

A b s t r a c t s

Russia's lost Wars

Yurko Prokhozko

Flood of Flight

War and the Devastation of the Soul

If anything can be said with certainty about Russia's war against Ukraine, it is that there are no certainties and the horizon of horrors is still expanding. The invaders' frenzy of destruction and annihilation feeds on the narcissistic grievance that Ukrainians reject unity with "Greater Russia" and insist on having their own identity. War, terror, and violence are devastating society as a whole. There is not a single Ukrainian person anywhere, of any age, at home or abroad who has remained unscathed. Many people are consumed by fear, full of despair, and struggling for self-esteem and dignity. Ukraine will never be the same again.

Ulrich Schmid

A Spectre is Haunting...

Russia's War against Ukraine as Afghanistan 2.0

Two years after its defeat in the Afghan war, the multinational Soviet Union disintegrated. Russia, too, is a multi-ethnic state. What will happen to it after a possible military defeat in Ukraine, no one can say. Moscow has failed to understand the central lessons of the fiasco in Afghanistan and is repeating old mistakes in Ukraine. There are numerous parallels, similarities, and congruities. They do not bode well for Putin's Russia.

Leonid Luks

Miscalculations

The Crimean War and its consequences

Russia's Crimean War, from 1853 to 1856, has similarities with Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine. In each case, those responsible assumed false premises. They underestimated their opponents and misjudged the West's ability to act. Putin and Russian propaganda portray Europe as decadent and see it in decline. Nikolai I and his mouthpieces spread similar theses. The determination

with which Britain and France reacted to Russia's aggressive actions caused astonishment at the St. Petersburg court in 1853. Before its invasion of Ukraine, the Putin regime may have also failed to expect a decisive reaction from the Europeans and the United States.

Andreas Renner**Hubris on the Yellow Sea****Russia's War against Japan 1904/05**

The war between Russia and Japan was an imperialist struggle for supremacy in north-eastern China and Korea. Because of its high casualties and worldwide resonance, it is considered a prologue to the First World War. Contrary to expectations, Japan won every battle and was able to force the world's largest land power to retreat permanently from the Yellow Sea. Russia entered the conflict inadequately prepared and wrongly certain of victory, but was able to achieve a compromise peace, because Japan had used up its military resources.

Dietrich Beyrau**Lessons from Defeat****Russia and the First World War**

Russia has a long history of wars. Despite the alternation between defeats and victories, Russia's territorial expansion seemed almost like a law of nature to contemporaries and historians alike. The First World War ended in defeat for Russia. Under its pressure, the Tsarist empire fell apart. The new elites and the population reacted differently to the experience of war and defeat: desertion and the militarisation of the economy, society, and culture occurred simultaneously. The Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union interpreted the First World War as an "imperialist war". Therefore, they did not see themselves as losers of the war.

Michael Jonas**"Frozen Hell"****The Soviet-Finnish Winter War, 1939-1940**

There are military victories that are hardly distinguishable from defeats. The Soviet Union's victory in the Winter War is one such case. At Stalin's behest, the Red Army invaded Finland. It was supposed to be a victorious blitzkrieg. But the invasion initially turned into a debacle for the aggressor. Although Soviet troops were massively superior in terms of personnel and technology, they were poorly

prepared, ponderous, and no match for the Finns' flexible defence. The Finns profited from their local knowledge of inaccessible terrain, used the deep snow to their advantage, and inflicted enormous losses on the Red Army by means of guerrilla tactics. But the Soviet army leadership learned from this phase, changed its operational conduct of the war, and was finally able to defeat Finland. The Winter War has been largely suppressed from Russia's collective memory. In Finland, the first phase of the war in particular plays a positive role in the country's national self-image.

Georg Wurzer

A Small War with Great Impact

The Soviet-Afghan War, 1979–1989

In the beginning, there was the hubris of the Soviet leadership. It hastily made the decision to intervene militarily in Afghanistan. Intelligence about the situation on the ground was inadequate, the political goal was vague. Moscow overestimated its allies' capabilities and underestimated the Afghan resistance and the population's unfavourable attitude. The war led to the international isolation of the USSR. Censorship and propaganda kept the local population in the dark about the reality of the war for a long time. The term "war" was taboo. But dead soldiers returning in zinc coffins changed the mood. Veterans were abandoned by state and society. The war became a catalyst that exposed and exacerbated the shortcomings of the Soviet economic and social system and thus accelerated the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Walter Sperling

Victory from a String of Defeats

Russia's Wars against Chechnya

It was to be a "small, victorious war". It became a fiasco. Moscow's attempt to use troops in Chechnya to "restore the constitutional order" grew into a long, two-stage war, 1994-1996 and 1999-2009. The decision to dispatch the troops to stifle Chechen separatism set in motion a devastating dynamic of violence. Russia's understanding of itself as an imperial state made the war possible. And Chechen violence during the republic's decolonisation process and the national revolution under Dzhokhar Dudaev paved the way for Chechnya's radicalisation. In the end, Russia achieved victory, but the war's devastation still affects the Caucasus and Russia to this day.

Nikolay Mitrokhin
Russia's War against Ukraine
Weekly Reports from Summer 2023

From November 2022 to May 2023, Russia made minimal territorial gains, while suffering terrible losses. The army's offensive potential is exhausted. Ukraine's long-heralded counteroffensive has failed to make advances in the three weeks since it began in early June. The front line is mined, and the Ukrainian army lacks the air defences to protect advancing troops from air raids. Russia has left its border with Ukraine significantly less well protected than the occupied territories. Small Ukrainian squads can enter Russia to force troop deployments from the combat zone. At the same time, the war of attrition continues with missile and drone attacks on industrial assets and infrastructure. In addition to destroying Russian refineries and bridges, Ukraine has also achieved symbolic successes, for example, by sending drones all the way to Moscow. Russia has overcome its supply problems and is counting on wearing down Ukraine with air strikes against facilities relevant to Kyiv's war effort and with terrorist attacks on civilian targets.

War, Church and Culture

Alexa von Winning
Let the Swans Dance!
Russian Music for and against War, Lies, and Dictatorship

Russia's war against Ukraine produces its own musical accompaniment. Musicians are helping the Kremlin sustain popular support for the "special military operation". At the same time, artists from the musical counterculture – mostly in exile – agitate against the war and Putinism. They denounce repression, militarisation, the cult of war, and the deformation of Russian society. They hardly address the suffering of the Ukrainian population as a result of the war. However, so long as these songs remain accessible in Russia via YouTube, virtual encounters between people who desire a different Russia are at least possible.

Hans Günther
Hero or Victim?
How S. Aleksievich Dismantled a Soviet Myth

In Soviet culture, the myth of the male hero was of fundamental importance. He makes up part of a mythical family triangle of father (ruler), mother (homeland),

and son (hero) that was already formative in Russian history long before Soviet rule. Svetlana Aleksievich's books, beginning with *Boys in Zinc* (1989), deconstruct this myth. Alone her unfurling of the polyphony contained in the panorama of war must have seemed a provocation against the background of the official, monolithic cult of heroes. In terms of content, her attention was directed precisely to war's unheroic aspects, the "small story", unspectacular human action. With the forced revival of the hero cult in Putin's Russia, her critical view has gained new currency.

Joachim Willems

A Servant of Two Masters

Patriarch Kirill and His War Sermons

As head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill possesses great spiritual and moral authority in Russia. His open support for Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine carries weight. In his sermons in 2022, Kirill drew on a Russian nationalist reading of the past and present that is based on a theological and eschatological view of history. He derives the historical unity of Ukrainians and Russians from the baptism of Kievan Rus'. He justifies Russia's war as the defence of "traditional values" against attacks from the liberal West, in which he sees the Antichrist. He guarantees devout soldiers who die on the battlefield a direct path to the kingdom of heaven.

Thomas Bremer

The Myth of the "Russian World"

Russia's Regime, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the War

The goal of creating and defending a "Russian world" is sometimes cited as a motive that moved Russia's leadership to start the war against Ukraine and led the Russian Orthodox Church to support it. This interpretation is untenable. The concept of the "Russian World" is vague in terms of content and history. Indisputably, there are historical similarities between Russia and Ukraine. But to consider these a normative factor for political action today would be misleading. The term "Russian world" does not help to understand the war and the reasons for it.