against this context that Russia’s main security strategies have been reviewed. Accordingly, the National Security Strategy (Rossijskaâ gazeta, 2015) frames patriotism as a strategic resource, whereas the Military Doctrine (Sovet Bezopasnosti Rossijskoj Federacii, 2014) identifies the low level of patriotism among the youth as a ‘danger to military security’. To prevent this situation, the Russian state has sought to enhance the military-patriotic education of the youth.

The key question is whether the maintenance of the war myth and the consolidation of patriotic narratives and social practices translate into people’s ‘will to fight’. To put it more bluntly, does the current discourse on Russian exceptionalism, historical traditions and patriotism include elements that facilitate the militarization of society in a way that legitimates the preparation for war and the use of force against Russia’s enemies (external or internal)? Or is it rather the case that patriotic sentiments among the Russian population are developing in directions that may undermine authorities’ attempts to enhance internal cohesion?

This volume seeks to answer these questions by exploring the formation of enemy images, perceptions of patriotism and elements of militarization that together form the nexus of patriotism and militarism in contemporary Russia. It is suggested that, while certain processes (e.g. the manipulation of enemy images) seem to strengthen this nexus, there is also evidence of the opposite phenomenon (e.g. a strong sense of ‘individual patriotism’ shared

by the population). The title of this volume, *Nexus of Patriotism and Militarism in Russia: A Quest for Internal Cohesion*, captures the dilemma.

This volume is divided into three parts, which each present original research contributions to the evolution of national narrative, perceptions of patriotism and elements of militarism in contemporary Russian policy and society. Each part begins with a brief introduction of the core concepts used in the analysis. In the following I will elaborate on the ontological security concept, which provides a loose framework for interpretation.

Ontological Security as a Framework of Interpretation

The ontological security concept was coined by psychologist R.D. Laing to describe a difference between persons suffering from pathological anxiety (ontological insecurity) and those individuals who are able to experience themselves as ‘real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person’ (cited in Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi, 2020, p. 881). The concept refers to a ‘feeling of being secure oneself’ that ‘enables one to feel like a separate and autonomous being’ and from this position interact genuinely with others. In the context of international relations (IR), ontological security is welcomed as an alternative to the traditional view of security as physical survival (Steele, 2008). However, the concept was adapted to IR via Giddens (1991), who downplayed (or rather ignored) a distinction between normal and pathological anxiety. As argued by Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi (2020, p. 877), the importance of this distinction has been lost in the IR literature, and with that, the idea that anxiety is a normal part of life. The stronger the feeling of ontological security, the better abilities (resilience) an individual (or state) has in coping with recurring instances of anxiety. Whereas those with a weaker sense of self-identity (state identity) may feel insecure when ‘a value central to a particular subject’s sense of self is somehow at risk’ (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi, 2020, p. 885).

An application of the ontological security concept in the analysis does not exclude change a priori as something potentially harmful. The interpretation of this concept in favour of identity related stability emerged later, when the concept was adapted to the IR disciplinary framework (Browning and Joenniemi, 2017; Croft and Vaughan-Williams, 2017). A key insight inherent to the above discussion is an understanding of ontological security as a fundamentally relational (intersubjective) and fragile construction – my reading of the story can be contested by others and it may not even correspond with the real events. However, my incomplete version of reality may become a constitutive element of my ‘narrative of the self’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 243). With the emphasis on these two features – intersubjectivity and fragility – the ontological security framework can be used in analysis of both self-identity formation and the formation of collective (state, region, group) identities.

In the case of states, the biographical narrative ties together critical situations and other events into a coherent story of the state (Steele, 2008, pp. 10–11). For example, as suggested by Kazharski (2020, pp. 24–25), discourses on ‘Russian civilization’ and the ‘Russian world’ rest on an interpretation of the Soviet Union’s dissolution as a trauma, against which Russian ‘civilizational identity’ is construed. Framed in terms of ontological security, the trauma of territorial loss is a source of perpetual anxiety that generates ontological security-seeking (Kazharski, 2020, p. 25; Torbakov, 2018, p. 186). It is in this context that the West is represented as a near-existential threat to Russia’s self-identity. Since the early 1990s, the Russian public has been persuaded to believe that ‘real causes of Russia’s many problems had to be found outside the country’ (Hansen, 2016, p. 369). The conspiracy theories about the Western interference into Russian affairs are used both in the sphere of popular culture (Yablokov, 2018) and in the pseudo-academic literature on hybrid war and information warfare (see Pynnöniemi and Jokela, 2020). As argued by Hansen (2016, p. 370), the fostering of enmity towards the West has damaged relations but, paradoxically, has also brought with it ‘greater ontological security’, that is, ‘a stronger sense of being’.

Both Kazharski (2020) and, earlier, Torbakov (2018) emphasize that the anchoring of state identity to the trauma of disintegration and the loss of superpower status has been deliberate. Putin's 'famous cliché about the USSR's collapse as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century"' (Kazharski, 2020, p. 25) articulates a sentiment that Russia's political borders do not 'fit' with its current state borders. Later, this sense of incompleteness has become an integral part of Russia's story of itself. Against this background, the emergence and consolidation of conservatism in Russian politics seems logical. The conservative ideal entails 'faithfulness to oneself, to one's historical and spiritual path, and the ability not to submit to alien influences' (Laruelle, 2020, p. 119). The historically formed spiritual and moral values are seen as a shield that protects the state and national identity from harmful (Western) influences. In other words, conservatism offers a formula whereby historical myths, critical situations and subsequent traumas, as well as visions of the future, are tied into a consistent national narrative.

The hypothesis put forward in this volume is 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 the people's will to defend the country against external and internal enemies (security as survival). Here trauma is used as a 'resource' (Steele, 2008, p. 57) to synthesize Russia's national narrative as a perpetual search for '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, produces the feeling of anxiety in society. The 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). However, as shown in this volume, alternative interpretations of patriotism exist that tell the story of Russia anew.

The ontological security concept provides a loose framework for the research analysis, although each individual chapter will apply

this framework on the basis of different disciplinary traditions (political history, sociology, political science). Before I introduce individual chapters in more detail, I will briefly discuss the results of recent public opinion surveys and research literature on public perceptions of external and internal threats towards Russia.

When Everything Was Made for War, Until It Was No More

The above title paraphrases a famous book written by Alexei Yurchak (2005) that summarized the Soviet collapse in one sentence: everything was forever, until it was no more. The Nobel laureate in literature Svetlana Alexievich contemplates the Soviet past in her work and argues that everything in the Soviet Union was built for war:

We were always either fighting or preparing to fight. We've never known anything else – hence our wartime psychology. Even in civilian life everything was militarized. (Alexievich, 2017 [2013], p. 4)

Indeed, 'war', as Gregory Carleton (2017, p. 2) has argued, 'saturates Russian culture', and it 'serves as a foundation for a Russian myth of exceptionalism' (see also Kolesnikov, 2016). In the post-Soviet Russian context, memory of the Great Patriotic War has 'proved to be the most "politically usable" element of Russia's past', notes Russian scholar Olga Malinova (2017, p. 45) Consequently, the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War has been integrated into a new narrative of Russian history and 'largely retains its status as sacred and untouchable' (Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017, p. 14). However, while the victory myth has become an important part of the Kremlin's domestic political agenda, official security strategies downplay a possibility of major war against Russia.

As suggested in the military doctrine (2014), the possibility of a major war that would endanger the physical survival of the Russian state is declining, while attempts to undermine Russia's internal political composition and the original sense of

belonging to the world, that is, the country's ontological security, are increasing. There is, however, an important distinction to be made between these two types of threats. The traditional military threats, as they are defined in the Russian strategic documents, are linked to definite action (the use of military force, the targeting of critical infrastructure) that is performed by an external force, whereas colour revolutions, or changes in social-political preferences, are examples of 'critical situations,' defined by Steele (2008, p. 51) as 'circumstances of a radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalized routines.' With this strategic-level formulation, a public space has been opened for discourse whereby Russia is viewed as a target of foreign influence operations (Patrushev, 2020), a 'besieged fortress' (Yablokov, 2018) and a victim of a Western-conducted hybrid war (Pynnöniemi and Jokela, 2020).

The saturation of war discourse as part of current Russian strategic communication is in contradiction with the observation made by Alexievich in her book. Indeed, she argued in 2013 that the war had ceased to be a constitutive element of people's self-identification. On the contrary, 'nowadays everything is different. People just want to live in peace without a great idea' (Alexievich, 2013, p. 4). Public opinion polls conducted in Russia partially support Alexievich's observation. The Levada-Center research agency has regularly asked respondents what in their opinion best characterizes the idea of a great power. The two features that respondents have regularly valued most are high well-being of citizens and economic and industrial potential of the country. For example, in 2018, 69% of respondents ranked well-being as the most important feature of a great power (Levada-Center, 2019, p. 33). Among the other features indicated in the survey are the following: military power; great culture, science and art; freedom and citizens' rights; rich natural resources; a heroic past; and respect from other countries.

However, this survey identifies a change in the way in which military power features in people's understanding of the great power idea and Russia's place in the world. In a survey conducted

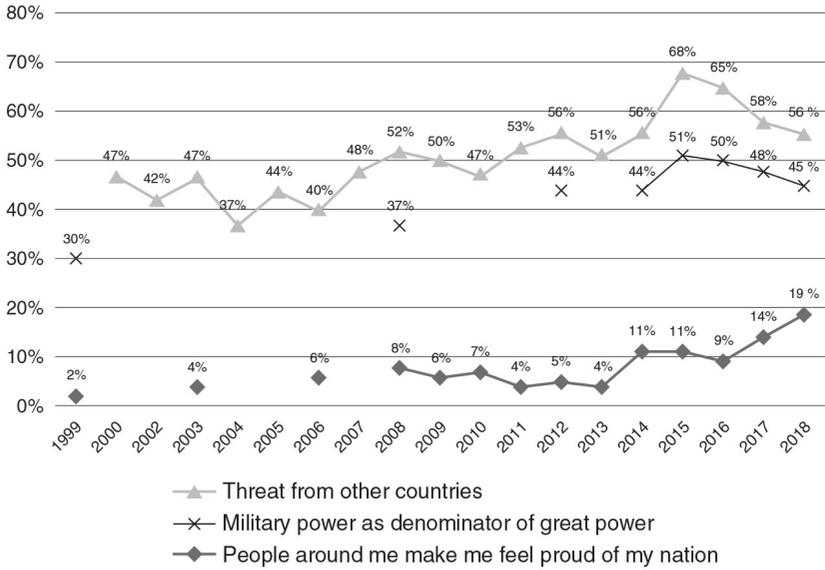


Figure 1: Trajectories of patriotic and militaristic sentiments in Russia between 2000 and 2018.

Source: Levada-Center (2019). Figure by the author.

in 1999, 30% of respondents identified military power and nuclear weapons as the key features of a great power. In a 2016 survey, this figure had risen to 51% of respondents, and it has not decreased significantly since then (see Figure 1 above). At the same time, Russians have become prouder of their homeland. As Figure 1 illustrates, in 1999 only 2% of Russians thought that the people around them made them feel proud of their nation, but by 2018 this figure was already 19%. Although the overall percentage might seem low, the 17% rise between 1999 and 2018 is significant. One possible explanation for this change is a surge of pro-Kremlin and nationalistic sentiments after Russia's successful military operation in Crimea in February–March 2014.

Interestingly, the share of respondents who ranked the 'respect of other countries and authority in the world' as a significant feature of the great powers has steadily declined. In 1999, 35% of respondents saw this as an important feature, above military power (30%), while in 2018 only 13% of respondents listed it as a significant feature of great powers (Levada-Center, 2019, p. 33). Another survey may provide at least partial explanation for this trend. According

to this, the self-image of Russia among respondents has undergone a significant change. In 2007 only 7% of respondents thought that others (meaning a majority of developed nations) saw Russia as an enemy. Ten years later, in 2017, 30% of respondents thought others considered Russia their enemy. Only a minority (from 3 to 7%) expected others to identify Russia as a friend (Levada-Center, 2018, p. 197). Perhaps not surprisingly, an image of Russia encircled by enemies has grown in significance (in 1994, 7% of respondents agreed with this statement; in 2017 this figure was 23% (*ibid.*, p. 193)). These results also correspond with a survey conducted in 2016, in which 25% of respondents thought that Others definitely posed a threat to Russia. Only a tiny minority (8% in 2000, and 5% in 2016) of respondents did not see other countries as posing a threat to Russia (Levada-Center, 2017, p. 222).

The set of opinion polls cited above obviously do not provide a comprehensive picture of the public mood in Russia. Although the Kremlin has a monopoly when it comes to traditional media space (especially TV), fragmentation of society and the existence of alternative sources of information (e.g. social media) provides a growing hindrance for the mass manipulation of public perceptions. In fact, several studies have shown that, although the ‘artificially induced patriotic surge’ (Gudkov, 2015, p. 88) gave rise to conservative reconsolidation around the regime at a critical moment, this type of mobilization has been short-lived (Volkov, 2019). Thus, even if we can locate a set of discourses and practices that seek to interpret patriotism as an element of militarization (in a sense of the legitimation of the use of force), alternative interpretations of events exist, and thus alternative (re)sources for Russia’s ontological security. The aim of this book is to explore both of these directions of enquiry and thereby contribute to the contemporary research on Russian domestic and foreign affairs.

Organization of the Book

This volume is divided into three parts, which each deal with one aspect of the nexus: the role of enemies and others in the

formation of the Russian national narrative, the existence of several, competing perceptions of patriotism in Russia and the elements of militarization in three distinctive spheres: practices of military conscription, organization of military activities for the youth, and popular literature.

The first part includes three chapters that each explore the role of enemies and Others in the Russian national narrative. Soviet and later Russian patriotism activated the tendency to a dualistic categorization in Russian culture that dates back to the medieval worldview and is preserved in text and concrete representation of Russia's others and enemies (see Parppe, Chapter 2, and Laine, Chapter 3, in this volume). In the Russian national narrative, Europe has been Russia's most significant Other, against which Russia's exceptionalism is reflected. Historical experience but also religion has shaped Russian perception of threats. The juxtaposition of Orthodox Christian Russians against infidel enemies carries traces of the medieval dualistic thinking to this day. The analysis of contemporary Russian strategic communication (see Laine, Chapter 3, and Pynnöniemi, Chapter 4, this volume) allows us to pinpoint historical continuity in the representation of Others and enemies, but also significant changes in the threat perception. The underlying assumption in the Kremlin's discourse is constant competition between the countries and nations. Success in this competition is an attribute of a country's independence from others – a strong nation is united and sovereign, whereas a weak state is in danger of falling behind. The image of a 'worthy enemy' captures an expectation of permanent conflict and struggle for power and resources. In the crisis situations, competitors become enemies that contain Russia and prevent it from achieving the position it deserves (by token of historical destiny).

Although not a novel phenomenon, the intensity with which such argumentation appeared in the Kremlin's strategic communication in the mid-2000s and again in the context of conflict in Ukraine marked a change. The historical patterns of enmity and misunderstanding were reinterpreted as questions of system

survival, in the sense of both cultural identity and military security. As shown by Veera Laine in Chapter 3 of this volume, distance to Europe is not just about Russia's economic and technological backwardness – an issue that could be fixed with Russia's technological modernization – but it is attributed to difference in values. The ideas borrowed from Russian conservative thinkers helped to make sense of this change in priorities. A notion of a common European home with shared values and norms is replaced with an idea of Russia as a true Europe.

The Russian religious thinker and philosopher Ivan Il'in's texts may have played a role in shaping Russia's strategic thinking at a time when an opportunity to consolidate Russia's great power status emerged again. The analysis of Il'in's enemy images and their juxtaposition with the Kremlin's strategic communication of threats provides a new opening that deepens our understanding of the link between this conservative philosopher and the conservative turn in present-day Russia.

The second part of this volume takes up the issue of multiple interpretations of patriotism and what it entails in the Russian political context. The analysis of the enemy images in Russia's national narrative points towards strong historical continuity in the representation of others. The inherent dualism of Russian political discourse provides a resource that can be activated in the creation and consolidation of enemy images. However, public opinion surveys and previous research show that mass mobilization during the conflict in Ukraine has remained 'artificial' (Gudkov, 2015, p. 88) As Eemil Mitikka and Margarita Zavadskaya show in Chapter 6 in this volume, although the connection between public preferences for authoritarian rule and stronger patriotic attitudes has slightly strengthened since 'the rally around the flag' in 2014, it remains very ephemeral. Second, Russian patriotism compared to state propaganda mostly relates to notions of pride, dignity and self-esteem, rather than willingness to fight. Lastly, perceived threats and fear reinforce the exclusive form of today's patriotism in Russia, and strengthen the link with preference for authoritarian rule.

The exclusive, top-down assigned understanding of patriotism as loyalty to the state and the 'stability' of the regime is, however, being questioned. In Chapter 5 in this volume, Jussi Lassila argues that the greatest challenge of patriotic politics and its implementation is the expectations of the youth. Owing to the lack of reciprocity and feedback from youth, of genuine commitment and determined implementation of projects, as well as the inability to include youth, these educational goals are inadequate and, in many respects, unrealistic. It is telling that even Russian journalists, as shown by Salla Nazarenko in Chapter 7, assign different meanings to patriotism, from 'intimate patriotism' to 'military' and 'infowar' patriotism. Although state-centred military patriotism does have its ramifications in the minds and activities of Russian TV journalists, the official discourse is not accepted without criticism, Nazarenko concludes.

The third part of the volume explores practices of militarism and/or militarization in contemporary Russia. Chapter 8 by Arseniy Svynarenko will analyse the recent survey results that show growing trust in Russian armed forces. This chapter will discuss the meaning of these results and provide an overview of the newly organized military-political training among conscripts and military personnel. It is argued that, with the reorganization of military-political training, the authorities aim to further enhance a positive image of the armed forces, and – what seems most important – to consolidate the troops' moral and political views as well as willingness to fight. Given the rather bleak demographic outlook, it is quite logical that the Russian state authorities have invested in the military-patriotic education of young people. In fact, as pointed out by Jonna Alava in Chapter 9, the Russian Young Army, *Ūnarmiâ*, has become an important tool for the authorities in activating young people. The increasing role of the Russian armed forces in this field should be noted as well, in particular because the military-patriotic education is framed as a response to external threats: Western influence aka globalization, democratization and the prospect of major military conflict. In this sense, the *Ūnarmiâ* concept is geared towards the military mobilization of the Russian youth.

With the restoration of the military-political directorate in the Russian armed forces, political leadership in Russia has sought to strengthen the loyalty of military personnel towards the political leadership and increase control among the ranks. The emphasis on political loyalty towards the regime leaves open a question, discussed in Elina Kahla's Chapter 10, on the sacrifice of dying on duty. As the *Kursk* submarine tragedy of the year 2000 brought to the fore, the prioritization of relations between the Russian state and the Orthodox Church is problematic in a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic state. With the narrowing public space to express criticism towards the political leadership, powerful artistic contributions provide a way to deal with the trauma and sacrifice.

In conclusion (Chapter 11), the editor of the volume summarizes the main findings and suggests new directions for research on the basis of the present analysis.

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