

A photograph showing a line of children in military-style uniforms marching on a paved surface. The uniforms are tan-colored with red accents on the boots and caps. The children are walking in a straight line, and their shadows are cast long and dark on the ground. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The land of victorious militarism

Militaristic indoctrination in Russia

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Executive Summary

As part of the war against Ukraine, Russia has established one of the most aggressive authoritarian regimes on the planet. Vladimir Putin intends to pursue his goals militarily, by threatening to use armed force to resolve disputes with other countries or resorting to direct aggression. In any analysis of the Kremlin's ability to pursue a policy of the use of military force, it is fundamental to understand the methods and tools used to mobilise the country's population.

Like any authoritarian state, Russia needs an ideology that explains why the same person has been leading the state for more than two decades. For Russia, this is the concept of a fortress under siege. War and the preparations for it have become the defining characteristic of the Putin regime and militarism, which prioritizes so-called military values, has become its ideology. Under these conditions, the structures created to conduct political education in the military, which have failed in their main task of ensuring a high level of morals in the army, have begun to play a major role in the political indoctrination of the entire nation. The Kremlin has sought to recreate the gigantic propaganda apparatus of the Soviet era. Unlike in the Soviet Union, however, the leading role is given not to party or state structures such as the presidential administration, but to the main military-political directorate of the armed forces. This department plays a key role in implementing the State Program of Patriotic Education. It supervises numerous projects that involve millions of, primarily young, Russian citizens in political education.

The Yunarmia (Young Army) movement involves more than 1.5 million schoolchildren and a network of "Avangard" centres, through which every young male recognized as militarily capable must pass. The Russian Ministry of Defence also conducts large-scale propaganda campaigns aimed at the entire population. Militarism, officially known as "state patriotism", has become the ideological basis of the regime and poses a threat to Russian citizens and the entire world. It is also the main form of self-identification for the Russian people, which ensures long-term support for the regime and a readiness of citizens to participate in its military adventures.

A besieged fortress

Russia today is a highly aggressive state. Its leaders are guided by the imperialist approaches and perceptions of the 19th century. Russia has unleashed and is waging the most widespread and bloody hostilities in Europe since the Second World War. The purpose of this war is not just to seize the territory of a neighbouring state and change the regime there. Through the use of military force, Moscow intends to return to the ranks of the “great powers”, which, according to the Kremlin, have the right to decide the fate and future of “smaller” countries. Even if the fighting in Ukraine ends, war and preparations for it will remain Russia’s modus vivendi. It is no coincidence that European states are now concerned about the possibility that the Kremlin might start a military conflict with the Baltic states or Poland. The Kremlin’s military adventures have resulted in [huge loss of life](#), which the Russian population appears to accept uncomplainingly. This is probably not just linked to the repression used by the Putin regime or the large sums of money paid to the participants in the war. The system of ideological indoctrination is obviously working quite effectively in the country. In preparing to contain the aggressive aspirations of the Putin regime, it is necessary to understand how this indoctrination is carried out.

Like any authoritarian state, Russia needs an ideology or system of views that explains to the population why, under the existing formal electoral system, the country should be governed by the same person for such a long period of time. The worldview of the current leaders of Russia and a significant proportion of the country’s population was formed during the Cold War, which makes the concept of the state as a besieged fortress an ideal explanation. This was exactly the approach taken by Vladimir Putin in the early years of his presidency, explaining any failures of the government as the result of the machinations of external enemies. This is how he [explained](#) the seizure by terrorists of a school in Beslan, North Ossetia in 2004, after about 300 children had been killed in an unsuccessful attempt to free them. As a result of the actions of external enemies, “our country ... overnight found itself unprotected either by the West or from the East....In general, we must admit that we have not understood the complexity and danger of the processes taking place in our own country and in the world. In any case, we failed to react adequately to them. We showed weakness. And weak people are beaten”.

Russian citizens have been offered a fairly primitive state structure similar to an army hierarchy. At the head is the president, or commander-in-chief, who with his staff makes crucial decisions under conditions of a continuous ongoing war with the outside world. The natural conclusion is that any change in the commander-in-chief would risk defeat. By the same logic, society should not allow even a shadow of doubt about the “wisdom” of the supreme leader. Those who risk doubt or even criticise his decisions are immediately declared traitors or foreign agents.

Thus, war and the preparations for it have become the only form of existence in Putin’s regime and militarism, which connotes “the extensive control by the military over social life, coupled with the subservience of the whole society to the needs of the army”, has become its natural ideology.¹ Militarism “covers every system of thinking and valuing and every complex of feelings which rank military institutions and ways above the ways of civilian life, carrying military mentality and modes of acting and decision into the civilian sphere”.² This is the approach that guides the Russian authorities today and has made the army the most important political institution in the country. It is also logical that after the aggression against Ukraine began in 2014, which

1 Andreski, S. (1968) *Military Organization and Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. P 185

2 Vagts, A. (1959) *A History of Militarism*, rev. ed. New York: Meridian Books. P17

led to the occupation of Crimea and the seizure of parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions several years before the start of a large-scale war, the Kremlin began to consistently recreate the Soviet system of political indoctrination in the armed forces.

The Soviet Army's "political organs" were not only a system for organizing indoctrination. Their main task was to control the loyalty of officers and generals, and their compliance with communist standards. Deputy commanders for political work (zampolits) were located at all levels of the army hierarchy from the company up. Their duties included regular compilation of "political reports", which informed not only on the condition of their units, but also on the behaviour and views of their immediate superiors. Regular reports on senior officers were sent by their own deputies on political work to the administrative bodies of the Communist Party Central Committee, which had the final on appointments to command positions from divisional commander or the commander of a nuclear submarine up to all higher positions. All military-political activity was directed by the Main Political Department of the Soviet Army and Navy (GlavPur), which had status of a department of the Central Committee. Military criteria on "morality" were much stricter than Soviet standards. For example, an officer was allowed to divorce only after a discussion in the unit's party committee. This inevitably ended with a party reprimand, which automatically prevented an officer from being promoted to the next rank or appointed to a higher position. In contrast to the ritualistic praise of political officers in the army, however, they had a reputation for being slackers, talkers and snitches, as demonstrated in numerous aphorisms, such as "the zampolit closed his mouth and finished the job" or "the commander says do as I do but the zampolit says do as I say".

The Soviet GlavPur together with its subordinated structures disappeared immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The army did not regret it. In the 1990s, an uninfluential Department of Educational Work (GUVR) was created, and political officers became "assistants" in educational work with unclear functions and authorities. The times for ideological officers were very bad when Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov took office in 2007. Having served as a private in the Soviet Army, he had no positive sentiments regarding military "educators" and it was with political educators that large-scale reductions in officers began in 2009. Of the 17,500 military educators working in the army and navy in 2008, more than 12,000 had been [removed](#) by 2010. Alongside the complete elimination of 70 per cent of such positions, however, about 30 per cent of those who remained on the staff were transferred from officer positions to civilian ones and the GUVR itself became subordinate to the Main Personnel Directorate (GUK).

In search of ideology

Sergei Shoigu, who replaced Serdyukov as defence minister in 2012, had a much better grasp of the wishes of his superiors. He began talking about the need to raise the status of "educators" as soon as he took over, and in February 2013 he [announced](#) the return of deputy commanders for educational work. He did not, however, risk declaring their work "political", and constantly emphasised that these officers should not be treated as a "vestige" of the Soviet era.

As imperialist tendencies grew in Russian politics following the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the "undeclared war" in Donbas, and envisaging new military adventures, the Kremlin began to strengthen the system of ideological indoctrination in the military.

The Main Directorate for Military and Political Work (GVPU) in the armed forces was established in 2018. It was given a bureaucratic status comparable not to a modest department for educational work, but to the Soviet GlavPur. It was led by a three-star general while the Directorate for Educational Work was commanded by a colonel.

The Military-Political Directorate is not part of the structure of the Ministry of Defence but an independent part of the Armed Forces. Only the Main Directorate for Combat Training and the Main Directorate for Armaments had previously been given such status. In record time, the hierarchy of political officers was recreated from deputy military district commanders with the rank of general to deputy commanders for political work (zampolits) in each company. The Military University began training new cadres of political officers, making it possible to create a reduced version of the Soviet apparatus for ideological indoctrination of the armed forces.

The defence ministry leadership made no secret of the goals of the new body. Shoigu [insisted](#) that the main task of the GVPU was to counter western influence: “The need to create a new department became obvious when we saw how actively the West was meddling in the army’s affairs – they were meddling quite unceremoniously and unapologetically”. If everything was immediately clear about the identity of the enemy, however, it was more difficult to formulate a set of positive ideas that political officers should instil in the minds of the military. The Russian Constitution [was clear that](#): “In the Russian Federation ideological diversity must be recognised. No ideology may be established as state or obligatory. In the Russian Federation political diversity and a multi-party system must be recognised”. This meant that, in principle, “political indoctrination” in the armed forces was not possible.

In fact, the heads of the revitalised “political organs” decided to ignore these most important constitutional provisions. Colonel General Kartoplov, who was appointed the first chief of the GVPU in 2018, [stated](#): “Our ideology must be based, first, on the history of the Motherland and its people, and second, on historical and cultural traditions”. The general had no doubt about the main source of this new ideology: “The revival of the Russian state, as we see it, continues through the revival of the Orthodox faith”. In an attempt to explain the wars Russia was involved in, Kartoplov [referred](#) to examples where religious controversies served as a reason for war: “What is happening now in Syria can be considered another act of war for the manger of the Lord”. Thus, the general seriously considered the Syrian civil war to be a continuation of the confrontation between the Orthodox and Catholic churches, which gave rise to the Crimean War of 1853–1856. He obviously wanted to stress Moscow’s perception of an existential confrontation between Russia and the West.

Kartoplov should be given credit for creating an ideology that has been successfully implanted in the heads not only of the military, but also of all Russian citizens. He became head of the State Duma Defence Committee in 2021. This militaristic ideology is a mixture of myths about the Second World War, or Great Patriotic War, and primitive fundamentalist ideas about Orthodoxy, within the framework of which the Russian Orthodox Church has become a subdivision of the presidential administration and the Ministry of Defence. People who spent most of their lives taking exams in “scientific atheism” at countless “institutes of Marxism-Leninism” could think of nothing else. The giant, khaki-coloured Main Temple of the Armed Forces, located in Patriot Park near Moscow, is a clear embodiment of their understanding of this ideology. It is a temple for which God is the state in its modern incarnation. It is no coincidence that mosaics depicting the current leaders of the country, as well as Joseph Stalin, were discovered here – and were removed only after a scandal that began when reporters found such images alongside icons.

Tellingly, the only serious innovation in the organization of political work compared to Soviet times was the arrival of clergy in the army. There are now about 300 military chaplains permanently working in the armed forces, and the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church insist that this number needs to be [increased](#) to 1,500. A Rostov seminary has created a Master's Programme with a military module designed to train priests for the needs of the army, and the Holy Synod, the governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church, has created a department for interaction with the armed forces. The GVPU and lower political directorates have established departments to work with religious servicemen led by priests with the rank of assistant commanders of military districts. The Ministry of Defence website regularly publishes collections of prayers for soldiers at war.

Another crucial element of this ideology is the mythologised history of the Great Patriotic War. The creators of this ideology seek to present that war, which resulted in the deaths of more than 27 million Soviet citizens, as a series of heroic victories. They argue that the world owes the Soviet Union for its salvation from fascism 80 years ago. On this basis, they insist on Russia's special right to resolve its current controversies with the countries of Europe. Thus, Russian propagandists have arrogated to themselves the right to speak on behalf of the heroes of the Second World War. They insist that Russian troops are doing today what Soviet troops did then. According to the Kremlin, they are at war with Nazis. The annual culmination is Victory Day on 9 May, which has become a giant militaristic demonstration as thousands of military personnel march through Red Square in Moscow. The presence of foreign leaders at the parade is seen as a sign of loyalty to the Kremlin.

Thus far, the new ideology has not been formulated as an official doctrine. The authors of numerous articles on this topic that have appeared in military publications in recent years do not go beyond statements about the need for such an ideology. They also interpret in every possible way the words of [Vladimir Putin in 2019](#): "In my opinion, in a modern democratic society, there is only one possible ideology – patriotism". It is quite revealing that the authors consider love for the Motherland first and foremost as love for the state and its head. It is no coincidence that they call this ideology "state patriotism". In fact, it is reduced to [ensuring](#) unconditional support for all the decisions of Vladimir Putin: "Military policy as a derivative of military ideology in the army and society is aimed at ensuring political support by the military and the population of the country for the decisions of the state authorities".

It is logical that in seeking to formulate such an ideology, military theorists inevitably arrive at attempts at a modern interpretation of the formula of Sergei Uvarov, Minister of Education in the era of Nicholas I, who, as is well known, argued that autocracy, Orthodoxy and nationality are the only possible way to govern Russia. The key concept for current military ideologues is undoubtedly autocracy. Uvarov argued that the Russian people do not distinguish between concepts such as "tsar" and "country". Two centuries later, the authors of the main theoretical magazine of the armed forces, *Voennaya mysl*, seriously argue that autocracy is "a necessary condition for maintaining order within the state and for defence against enemies 'outside'".³

3 Yu. N. Arzamaskin, O. V. Kepel'. Gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskaya ideya kak ideologicheskaya osnova voenno-politicheskoy raboty / *Voennaya mysl*. - 2021. - № 11. - p. 131Ю. Н. Арзамаскин, О. В. Кепель. Государственно-патриотическая идея как идеологическая основа военно-политической работы / *Военная мысль*. - 2021. - № 11. - С. 131

Political work in war

This quasi-ideology is being implanted by modern commissars into the heads of Russian servicemen who Putin has thrown into a new war “for the Lord’s manger”, in aggression against Ukraine that has no other reason than ideological. Surprisingly, three decades after the disappearance of the Soviet GlavPur, its successors have not invented any new forms or methods of ideological indoctrination. As in communist times, when political officers were obliged to explain the provisions of the General Secretary’s regular report to the Party Congress, zampolits must try to explain Putin’s speeches to the soldiers. [As in Soviet times](#), orders and instructions are issued down to the minutiae of regulating the organization and conduct of political classes, in which all categories of soldiers must participate. Different classes have to be organised for officers, sergeants and privates.

The propaganda materials published on the website of the military department for “Military and Political Work in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” give an exhaustive idea of the content of political work. The brochure, “What are we Fighting For?”, comprises eight pages and 12 phrases. From it, we learn that those on the front in Ukraine are fighting “for old people and children, for veterans of the Great Patriotic War, tortured by the descendants of the Nazis”. In addition, “We are fighting against the oppression of Russians...for the right to consider ourselves part of the united Russian people, for the right to study our history and be proud of our ancestors”. Finally, it turns out that Russian soldiers are killing Ukrainians because “we are defending a healthy culture, for the truth in the darkness of lies, fakes, enemy propaganda and provocations, for humanity in the midst of animal cruelty and outright insanity, for our traditional values in the abyss of depravity and moral decay”.

The newspaper Na strazhe mira (Guarding the peace) and the magazine Politruk, both published by the GVPU, are filled with ideological clichés and make an even more wretched impression. It is notable that the main newspaper of the armed forces, Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star), where the prominent Soviet-Russian writers Platonov, Simonov and Ehrenburg worked during the war against Nazi Germany, now does not even try to make propaganda even slightly interesting for the soldiers. From issue to issue, the articles follow the same pattern: enthusiastic reports on the minister’s participation in an event, victory reports supplied by the information department of the Ministry of Defence and multi-page reports of identical, one or two paragraph, depictions of stereotypical feats.

It is more than doubtful whether all this ideological product has any serious impact on the minds of Russian soldiers. Former servicemen who find themselves abroad do not hide their [contempt](#) for zampolits. The state of morale and discipline in the Russian army shows that such political work does not bring about significant results. Desertion has become an epidemic and the number of servicemen who have left their units has [reached](#) the tens of thousands. In one division alone the list [exceeds](#) 1000. Looting is now [common](#). The number of military crimes [doubled](#) in 2022. All such statistics are now classified.

An instrument of politics

Having failed in its main task of maintaining the morale of the military, the Ministry of Defence has paradoxically received the approval of the authorities for its ideological treatment of the population as a whole. This is a significant innovation compared to Soviet times, when the activities of the army’s political bodies were largely confined to the armed forces. The Main Directorate for Military and Political Work has claimed since its inception that the army has the authority to target all the inhabitants of the country. In May 2019, the then head of the GVPU, General Kartopolov, called the separation of the army from politics an “erroneous step” and

emphasised that “the armed forces are not only a military force, but also a political institution”.⁴ He aimed to [create an ideology](#) for the entire country: “the ideology that is being born before our eyes today will be tested in the army. If later it turns out to be in demand by the state, we will be glad”.

It should be noted that the Kremlin has endorsed the GVPU's claim to be the main source of the new Russian ideology. An order of the Minister of Defence dated 22 February 2022 – two days before the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine – [tasks the GVPU with](#):

[implementing] state programmes for the patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation; coordinating the interaction of military government bodies with federal executive authorities, state authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and public organizations in the interests of the military-patriotic education of young people; [and] providing organizational and methodological support for the development of military-political work.

To call things by their proper name, the GVPU was appointed curator of the ideological indoctrination of both federal and local authorities, as well as pro-government “social movements”. The Centre for Military-Patriotic Work of the Armed Forces, which is subordinate to the GVPU, was created to carry out these tasks. The army was assigned a leading role in the implementation of the federal project “Patriotic Education of Russian Citizens”. The armed forces were to conduct 85 [propaganda campaigns](#) in which 5 million people were expected to participate.

The system of ideological indoctrination led by the Ministry of Defence covers the entire population of the country but is primarily focused on young people, who are regarded exclusively as future soldiers. Militaristic indoctrination begins not in school, but in kindergarten. Numerous methodological instructions on the patriotic education of preschoolers contain the same requirement: to inculcate in children such important concepts as “duty to the Motherland”, “love for the Fatherland” and “hatred of the enemy”.⁵ It is highly revealing that the people involved in the education of children aged five or six do not see the difference between love for the Fatherland and hatred of the enemy.

Mobilising the youth

The Defence Ministry's main youth-oriented project is the Yunarmia (Young Army) movement, created by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in 2016. This is a phenomenon unique to authoritarian regimes, where the political indoctrination of young people is officially prioritized as militaristic indoctrination, officially called “military-patriotic education”. It proceeds from the assumption that it is impossible to raise a patriot without teaching him how to handle a Kalashnikov. According to official data, there are 1.7 million people in this movement aged of 8 to 18. More than 18000 “events” have been held.

The work of Yunarmia in the regions is concentrated around the so-called Houses of Yunarmia, which have been created in educational institutions and military establishments. Its main headquarters is in the House of Officers in the Moscow Military District, where members of the movement regularly engage in basic military training, and familiarise themselves with various

4 Kartapolov A.V. Armiya dolzhna vliyat' na politiku v strane // Krasnaya zvezda. 15.05.2019

5 Formirovanie u doshkol'nikov patrioticheskikh chuvstv posredstvom oznakomleniya s podvigami russkogo naroda v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny / S. A. Voronkova, L. V. Mirgorodskaya, M. A. Starzhinskaya Molodoj uchenyj. — 2019. — № 14 (252). — pp. 232–234. — URL: <https://moluch.ru/archive/252/57856/>

types of weapons and military profession. Within the framework of Yunarmia, separate projects are implemented to prepare children for future military service in specific branches of the armed forces, in particular in the navy and aviation.

A special project is devoted to the education of military propagandists. Project members cover all sorts of “patriotic events” and regularly attend “master classes” by professional propagandists working in Russian television and in the official military press. A significant part of Yunarmia members’ time is spent preparing for and participating in military parades and rallies. They also regularly participate in the military game, “Zarnitsa”, which is modelled on military field exercises. The Ministry of Defence ensures that participation in Yunarmia provides serious privileges for admission not only to military, but also to civilian institutions of higher education.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, Yunarmia activities have concentrated on symbolic support for the warring army. Members of the movement weave camouflage nets, make trench candles and write letters to soldiers. The movement’s headquarters is led by Marine Captain Vladislav Golovin, who participated in the war against Ukraine. Political education in Yunarmia is bearing fruit. More than 1000 former members of the movement have participated in the war against Ukraine and 50 former military men who worked in Yunarmia as instructors have gone to war [as volunteers](#). Yunarmia has a database of all participants, which will facilitate mass mobilization if needed.

According to media reports, Yunarmia will receive 1 billion rubles (more than €10 million) from the state budget in 2025, which is more than double the funding in 2024. Yunarmia will receive 800 million rubles in the form of subsidies under the national project Youth and Children, which was developed on the instructions of Putin in 2024. The goal of this project is to create “advanced schools” throughout Russia. Yunarmia will also [receive](#) another 200 million rubles from the Russian Ministry of Defence to prepare young people for military service.

In parallel with the Yunarmia movement, the Ministry of Defence is implementing another larger-scale project – the creation and operation of “Avangard” centres for the military-patriotic education of young people. In accordance with current legislation, every potential conscript, which is practically all men aged 15 to 17, is obliged to undergo a five-day training camp during their period of schooling to master the basics of military service. This will be provided by the “Avangard” centres, which, in accordance with Putin’s decision, are to be set up in every town with a population of more than 100,000 people. [According](#) to Shoigu in 2021: “The activity of Avangard is one of the key criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the region’s work in preparing citizens for military service”.

These centres, which are closed camps where high school students stay 24 hours a day, provide basic military training and “military-patriotic education” programmes. An obligatory element of such education is meetings with participants in the war against Ukraine and other figures who have distinguished themselves in the field of state patriotism. In 2023, for example, the Moscow Avangard centre hosted Viktor But, an organiser of the illegal arms trade who spent more than 10 years in a US prison. He explained the goals of the war against Ukraine in [following terms](#): “Russia is defending itself, striving to stop war and aggression against itself by countries that are members of the NATO bloc. We are defending our lands and the right of the people living on them to speak their native language”.

The scale of this programme is illustrated by the largest Avangard centre, which was built in 2020 with funds allocated by the local governments of Moscow and Moscow Region, as well as the Ministry of Defence. The centre is designed to train and accommodate 900 schoolchildren and 1,800 college students from the Moscow area. The military [training](#) for each category of student lasts for five days, during which they study six military professions under the guidance of 110 instructors. In a year, the centre trains more than 80,000 people. In addition to the direct military and military-patriotic training of young people, the centre also “develops, tests and disseminates innovative forms and methods of work with young people in the sphere of military-patriotic education”.

From its own television channel to propaganda trains

The propaganda activities of the Ministry of Defence are not limited to the indoctrination of military patriotism into the heads of the younger generation. The military conducts political indoctrination of the entire Russian population. The main tool is the Zvezda media group, which is owned by the ministry and comprises a television channel, a radio station with the same name and numerous internet sites. Zvezda TV is a federal channel that is included in the compulsory broadcasting grid throughout the country. It ranks tenth in popularity and has about 3 percent of the total television audience. (The first-place Rossiya channel has about 14 per cent.) The number of viewers has almost doubled since the war began. The channel spends about 2 billion Russian rubles (€20 million) on its content. Its news programmes are a source of blatant militaristic propaganda, but this is not too different from other federal channels. The main difference is that the rest of the airtime is occupied by programmes on military topics, such as “Military Quality Control”, “War of the Worlds”, “Legends of the Army” and “Secret Materials”, for which the channel hires famous actors.

So-called visual agitation has an important role in the ideological indoctrination of the population. A major role here is played by the Patriot Park or “military-patriotic park of culture and recreation”, which is located near the town of Kubinka in the Odintsovo urban district of Moscow Region. The park, which covers an area of more than 5000 hectares, houses an aviation museum (that includes the Kubinka airbase), a museum of armoured vehicles, an artillery museum and sports facilities. The park is also used for historical exhibitions and armament and military equipment expositions. There are plans to create “clusters” on the branches and types of armed forces: Ground Forces, Navy, Air and Space Forces, Strategic Missile Forces and Airborne Troops. Each cluster will be divided into several thematic zones, such as exhibitions of military equipment, amusement rides and mock-up ranges.

All major Ministry of Defence events from exhibitions to forums take place in the exhibition centre. Patriot Park also stages reconstructions of battles and historical events. A large-scale reconstruction of the storming of the Reichstag took place in 2017, in which more than 1500 people participated. A model of the Reichstag was built for the purpose.

In the park, the historical and memorial complex, “Partisan Village”, comprises more than 20 objects that represent the everyday lives of a partisan detachment during the Great Patriotic War, as the authors of the exposition wish to represent them. There is also a multifunctional firing range designed for shooting small arms and grenade launchers in the park. The main temple of the armed forces is located in the park. The complex houses a museum, the Field of Victory, dedicated to the battle of Moscow in 1941. The museum exhibits weapons and military equipment from the Second World War. In 2024, trophy equipment from the Ukrainian armed forces, produced in NATO countries and captured during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was delivered to the park.

According to official figures, the park was [visited](#) by 2.2 million people in 2022. It is this “military Disneyland” that embodies the military ideologists’ ideas about the values that should be inculcated in the minds of Russian residents: primitive myths about the war with Nazi Germany, claims that Ukraine and its western allies are the new incarnation of Nazis and the trappings of Orthodoxy. The Ministry of Defence periodically organizes similar exhibitions in all major cities throughout the country.

For the past five years, the Ministry of Defence has conducted large-scale annual propaganda campaigns using propaganda trains. The propaganda train usually leaves Moscow on 23 February, which is Defender of the Fatherland Day, a national holiday, and returns on the eve of Victory Day on 9 May. (This year the action started on 19 April 19 and will end on 3 July.) During this time, it travels almost the entire country. These trains are a traveling exposition, each carriage of which corresponds to a theme of militaristic propaganda. In 2024, the propaganda

train included a carriage devoted to the Great Patriotic War with samples of weapons and models of military equipment from the time, a carriage with a mission to “reveal the criminal intentions of the Ukrainian leadership and the ideology of Nazism planted by it”, thematic carriages on Ground Forces, Airborne Forces, the Navy, the Air and Space Forces, the Main Military and Political Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces, the Department of Culture in the Ministry of Defence and Yunarmia. There is always a carriage advertising recruitment and contract service in the army.

At each of the 75 stations where the train stopped, local authorities held a rally attended by high-ranking officials. In St Petersburg, for example, the campaign train was welcomed by Governor Beglov. On a special stage, there were concerts by agitator brigades of actors from the Central House of the Russian Army, as well as song and dance ensembles from military districts and fleets. The degree of aggression in these propaganda activities was evidenced by the fact that visitors were encouraged to trample the banners and chevrons of Ukrainian troops taken as trophies. OSCE flags were also among the trophies.

Conclusion

Russia has created and is continuing to rapidly develop a system for the militaristic indoctrination of the population. Even though the Constitution explicitly prohibits the existence of a state ideology, one exists in the guise of so-called state patriotism. Unlike communism, this ideology does not offer the population a picture of an ideal future. Instead, it suggests to the country's inhabitants that Russia is doomed both now and, in the future, to be a besieged fortress. The main task of the state is therefore “defence” against external and internal “enemies”, waging wars and preparing for future wars. In the Soviet Union, the Central Committee of the Communist Party was the main organizational and intellectual power in the ideological indoctrination of the population. The Ministry of Defence and its Main Directorate of Military and Political Work have taken over these functions.

In its practical activities, the GVPU uses mainly Soviet methods of political indoctrination. The Soviet system of organizing political work in the armed forces has been recreated, relying on “political organs” and deputy commanders for political work, starting at the company level. As far as can be judged, this ideological indoctrination has not significantly improved the morale of the armed forces. The military propaganda organs have also become the main source of the regime's ideology among the country's population. The Ministry of Defence directs mass “military-patriotic” movements and projects in which millions of young people participate, primarily the Yunarmia movement and the network of Avangard centres. The Ministry of Defence also carries out ideological indoctrination of the entire population through its own television channel. It “military-patriotic” Patriot Park has become a “military Disneyland” of military museums and exhibitions, as well as the main temple of the armed forces. The Ministry of Defence regularly conducts large-scale propaganda campaigns with the participation of “propaganda trains” that run throughout the country.

Thus, Russia is increasingly becoming a classic militarist state with “an unquestioning embrace of military values, ethos, principles, [and] attitudes” that ranks “military institutions and considerations above all others in the state [and finds] the heroic predominantly in military service and action including war”.⁶ Militarism, officially known as state patriotism, is a threat to Russia's citizens and the entire world. It is becoming the ideological basis for a regime whose sole existence is preparation for war or conducting war.

6 Vagts, A. (1959) A History of Militarism, rev. ed. New York: Meridian Books. P 453

Even in the event of an end to hostilities in Ukraine, which would be presented by Kremlin propaganda as an unconditional victory, there will be no demobilisation of public consciousness. To ensure regime survival, the Kremlin will continue to adhere to the concept of the country as a besieged fortress. The economic and political situation of the country will not allow it to demobilise those who fought in Ukraine or shift industry to civilian production. Public opinion will also demand new military victories. Consequently, Russian militarism could turn to new military adventures. Militaristic indoctrination in this situation begins to influence not only the population, but also the leaders who are guided by the myths created by their decision making.

Militaristic indoctrination will have long-term consequences. Militarism is becoming the main form of self-identification for the Russian people, which ensures long-term support for the regime and the readiness of citizens to participate in its military adventures. More than 80 per cent of Russians believe that Russia must regain and retain its role as a great power. They also [associate](#) great power status with the possession of enormous power and nuclear weapons, and the ability to intimidate other countries. The role of militarism in the minds of Russians will persist even in the event of regime change. This will be a factor that future leaders of the country will have to take into account even if they try to free themselves from Putin's legacy. Future leaders will have a huge job re-educating Russian citizens, which may take decades rather than years.



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The Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) is an independent Centre, funded by the Swedish Government, established in 2021. The Centre conducts policy relevant analysis on Russia and Eastern Europe and serves as a platform and meeting place for national and international discussions and exchanges on Russia and Eastern Europe. Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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