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Fascism Has Won in Russia Decades After WWII

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Soldiers march through Red Square on Victory Day 2024. **Vladimir Gerdo, TASS / kremlin.ru**

Each year, Russia seizes May 9th to reinforce its image as a global power with legendary military might. Once a symbol of unity among nations aspiring for peace, Victory Day has now evolved into another line on an ideological battleground between Russia and the West, including Ukraine.

This year, Russia – declared a state sponsor of terrorism by the EU – will celebrate right after the inauguration of its fifth-time and probably life-long president Vladimir Putin, indicted by the International Criminal Court. The country seems to have lost its battle for democracy, and is proud of further alienation from the West, and the mounting victims of its aggression. Russia has been subdued by extensive censorship and propaganda, rising illiberalism, and the squashing of dissenting voices extending to murder.

While the performative voting saw widespread anomalies and 22 million fake votes cast

across the country, the outcome of a genuinely free and fair election might yield similar results. This means that with Russia's current leader, little might change for the country.

While Europe solemnly vows that the horrors of war should never happen again, Russia is proclaiming that they can advance across Europe once more. In the best tradition of Russian diplomacy, it pushes on with nuclear blackmailing, announcing tactical nuclear weapons drills and threatening Britain and France for their bold support of Ukraine.

Analysts suggest that the Kremlin aims to capture Chasiv Yar by May 9th to satisfy its domestic audience's hunger for victory. This strategic location may potentially serve as a springboard for further Russian advances toward Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.

However, these are not the territories that may satisfy Russia's appetite. What they really want is the defeat of the West whose collective effort is not enough for Ukraine to be a safe and prosperous country. Ukraine is a message to all ex-Soviet republics, a kind of a 'hanged man' reminding of the fate of the disobedient.

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To offset significant losses in the war against Ukraine, Russian leadership aims to recruit approximately 400,000 contract soldiers. Meanwhile, Putin has announced that by the end of the year, half a million Russians will be mobilized for the war against Ukraine, with 617,000 currently engaged in combat. Under the pretext of elections on the temporarily occupied territories, Moscow launched a hidden mobilization for the next phase of the war.

While money remains the main motivation for Russians who choose to fight, sociologist Grigory Yudin thinks that the motivating emotion among Russians is resentment caused by the belief that Russia's national superiority is being sidelined by the global order. Some Russians who are horrified by Russia's aggressive policies still fear the possibility of their country losing the war and definitively stopping being a global power.

This sense of resentment towards the world forms a pretext for the rise of fascist regimes. Russia in the 1990s underwent not only a sharp reduction in living standards but also a crisis of national identity. This resulted in deeply ingrained collective anger and the inability to govern the country through traditional democratic means.

Alexander Dugin refreshed the ideas of the political philosopher Ivan Ilyin, offering Russians a sense of identity rooted in militaristic imperial nationalism. This is the idea that Russia acts as a counterweight against Western hegemony, leading nations united by Eurosianism, traditionalism, and anti-liberalism. If nations like Ukraine refuse to comply, they are labeled as either non-existent or fascist, justifying their conquest and Russification.

Another two features of fascism evident in Russia are the willingness of the majority of society to enter a state of mobilization accepting limitations on rights and freedoms, and the presence of a charismatic figure to serve as the leader of the nation. Even though more than

half of the Russian population would support a peace treaty with Ukraine, only 3 % believe it should result in Ukraine regaining sovereignty over all its internationally recognized territory.

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All these moods are reflected in the Victory Day celebrations, along with the ubiquitous stripes of the Saint George ribbon and the "Z" logo. The letter has become the most recognizable symbol of public support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, giving supporters of the war a symbol to rally behind. To encapsulate the essence of Russia's Victory Day, Ukrainians have coined the term *"pobedobesiyje"* (a frenzy of victory)—a haunting portrayal of celebrations driven by a pursuit of victory so obsessive it is akin to demonic possession

Russia does not fully resemble fascist states of the past, lacking revolutionary fervor and a mass obsession with utopia. The term "post-fascism," which emerged from the analysis of European far-right movements, may describe the explosive mixture of state management mechanisms, societal moods and popular myths defining today's Russia more appropriately. But regardless of what we call this phenomenon, it is just as dangerous as fascism.

As the war continues, without the aim of controlling specific territory but causing the downfall of Ukraine as a liberal democracy, its end remains elusive. Even if the fighting transitions to a lower intensity, Russia will persist in its endeavors to overtake Ukraine politically and economically, undermine liberal democracies across Europe and challenge U.S. influence in the region.

In his inauguration speech, boycotted by most Western countries, Putin once again proclaimed Russian exceptionalism and emphasized the need to establish a multi-polar world order. Putin said that discussions with the West on security and strategic stability are possible, but not if the West approached them from a position of strength.

However, Russia's interests are incompatible with democratic values, and remain a direct threat to Ukraine's very existence. Hence, the ultimate objective of the collective effort to support Ukraine should be the defeat of the specter of fascism in Russia. Otherwise, Russia will continue to be the world's troublemaker.

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