

# ნოსტალგიის გეოპოლიტიკა: მახსოვრობის ომებიდან შპრინგის ომამდე

GEOPOLITICS OF NOSTALGIA: FROM MEMORY WARS TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

სერგეი მედვედევი

ჰელსინკის კოლეგია უმაღლესი კვლევებისთვის

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(transcript of a lecture)

## რეზიუმე

ტექსტის მიზანია, ახსნას უკრაინაში რუსეთის კოლონიური ომის დაწყების მიზეზები. ავტორს მიაჩნია, რომ ამ ომის რეალური წყარო მეხსიერებაა, ნოსტალგიაა. მსოფლიო ისტორიაში ეს, ალბათ, პირველი ომია, რომელიც სრულადაა მეხსიერებაზე დაფუძნებული. საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების თეორიას თუ გადავხედავთ, არსებობს რეალიზმი, არსებობს ლიბერალიზმი და არსებობს კონსტრუქტივიზმი. უკრაინაში რუსეთის მიერ დაწყებული ომი კონსტრუქტივიზმის მაგალითია, რომლის დასაწყებად ვლადიმერ პუტინმა მეხსიერებაზე დაყრდნობილი ნარატივები გამოიყენა (გამოგონილი, გაყალბებული). სწორედ მისი ისტორიული წარმოსახვა გახდა ამ ომის დაწყების მიზეზი – ადამიანების ჯგუფმა სპეციფიკური სახის მსოფლიო წარმოდგინეს და ამაზე დაყრდნობით გააჩაღეს ომი.

რუსეთი აღარ ცხოვრობს აწმყოში, ის არის ქვეყანა, რომელიც ცხოვრობს წარსულში და ეს პუტინის პოლიტიკის ერთ-ერთი მთავარი „მიღწევაა“. პუტინიზმი გარკვეულწილად რეტრო-პოლიტიკაა. მისი მთავარი მამოძრავებელი ძალა რუსეთის დიდებულ წარსულზე ოცნებაა – გამარჯვებიდან გამარჯვებამდე; ყოველთვის დასავლეთის წინააღმდეგ; ფაშიზმის წინააღმდეგ მართო მებრძოლი; უსამართლოდ დაჩაგრული ცივი ომის დასრულების შემდეგ.

ამ ყველაფრის უკან პოსტ-იმპერიული „გაბოროტება“ და იმპერიული რევანშიზმის იდეა დგას, რომელიც რუსების თავში ფრთხილად იქნა ჩანერგილი 2000-იანების პუტინის რუსეთში – ჯერ განცხადებით, რომ საბჭოთა კავშირის დანგრევა გეოპოლიტიკური კატასტროფა იყო და შემდეგ მიუნხენში წაკითხული სიტყვით, სადაც გაცხადებული იყო, რომ ყოფილი იმპერია რუსეთის გეოპოლიტიკური ინტერესების სფეროში რჩებოდა, რასაც 2008 წლის აგვისტოში საქართველოში ტანკების შესვლა და სამხრეთ ოსეთის ოკუპაცია მოჰყვა. შედეგად, რუსეთი გახდა ერი, რომელიც ჩაფლვო წარსულში, შეპყრობილია ფაშიზმზე გამარჯვებით და განავითარა სპეციფიკური სახის რიტუალი, რომელსაც

„победобесие“ – გამარჯვებით შეპყრობილობა ჰქვია. გამარჯვების კულტი კი ნამდვილ რელიგიად იქცა და გარკვეულწილად ჩაანაცვლა მართლმადიდებლობა. ამ მესხიერებების ბრძოლის ნაწილია, ასევე, სტალინის კულტის აღდგენა – მისი წარმოჩენა, როგორც საბჭოთა გამარჯვების მთავარი შემოქმედისა. თუ მეორე მსოფლიო ომის შემდეგ საბჭოთა კავშირის აქცენტი იყო მშვიდობაზე, ახლა „დაე, არ იყოს ომი“ ჩაანაცვლა „ჩვენ შეგვიძლია გავიმეოროთ“ რიტორიკამ.

ამ ყველაფრის შედეგია რუსეთის კოლონიური ომის დაწყება უკრაინაში. იმისთვის, რომ მომავალში მსგავსი რამ ავირიდოთ, ავტორი რამდენიმე გამოსავალს ასახელებს:

1. რუსეთი სამხედრო გზით უნდა დამარცხდეს, მისი დეიმპერიალიზაცია უნდა მოხდეს და ნორმალურ ერ-სახელმწიფოდ უნდა ჩამოყალიბდეს, რომლის გამოცდილებაც აქამდე არ ჰქონია;
2. უნდა მოხდეს პოსტ-საბჭოთა სივრცის დეიმპერიალიზაცია, რადგან რუსეთი მას, როგორც საკუთარ კოლონიას, ისე აღიქვამს. ეს ომი კი სწორედ რომ კოლონიური ომია;
3. რუსეთის დესოვიეტიზაცია უნდა მოხდეს, რადგან უკრაინაში ინტერვენცია საბჭოთა წითელი დროშის ქვეშ ხდება;
4. დაბოლოს, რუსეთის დენაციფიკაცია უნდა მოხდეს. რუსეთი უნდა გათავისუფლდეს ფაშისტური და ნაცისტური იდეოლოგიისგან, რომელიც მას მართავს ახლა.

It is an astonishing and terrifying time to be giving this lecture. Six months ago, one couldn't have imagined the extent of what is happening now, as if we were suddenly placed in the middle of World War II. Like 80 years ago, we are in the midst of a major armed conflict in Europe, a conflict the size of World War II considering the number of troops involved (up to 500,000 people), the loss of human life (the Pentagon has just revealed that Russia has already lost close to 75 000 soldiers), the 15 million Ukrainian refugees... And still, we are just at the beginning of this war, it will probably last for another year, or two-three years, nobody knows. Indeed, we are in the middle of the making of a new world and we are trying to make sense of it and understand how this became possible. In order to understand this, we have to turn to memory wars that have been raging all across the world, and especially in Russia for the past decade.

I would like to start with this tremendous photo by the Associated Press. This was made in May 2022 in the village of the Konstantinovka in the Lugansk region and it shows a battlefield in the middle of which we have a military memorial site – that's a Soviet World War II tank, an IS-1 Tank, named after Joseph Stalin, and around it, we see the destroyed Russian military equipment. I think this photo is tremendously symbolic because it shows the two wars combined, World War 2, which has become an inspiration and a model for Russia in fighting a new war. the entire ex-Soviet territory is dotted with these war memorials, with WW2 tanks standing on pedestals, with their guns are looking towards the West. All war memorials, their warriors, soldiers, and guns are all looking west – Russia is always stressing in its memory policy that it's been fighting the West forever. In the photo, the tank is more or less intact amidst the ruin and devastation, and it is striking that memory has served as a pretext for the real war – the dead people have taken away the living.

I am reminded of an earlier episode from the war in Donbas in 2014, when the local guerrillas have discovered a similar tank on the pedestal, yet another IS1 tank, and they have managed to take

it off the pedestal and to restore it. They have repaired the gun of this tank and started firing shells at Ukrainian positions. And then, there is an even more striking metaphor when the field commander in the Donbas in 2014-2015, the military reconstructor Igor Girkin (a.k.a. Strelkov) was executing people using on the 1942 orders from Joseph Stalin. Literally, people were shot in Donetsk on the orders of a long dead state, the orders from the Soviet Union in 1942. This is yet another example of how memory holds us by the throat, how the past is destroying the present, like in a horror movie with zombies rising from the ground and grabbing the living.

My main message here is that the real source of this war lies in memory, in nostalgia. This is probably the first war of this proportion in world history which is fought entirely on the grounds of memory. Let us look at it from the point of view of international relations theory: there is Realism in which the states are pursuing national interests and clashing with each other, then there is Liberalism, for which the world is made up of institutions and economic interests, and then there is Constructivism when wars are fought and relations are made in the realm of identity, or for the sake of memory. What we have here is a textbook case of Constructivism, with memory, or rather a specific set of memorial narratives promoted by Vladimir Putin who has become a keen historian in recent years, as the key source of this war. Many of Putin's public pronouncements over the past years have been about history. He was writing extended articles on the history of World War II to prove the unique Soviet role in winning the war and to claim that the USSR was fighting fascism alone, without allies. So it is the inflamed historical imagination of Vladimir Putin that was the nucleus of this war against Ukraine, a suicidal war conceived against any geopolitical rationality or economic interest.

Indeed, apart from the tragedy of Ukraine, what we are witnessing now is the unprecedented act of Russia's political, economic and human suicide, an anthropological catastrophe. Russia is abolishing whatever it has achieved over the past 30 years of transformation, betraying its own culture, own memory and killing its hopes for the future. It is an amazing act of self-immolation, very much like a hundred years ago, in 1917. And now it is happening before our eyes, and at its core are not some specific geopolitical or economic interests, but a set of beliefs and therefore I contend that this is a clear case of political constructivism, when a group of people have imagined the world in a specific way and started a war on these grounds.

The original Russian pretext for this war was an absurd claim of "denazification" of Ukraine, fighting the Ukrainian "Fascists", and this claim was taken quite seriously: Russian soldiers honestly believed that there were some caricature "Fascists" hiding in Ukrainian villages and homes. The Ukrainians who have been under Russian occupation are telling stories of soldiers running into their houses with machine guns asking "Где у вас тут фашисты?", ("where are the Fascists hiding in your house?"). In fact, Russia is seeking for Fascism in Ukraine without noticing that Russia herself has become a Fascist country – a theme which I will discuss later in this lecture.

The problem is that Russia of the 21st century is no longer living in the present. It is a country living in the past, and that was one of the main achievements of Putin's policy. Putinism is a kind of retro-politics. It is driven by the dream of Russia's glorious past, proceeding from victory to victory, always opposing the West, standing alone in combating Fascism and being unjustly treated at the end of the Cold War. Much like Hitler in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, Putin instilled the ideas of a historical defeat in the Cold War in the minds of the people. One of his most quoted pronouncements was that the breakup of the Soviet Union was "the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" which in itself is a huge overstatement, as there were much bigger catastrophes in that century

like World War I, World War II, yet alone the Holocaust. In this respect, the breakup of the Soviet Union did not really bear a huge human cost. True, there were wars of Soviet breakup, the Karabakh war, ethnic conflicts in central Asia, in the Caucasus (in South Ossetia and Abkhazia), in Transnistria, etc., but the combined human loss is rather small compared to e.g. World War II. And still, the Soviet breakup in 1991 was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe for Putin, and he deliberately made Russians feel insulted and defeated.

I remember some fifteen years ago I was driving in the streets of Moscow when I suddenly saw a big billboard saying «За русских, за бедных!», (For the Russians, for the Poor Ones!). I couldn't believe my eyes, I could not understand why are Russians the poor ones when other post-Soviet nations suffered so much more in the breakup. This was actually the election poster of the caricature of Russian Fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the godfather of Putin's regime, who just died of Covid last April, just living to see the beginning of the war against Ukraine, which he had long foreboded and wanted. So there I was, in the middle of the thriving prosperous Moscow, the capital city of a country awash in petrodollars, and someone was telling me: you are the poor ones, you have been defeated. The TV was telling the people that Russia has suffered a terrible loss by giving up the Empire and that we should take back what is rightfully ours.

A post-imperial resentment, the idea of an imperial revanche was carefully planted into Russian heads a long time ago. It started with the rise of Putin in the mid-2000s, as the “geopolitical catastrophe statement” came from 2005. In 2007 Putin made his infamous Munich speech, claiming that the former Empire remained Russia's geopolitical sphere of influence, and a year later, in August 2008, the Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, occupying and annexing South Ossetia. In this sense, there were at least 15 or even 20 years of continuous brainwashing and propaganda inspiring revanchism and post-imperial resentment in Russia.

In the end, Russia became a nation immersed in its past, obsessed with its victory over Fascism, and developed a specific set of rituals which in Russian is called «победобесие» (“obsession with Victory”). You have probably seen the photographs of processions of Russian mothers and kids dressed up in war uniforms, or baby cots and perambulators disguised as tanks, Katusha rocket launchers, or school children assembling and disassembling Kalashnikov automatic rifles. With the start of the war in Ukraine, children are obliged to wear the Z symbols, a new Russian half-swastika, to write “letters to the frontline”, while schools, neighborhoods, and businesses are collecting packages of food and warm clothes for sending them to the Russian Army fighting in Ukraine.

This militaristic hysteria was on the rise for fifteen years at least. Multiple cars in Russia were displaying stickers «На Берлин!», (“We are going to take Berlin”), «Трофейная» (“A trophy car”), «Спасибо деду за победу» (“Thank you grandpa for the victory!”), and, most often, «1941-1945. Можем повторить» (“1941-1945, We can repeat it”). Many cars carried stickers of Kalashnikov assault rifles, the AK-47. Kalashnikov has become the quintessential Russian symbol rather than the matryoshka, or sputnik, rather than Gagarin or Pushkin – the country has identified itself with an assault rifle. A big memorial to Mikhail Kalashnikov, the constructor of the weapon, was opened in the center of Moscow seven years ago.

The victory cult in Russia has become a real religion and it has in a way replaced Orthodoxy. It has its own temples, and its own processions called “The Immortal Regiment”, where people instead of icons are carrying the portraits of relatives or war heroes that were killed in WW2. But as it happens with any state cult, a personal act of memory is replaced by bureaucratic ritual: demonstrators

are herded from municipal enterprises, businesses, universities, and schools, they are assembling at squares where the organizers are giving them the portraits of some unknown soldier, and they just walk along the streets carrying the portraits of somebody they don't know, and when the demonstration is over, they simply throw these portraits away. There is the whole mythology of those dead heroes, the dead people are ruling Russia – insulting and questioning the war memory is now a criminal offense in Russia.

These portraits are living their own lives, like the Christian icons. There was a short video circulating in the Internet some years ago about the portrait of a nurse from WW2. In this video a girl is talking on the phone to her boyfriend and telling her boyfriend that she is pregnant, and the guy on the other side says: you should have an abortion. As she hangs up a portrait on the wall behind her, probably her grandmother pictured as a war nurse, starts talking to her. The portrait says: do not have an abortion, give birth to a child, you will have a son and he will become a soldier and will defend the motherland. The father disappears from the story, as often happens in Russia, and the girl carries a child, gives birth to a son and some years later takes him to a military parade. Thus, it is a quasi-Christian legend of a speaking icon.

An important site of this new cult is the main Army Temple consecrated in 2020 in the village of Kubinka, outside of Moscow in the military theme park, called the Patriot Park, where thousands of people come every day to see the tanks, weapons, and military exercises. They built the army temple there, which looks absolutely threatening like a movie set from Star Wars. This church is very dark in color, indeed painted in camouflage colors, and it is full of hidden symbols and numbers. It is 75 meters tall, and is dedicated to the 75th anniversary of Victory. The diameter of its dome is 14,18 meters which corresponds to the 1418 days of the Great Patriotic war. Then, the number of tiles in the mosaic inside the church is the same as the number of the Heroes of the Soviet Union decorated during WW2, and there are other numerical symbols embedded in this church. This really reminds of an obsession of the German Nazis with mysticism and numerology.

Originally, the church had mosaics showing Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Putin, Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu, and Speaker of the Russian Senate, Valentina Matviyenko on the walls, but when the photographs leaked into the press there was a scandal and at the last minute before the opening, they removed the mosaics of Stalin and Putin. Still, there are other oddities, e.g. the entry steps to the Cathedral are made from German trophy weaponry from WW2. Inside the temple, there are some really absurd relics, for instance, there is Hitler's uniform and hat which were retrieved by the Soviet soldiers from Hitler's bunker in Berlin in 1945. Indeed, Russia has been thrown back to 1945. Russia today lives in a permanent 1945, reliving the same victory, saying that we will always defeat the Fascists, the world around us is Fascist, Americans are fascists, Ukrainians are fascists, Georgians are fascists, Europe is fascist, and we are the only country in the world which can stand up to the challenge of Fascism.

A religious cult would not be complete without its myths and legends. For instance, there is the myth of the “twenty-eight Panfilov heroes” which I learned as a schoolboy. This is a story from December 1941 when allegedly a platoon of 28 soldiers from the division of General Ivan Panfilov stopped the German tank division. Like the 300 Spartans, the 28 soldiers all died but destroyed dozens of German tanks. In the Soviet Union, there were streets named after these heroes in every city, and monuments to them everywhere. But then, there was an investigation of this whole episode back in 1945, and the military attorney came to the conclusion that this whole story was a hoax, because

after the war some of these people emerged and many of these dead 28 heroes were indeed alive – they served in the army, some were even captured, some were even turned up as fascist collaborators, and some were happily living after the war as war veterans. Thus, the whole myth was debunked, but the truth never came out, and in the Soviet Union it still persisted as a holy cow. But now, in the post-Soviet times, the director of the State Archives Sergey Mironenko spoke up on several occasions, showing documents from 1945, saying this was all falsified by the journalists of the Red Star army newspaper in January 1942. And then, you know what? The Russian authorities said no, we will not destroy the legend, and fired the director of the State Archive. The then culture minister Vladimir Medinsky spoke up saying that a story which had informed so many generations was more important than the actual facts of war.

Another myth, which was resurrected in recent years was the return of Joseph Stalin. Stalin was taken from the dustbin of history where he was lying for the past fifty years and presented as the key architect of the Soviet Victory and indeed a key figure in Russian history. Behind the quest for Stalin lies a quest for order which appears not only among the older generation shaped by Soviet propaganda, but also the younger generation is happily embracing the Stalin myth. Stalin's portrait in his young years is displayed in barbershops as a kind of hipster with a cool haircut, unshaved cheeks. Stalin's figures are sold in souvenir shops across Russia. Indeed, Stalin is becoming a brand of Russia, an epitome of the “Russian threat” from the age of the Cold War which the country seeks to restore, because in the end, fear is Russia's prime expert commodity, even more than oil.

The bottom line of this mythology is the same motto “we can repeat it”, meaning the crushing defeat of Germany in 1945 and posing as the world's leading military power. The past fifteen years, since invading Georgia in 2008, Russia was living with a dream of making a replay of World War II. This is an incredible change from the post-war years in the Russian mind, because for decades after WWII, the main Russian ideology was contained in the phrase «Лишь бы не было войны», “Let there never be war”. The generations of my parents and grandparents, my own generation, as we grew up as kids in the late Soviet Union, were preaching the idea of peace. The anti-war sentiment inspired the entire Soviet propaganda and then, in the 21st century, suddenly, this peace rhetoric turned 180 degrees and became a pro-war sentiment, an idea of repeating war. And they indeed attempted to repeat it, first in 2014, by annexing Crimea and occupying Donbas, and then again in 2022 – in fact some Russian tanks invaded Ukraine carrying not Russian but Soviet flags, and in the occupied territories the Russian administration restored Lenin's statues.

In the end, Russia has become schizophrenic: claiming to fight “Fascism” in Ukraine, it has turned into a Fascist country itself, writing a newly-invented half-swastika on its banners, the Latin letter Z which has suddenly become popular and has united the country. Yet, it is not the classical Fascism of the industrial era. The US historian Timothy Snyder argued in June in the New York Times in an essay titled “Russia a Fascist Country” that Russia has developed “schizofascism”, a schizophrenic fascism, in which you say that the fascist is the Other while being fascist yourself. Russian propaganda is claiming that the fascist is someone else (Ukrainians, Americans, the EU, etc.), but if we look at the classical definitions of fascism, we will see that Russia meets most of its key characteristics.

First and foremost, this is a country living in memory. Fascism is a kind of retro politics, a politics of memory. The original Italian Fascism was built on the memory of the Roman Empire: even the word Fascism comes from the Latin fascis, a bound bundle of wooden rods with an axe, symbolizing magistrate's power in ancient Rome, which in the 1920s became identified with the Fascist political

movement. The Italian Fascism, as well as its German sibling, were totally mythological based on the obsession with the greatness of Roman or German history, emerged from the 19th century Italian and German romanticism, the idea of heritage, “Blut und Erde”, “Blood and heritage” as they called it in Germany. Russian fascism is, too, about blood and soil, the common heritage of three Slavic people, with Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians being essentially one nation. However, the Russian nation is seen as the dominant, and the Ukrainians as the lower race. They are seen as a non-nation, as the people not worthy of their state, culture, and their own language.

It is at this point, the denial and humiliation of the Ukrainian nation, that, according to the Russian political analyst Vladimir Pastukhov, Russian fascism is indeed becoming Nazism. There are clear signs of Nazism in the anti-Ukrainian statements of Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, or the ideologists of Russian Fascism like e.g. in the infamous manifesto by the political analyst Timofei Sergeytsev in the pages of the state news agency RIA Novosti, recommending “the final solution” of the Ukrainian question, just like Hitler was looking for the Endlösung the final solution of the Jewish question. On the ground, Russian soldiers and Russian authorities in the occupied territories of Ukraine are behaving much the same way as the Germans in the occupied territories in the second world war. Russian officers are filtrating the Ukrainian civilians in detention camps, searching for teachers of Ukrainian language and literature, undressing people and looking for Ukrainian nationalist tattoos on their bodies (e.g. the trident, a Ukrainian coat of arms) – such people usually disappear. Thousands of Ukrainian refugees are forcefully sent to live and work in the remote regions of Russia, e.g. Sakhalin, Kamchatka, or East Siberia, much like the Ostarbeiter in Nazi Germany, while hundreds of Ukrainian children from occupied cities like Mariupol are undergoing forced adoption by Russian families in mainland Russia, resembling the Nazi German program of Lebensborn.

True, it is not the pure Fascism of the middle of the 20th century, because it lacks an important component, the mobilization potential. The classical Fascism of Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin (I would say that Stalin, too, was a Fascist, even if under the guise of the Communist ideology) mobilized tens of millions of people who could raise up and die for the cause, which is not the case in Russia these days. Even as the “partial mobilization” continues, it is increasingly difficult to find people ready to die in Ukraine. In a sense, this is a pseudo-Fascism, like so many things in Russia are fake (The entire Russian history is based on fakes, “Potemkin Villages” is a typical Russian invention). We have pseudo-institutions, and here, we have pseudo-Fascism which is no longer a mobilizing and transformative ideology, but yet another fake which is used by the Putin regime to prolong its power, to preserve the corrupt system which has been ruling Russia for the past twenty years. Indeed, I would rather use the neologism of “Ruscism”, as the same Timothy Snyder has suggested, a local breed of Fascism, a cargo-Fascism used to consolidate the Russian society, to instill fear in the outside world (because being a threat to the world is one of the key Russian assets), and to protract Putin’s power, because he is now undisputed ruler, he is the ruler of the war nation, the nation for the time being united at war.

So where to go from here? The problem is, in my opinion, that Russia has not yet lost its empire, and is still an imperial nation. There were two attempts to break up the Russian Empire, one in 1917 and another in 1991, and both were only partially successful, parts of the former empire have fallen off, Finland and Poland in 1917, and the Soviet Republics in 1991, but Russia would never accept these losses, and now we see how the neo-imperial ideology disguised as revanchism and fascism are ruling Russia. At some point, Russia has to be defeated, in a direct military sense, in order to cease being an Empire, and until that time, it will forever be a threat to the outside world. Yes, theoretically

bad peace can be achieved in Ukraine, for instance, Putin can convince the West of that, and the West can try to compel the Ukrainians to accept that peace, losing Crimea and probably parts of Eastern Ukraine, but this will be a temporary peace, it will take another year or two before Russia strikes again and we do not know where – in Georgia, in South Caucasus, in the Baltic States, in Moldova, Poland, we do not know.

This is an inherent problem, and it has to be addressed in a structural manner, Russia has to be defeated and dismantled as an imperial power. Not as a state, I am not calling for the complete destruction of the Russian state, I do not think the West can occupy Russia the way it occupied Germany in 1945, but there should be a concerted action by the outside world to impose a military defeat upon Russia and I think the West is working in this direction already. If the war goes on for another year, the Russian army will probably cease to exist, there will be no more ammunition and supplies left in Russia, and the mobilization of the population will also face increasing difficulties, as social tensions mount. Russia has to be defeated militarily, it has to be de-imperialized in order for the proper Russian nation-state to emerge from the debris of the Empire, because Russia has never had an experience of being a nation-state, and it has to be given a chance.

The second thing is the decolonization of the post-Soviet space, which Russia still treats as its own colony, so what is happening now is in fact a colonial war. Russia has been fighting colonial wars for the past thirty years in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and now in Ukraine. Thirdly, Russia has to be de-Sovietized, because this invasion of Ukraine is also happening under the Soviet red flag, and restoring Lenin's monuments in the occupied cities of Ukraine. And finally, Russia has to be denazified – not Ukraine, as the Russian propaganda claimed at the start of this war, but Russia proper. Russia has to be relieved of the Fascist and Nazi ideology which is now ruling there. Summing up, we need the de-imperialization, decolonization, de-Sovietization, and denazification of Russia.

It is only at that point, that we can lay to rest the memory of World War Two. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were two brutal dictatorships that were challenging the free world, Hitler's and Stalin's. In 1945, only one was defeated, while the second one became even stronger, lived on, transformed, and resurrected in the Putinist guise. It has to be defeated as well, and only then can we complete the unfinished work of World War II.