



Changing Attitudes toward War

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade, sociologists have noted a significant shift in Russian attitudes toward the concept of “war.” The accompanying excerpt from the centrist news source, *Gazeta.ru*, traces the transformation from the Soviet belief in peace, which was derived from the country’s tremendous sacrifices during the Great Patriotic War (World War II) to today’s more militaristic and aggressive stance. The author suggests that this “clear public move away from pacifism to the present official militarist rhetoric perhaps appeared over 10 years ago -- with the beginning of the new wave of the Russian authorities’ active public anti-Western propaganda.”

The author asserts that the aggression against Ukraine in early 2014 “finally ousted pacifist rhetoric from the official Russian discourse.” He provides a number of Russian memes and bumper stickers which reflect this new bellicosity: “Don’t mess with my Iskanders,” “a model of a missile inscribed ‘To Washington!’” or a German car “with the inscription ‘To Berlin.’” The author points out that these not-so subtle threats of aggression no longer “seem absurd, stupid, or inappropriate to the majority.”

The author concludes on a sobering note, positing that “something has happened to us. We have ceased to fear war. We have ceased to hate it.” While he does not specifically mention the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, he does assert that Russians “have ceased to resist attempts to drag us into various wars which have nothing to do with our country or which produce extremely negative long-term consequences.” And most disturbingly, the author notes that this attitude is prevalent among the younger generation, who, according to the author, will “answer the question ‘do the Russians want war?’ in the affirmative.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

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We have ceased to hate it.”*



USSR stamp devoted to the 20th anniversary of the Kursk battle, 1963. CPA 2869.

Source: By Scanned and processed by Leonid Dzhepko (Personal collection) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USSR_stamp_1963_CPA2870.jpg.

Source: Semen Novoprudskiy, “Хотят ли русские войны? (Do the Russians Want War?),” *Gazeta.ru*, 3 August 2018. <https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/column/novoprudsky/11877925.shtml>

...The question is why in present-day Russia it has become unfashionable and sometimes even simply dangerous to speak out publicly against war. And why in the past 100 years of our history the nation’s attitude toward war has changed to its direct opposite several times.

...The official Soviet rhetoric changed radically after the victory over fascism. Peace ensued, for which Soviet Russia paid an unimaginable price and which, of course, it wanted to preserve forever.... Now the Soviet Union will “fight for peace throughout the world” fiercely and resolutely, in words at least, until its very end.... A country which lost 27 million lives in the Second World War did not want to fight any more.

...In the first decade after the collapse of the USSR, in the 1990s, our country was clearly in no fit state for wars -- a least, no further off than our own Chechnya....

...The initial moments of Russia’s clear public move away from pacifism to the present official militarist rhetoric perhaps appeared over 10 years ago -- with the beginning of the new wave of the Russian authorities’ active public anti-Western propaganda. And since spring 2014 militarist rhetoric has finally ousted pacifist rhetoric from the official Russian discourse for well known reasons.

Now we are living with the militarist memes “Don’t mess with my Iskanders,” “polite people,” “we can do it again” -- and they do not seem absurd, stupid, or inappropriate to the majority.

A procession along Moscow’s central streets with a model of a missile inscribed “To Washington!” does not seem an absurdity to the majority. Or stickers on foreign cars, including German-made ones, with the inscription “To Berlin.” In Russia now to publicly call for the end of the war in Ukraine or the withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria means that you will immediately pass for an “oppositionist” and a “liberal” at the very least (in today’s Russia these are terms of abuse) or a “fifth column,” at the very most....

...Today the children and grandchildren of those same “sons of soldiers who lie under the birch trees” answer the question “do the Russians want war?” in the affirmative. Something has happened to us. We have ceased to fear war. We have ceased to hate it. We have ceased to resist attempts to drag us into various wars which have nothing to do with our country or which produce extremely negative long-term consequences...