

Putin's Islamist Mindset

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In his best-selling book "Games People Play," psychoanalyst Eric Berne describes the personal "I" as a combination of three different states: the child, the adult and the parent. Destructive human behavior is defined as a game in which the "child" pursues very different objectives than the "adult."

Sometimes, the games can be relatively innocuous. For example, a travel agent says, "Miss, that vacation package is much too lavish for you. Let me show you something more reasonable." In doing so, he is speaking not to the customer's "adult," but to her "child," who immediately responds to the implied challenge by purchasing the pricier option.

But there are also destructive games. For example, an unemployed person who only pretends to want a full-time job might say, "Poor me, I'm such a loser. The whole world is against me." He is supported in the game by the employment agency officer who adds, "Yes, and I only wanted to help."

Unfortunately, entire nations can play these destructive games. For six decades, the Palestinians have been saying, "We would be happy if only those damned Israelis weren't out to destroy us." To back up this belief, they blow up Israeli discos, hijack airplanes, fire

missiles onto Israeli territory and use their own women and children as human shields against retaliatory strikes. In fact, their latest tactic is to deliberately maximize the number of victims among their own women and children in order to convince themselves and the world that Israel is the aggressor. Osama bin Laden played a destructive game called "The West offended us." The axioms of that game were enunciated in his infamous fatwa of 1998. They are: "I have the right to kill any American," "I am not the murderer, the Americans are" and "for some reason, those bloodthirsty Americans believe that Islam is violent."

Obviously, such ideas are directed not at the "adult" but at the "child" in Muslims, and it leads to the most destructive of all human behavior — the behavior of an aggressor who considers himself the victim. Maniacs and drug addicts exhibit similar destructive patterns of thought and behavior.

This is the type of destructive behavior and thinking that dominates the Middle East. It carried the day in Egypt's parliamentary and presidential elections, and soon we will likely witness a whole series of totalitarian Islamist states playing the destructive game of "the corrupt West offended us" and "we are poor because we are spiritually superior to the West."

The regime of President Vladimir Putin imposes a similar destructive game on Russia. It involves the same thinking as the Islamist states: "the West offended us" and "we are poor because we are spiritually superior to the West." Another variation of this game is the attitude taken by Russia in relation to the Baltic states, effectively saying, "We liberated you from the Nazis, and you brand us occupiers."

It is interesting that the object of such games is usually not the party that originally gave offense. Putin's ideologues, for instance, have never suggested a game along the lines of "Damn those Bolsheviks. They destroyed the Russian Empire, and we have lagged behind the West ever since." In order for the game of "we are the victims and are only responding to the aggression of others" to succeed, the supposed aggressor must actually be a country or people that do not match that description at all.

Usually, the person who starts such a game is striving for power. Toward that end, he tries to convince the population caught up in his destructive game that they are "surrounded by enemies" in order to rally them around himself, casting himself as a savior figure. The problem is that these destructive games tend to outlive the initiator, and the negative ideology takes on a life of its own, exacting a political and social cost that later generations must pay.

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