

Sorting the Truth From the Lies on Victory Day

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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Victory Day celebrations were divided between official speeches steeped in falsehoods and insincerity and genuine sorrow for those who had fallen in the Great Patriotic War, as well as gratitude to them for saving the country.

However, in the months leading up to the holiday, the country was plunged into an unprecedented display of militaristic hysteria. The Guard's Ribbon, or, as it is called now, St. George's Ribbon, even adorned such unlikely objects as fruit and processed cheese in the supermarkets. Those symbols of military glory — which the authorities practically forced upon Muscovites — even showed up on dog collars.

Government officials outdid themselves for acts of sheer idiocy. In Oryol, the site of the war's most ferocious battles, the authorities chose to honor the Great Victory by competing to see who could bend the most steel rebars over their head in a given time.

The pro-Kremlin group Young Guard of United Russia organized a fashion show of sorts that

featured military decorations and medals made from rags and shorts adorned with the dates of the start and close of World War II. Somebody even created a confectionary reproduction of the renowned monument in Volgograd "The Motherland Calls."

The most fitting symbol of the bureaucratic hype over this holiday appeared in a glowing description of the brand new and heretofore unseen T-14 tank, based on the Armata model and touted as the centerpiece of the Moscow parade. The author of the text simply repeated verbatim the tank manufacturer's claims — namely, that the crew rides in an armored capsule deep inside the tank and guides the gun remotely without having a crew in turret.

Several "false panels" made from ordinary steel that in no way resembled heavy armor looked strangely out of place atop the tank, but the fawning written commentary explained that they were there to hide certain military secrets from prying eyes.

The problem is that a tank hailed as the apex of scientific achievement demonstrated only one capability on May 9: the ability to move — and even that it did with some difficulty, stalling out during the dress rehearsal of the parade.

Do those "false panels" really hide ingenious engineering secrets, or are they an attempt to disguise the lack of technical breakthroughs and the fact that the tank is an enormous waste of taxpayer money?

In truth, this entire Victory Day was a sort of "false panel" put up by the Russian authorities. They used it to hide their selfish interests and, above all, their profound indifference to the tragedy and triumph that this country experienced seven decades ago.

They could care less about the 90-year-old veterans who fought to save the motherland.

In fact, Vladimir Putin had only two goals in mind for these 70th anniversary celebrations. First, and most important, he hoped for at least one day to become the most important leader on the planet.

His plan was to eclipse even U.S. President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Francois Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and their ilk and watch as they were compelled to stand in the crowd and listen to him, Vladimir Putin.

However, that spectacle did not go off as planned. Most world leaders decided not play the role of extras in Putin's self-congratulatory show and thereby lend tacit support to the annexation of Crimea. As a result, Putin was forced to content himself with attendance by his allies in the BRICS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

However, even from the latter, the ever-scheming Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko opted to abstain, as did the delegations from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Zimbabwe and other "leading" countries of the world.

Putin's second goal was to convince average Russians to equate the nearly holy war against fascism with the regime's current escapade in Ukraine. Kremlin spin doctors have been reinforcing that association for months with a constant torrent of claims that Ukraine is besieged with "fascist sentiment," which is attempting to justify Hitler's atrocities and so on.

It will be on the Kremlin's conscience that it is waging a war against a brotherly people that also sacrificed millions of lives for the Great Victory. It will be on the Kremlin's conscience that it has twisted the Guard's Ribbon into symbol of Donbass separatists and those who support them.

It is no accident that ordinary citizens from the provinces now rank the battle for Debaltseve as one of the major victories of Russian arms. Could the heroes of the Battle of Kursk ever have imagined that their feats would one day be compared to Russians fighting against Ukrainians?

At some point it dawned on me that the tank's tin "false panels" festooned with a St. George's ribbon are, unfortunately, a fitting symbol of this year's Victory Day. But all of that propagandistic garbage was thankfully washed away when almost half a million Muscovites took to the main streets of the city to demonstrate the "Immortal Regiment."

With each of them carrying portraits of loved ones who had participated in the war, the demonstration immediately turned the celebrations into a deeply personal experience and freed them from the fetters of state propaganda. It is worth recalling that this method of commemorating May 9 first arose in Tomsk as an alternative to the usual bureaucratic nonsense.

The "Immortal Regiment" was conceived by journalists at a local television station that has since been shut down for excessive free thinking. As usual, the authorities co-opted that sincere show of patriotism for their own political purposes: President Vladimir Putin personally led the procession.

However, I think that what marchers will remember is not Putin, but the fact that they all came together in unity and recognized themselves as a one people.

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