The Conflict in Ukraine: Psychological Aspects

Sergei V. Jargin

1Affiliation not available

December 8, 2022

Sergei V. Jargin

Abstract

Paranoid individuals have restricted abilities to test their beliefs for reality. Among them are writers touting mysterious theories. Certain war instigators are paranoid in their tendency to present themselves as prophets, world saviors etc. Paranoiacs may be aggressive against delusional goals. Some mentally healthy people are susceptible to paranoid appeals, a predisposing condition being fear of strangers and projection of hatred upon them. Furthermore, paranoid individuals tend to transform internal threats into external ones. Psychological projection in patients with paranoia is regarded to be an aberration of shame. Being unable to tolerate shame, they project it onto others. Repressed shame may cause aggression. The attempt is made in this preprint to apply the above considerations to the conflict in Ukraine. Among others, the lack of knowledge about other countries, misleading propaganda, suppressed shame and envy seem to be contributive to the conflict. Instead of machismo and militarism, the propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Moral principles, based on modesty and mutual help aimed at preservation of as much life and wealth as possible should be invigorated. Ukraine must become a testing ground for the international cooperation..

Keywords: Ukraine, armed conflict, paranoia, shame, peace initiative

The current conflict in Ukraine has been discussed previously [1]. Psychological and psychiatric aspects of this topic have not been given due attention. For example, if political leaders have paranoid personality disorder while other mental functions are intact, they can preserve the ability to remain in the position of power [2]. This is precarious in authoritarian regimes with inefficient democratic procedures. So, in conditions of Soviet-trained collectivism and mass intimidation almost everybody has voted the ruling party. The rules of polemics have been disregarded, people hiding their opinions. The most serious consequences occur when paranoid ideas persist in a dictator along with rationality and efficiency so that delusions are put into life [2]. Governments in democracy are more transparent [3], and it is less probable that power would be kept by a psychopath. Of note, the reduction in conflicts after 1990 was attributed to democracy, globalization and economic interdependence [4].

Russia’s westward expansion has been supported by the ideology of Neo-Eurasianism (Fig. 1) and personally Aleksandr Dugin, professor of Sociology at the Moscow University. Two opposing expansion tendencies should be evoked in this connection: that from Eurasia to the West and that of the European civilization towards the East. The history of two millennia teaches that the latter tended to be constructive in the long run, and the former – degrading; more details are in [5]. Alexandr Dugin has attracted publicity after the annexation of Crimea. Since then, Dugin’s works seem to be better edited; probably he gets some assistance. Dugin’s ideas are influential in the ruling spheres, with analysts describing him as “Putin’s brain” [6]. Using numerous neologisms, Dugin has written the following (verbatim translation): “Shutting down (zakryt’) America is our religious duty [7]. “Anti-Americanism is a Creed (statement of faith)… The prohibition of war propaganda is pharisaism. You can’t get away from the war and you shouldn’t try. Western civilization
is deadly for our historical way” [8]. It should be stressed here that any propaganda for war is prohibited by the international Law [9]. Moreover, Dugin has written: “We must forget about the nightmare that is called Western civilization, globalization, political correctness, liberalism and human rights. We must forget this terrible nonsense” [10]. About science: “Death is the only truly scientific fact. Everything else is hypothesis. Therefore, true science can be built only on the direct experience of death. Without it, we are dealing with charlatans” [11]. Dugin’s geopolitical doctrine has been introduced into school curricula. Obviously, such discourses of the leading ideologist have contributed to the Ukraine war. Psychiatric assessment of Dugin’s works is necessary. His writings seem to be indicative of paranoid and grandiose delusions, compare: “Americans cause rejection, repulsion, a desire to hide from their influence” [7] and “If we lose, we will blow up the whole world” [12]. Of note, Dugin was born into a family of a colonel-general in the Soviet military intelligence [13]. The former party and military functionaries (so-called Numenklatura) [14] promoted their children sometimes irrespective of the latter’s abilities, integrity and health status [15].

Among others, paranoia is characterized by hypervigilance and an aggressive, hostile disposition. In clinical populations, paranoia is one of the strongest predictors of aggressive behavior. The boundary between non-psychotic paranoia and paranoid delusions is not sufficiently clear [16]. Paranoid individuals are highly motivated to prove that they are right but have limited abilities to test their beliefs for reality. Among paranoids are writers who tout mysterious theories e.g.; “The will of any people is sacred. But the will of the Russian people is a hundred times more sacred” [17]; “The flight of battle, the elements of war must become a true Russian University” [11]; “For peace to be without war, the war is first necessary... We make the war. It is originating in our heart. We give birth to the war. Through the war we create the world, our russkii mir” [18]. Some terrorists and war instigators are paranoid in their tendency to portray themselves as prophets, world saviors etc. Paranoiacs are sometimes belligerent and aggressive against delusional goals, as it is the case with the “denazification” of Ukraine. Of note, such ideas can be virulent. Some mentally healthy people are susceptible to paranoid appeals, a predisposing condition being fear of strangers and projection of hatred upon them. The more different is the stranger, the more suitable is he as a target for externalization. A “good” enemy is a reservoir for all the negated aspects of the self [19]. In this way,
the enemy contributes to a stabilization of the local society, serving at the same time as a distractor from internal problems. Furthermore, paranoid individuals tend to transform internal threats into external ones [16,19]. For Russia, an internal threat is the changing ethnic composition due to inter-ethnic inequalities in the birth rate and immigration from former Soviet republics [5].

Psychological projection in paranoid individuals is regarded to be an aberration of shame. Being unable to tolerate shame, they project it onto others and thus disown [19]. Repressed shame may cause aggression [20]. There are reasons to be ashamed of in today’s Russia summarily reflected by the comparatively low life expectancy especially of males, the world highest abortion rate etc. Selected medical topics have been reviewed [15,21-25]. Scientific and otherwise professional misconduct is especially harmful when it results in invasive procedures without evidence-based indications. Here follow several examples. The global trend towards more sparing breast cancer management remained largely ignored in the former Soviet Union (SU) for decades. The Halsted procedure was the predominant method till the 1980-1990s; it was presented as the main surgical treatment of breast cancer in some handbooks and monographs published in the 21st century; references are in [15,21,22]. Millions of women of different ages underwent it during the Soviet and early post-Soviet times. As the overtreatment had been realized, the chief surgeon of the Health Ministry, retired colonel Mikhail Kuzin recommended for less advanced cases the modified radical mastectomy of Patey with the excision of the pectoralis minor muscle [26]. This latter procedure is also associated with adverse effects; it was extensively used in the Russian Federation in last decades. Kholdin, Dymarskii and others recommended, patented and applied even more extended modalities of mastectomy [27-29]. Another example: the cauterization or cryodestruction of cervical ectropions (pseudo-erosions) independently of the presence of epithelial dysplasia (precancerous lesions) has been applied routinely. Ectopies were found at mass examinations and treated by coagulation [24]. This generally disagrees with the international practice. At the same time, Pap-smears have been rare and technically suboptimal, cervical cancer being detected relatively late. Some invasive procedures without clear indications have been endorsed by former military surgeons; personnel training might have been a motive. Former military and party functionaries, their children and prot´eg´ees, occupying many leading positions at universities, academies, healthcare and other authorities, will probably become more dominant thanks to the Ukraine war. Among mechanisms contributing to the persistence of suboptimal and outdated methods has been the autocratic managerial style discouraging polemics and criticism. Other attributes of this style are insufficient adherence to the principle of informed consent and paternalistic approach to patients. The lack of professional autonomy contributes to the widespread use of suboptimal practices [30], as per instructions and top functionaries’ publications. For example, bronchoscopy was applied routinely in conscripts with supposed pneumonia (1478 procedures in 977 patients 19,5 ± 0,1 years old in one study) [31,32]. The personnel training could have been a motive. Other invasive procedures performed in Russia with questionable indications have been reviewed elsewhere: the overuse of endoscopy, of surgery in tuberculosis and other pulmonary diseases, overuse of gastric resections in peptic ulcers, excessive manipulations and overtreatment of alcoholics, lengthy and unpleasant treatment of gonorrhea, etc. [15,21-25]. Actually, Russia needs international help in the healthcare. In view of the Ukraine war, the cooperation in many areas has been interrupted. Obstacles to the importation of medical products, coupled with increasing influence by the military, have adverse consequences for the healthcare. Domestic products are promoted despite often lower quality and possible counterfeiting [33].

Reverting to the topic of Ukraine war, it should be pointed out that today’s rhetoric goes too far: fecal language, obscenities, declarations of jihad and appeals to use nuclear weapon [34-37]. All the above is associated with shame. As mentioned above, repressed shame may cause aggression [20]. Further contributive to hostility are the lack of knowledge about other countries, misleading propaganda and suppressed envy. Envious people blame those who make them feel ashamed of imperfection [38]. Mental disorders are especially dangerous in ideologists and rulers. Psychotherapy and tranquillizers should be tried instead of the fratricidal war [1]. Mentally disordered war instigators must be efficiently counteracted, the means being commensurate to the inflicted damage and threats. Instead of machismo and militarism, the propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Moral principles, based on modesty and mutual help aimed at preservation of as much life and wealth as possible should be invigorated. Ukraine must become a testing
ground for the international cooperation.

Conflict of Interest
The author declares no conflict of interest

References


34. Elon Musk says Starlink is pulling internet service from Ukraine after ambassador asked him to ‘F*** off’. Times Now updated Oct 14, 2022.


37. OSN (2022) “There is a limit to the pressure of feces”’ Medvedev offered the Europeans away to end the crisis. OSN Obshhestvennaia Sluzhba Novostei 18 August 2022.