



Anton Shekhovtsov (ed.)

RUSSIA AGAINST UKRAINE

*Russian Political Mythology
and the War on Ukrainian Identity*

With a foreword by Galia Ackerman

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Preface

Russia's political leadership – echoed by some external voices – often claims its invasion of Ukraine was driven by national security concerns over NATO expansion. However, this narrative does not withstand critical examination. When Russia occupied Crimea and parts of the Donbas in early 2014, Ukraine was a neutral state. Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine had maintained a non-aligned status, reaffirmed by a 2010 law.

Despite this neutrality, Russia violated numerous international agreements, including the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Budapest Memorandum, and the 1997 Treaty on Friendship with Ukraine, which explicitly recognised Ukraine's territorial integrity. Exploiting Ukraine's non-membership in NATO, Moscow launched a war unseen in Europe since the Second World War.

Russia's focus on NATO is not just misleading – it serves as a strategic distraction from its revisionist aims: challenging the post-Cold War order and dismantling Ukraine as a sovereign nation. Central to the latter is Ukrainophobia – a deeply rooted ideological hostility towards Ukraine, embedded in Russian geopolitical chauvinism.

The Centre for Democratic Integrity defines Ukrainophobia as an ideological framework encompassing a set of views, including stereotypes, prejudices, and beliefs, as well as public statements and actions that reflect negative attitudes towards Ukrainian people, Ukrainian culture, the Ukrainian state, and individuals identifying themselves as Ukrainians.

Commissioned by the Centre for Democratic Integrity, the present volume explores the socio-cultural foundations and political manifestations of contemporary anti-Ukrainian sentiment within the Russian state and society.

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Foreword

The Deep Roots of Ukrainophobia

Galia Ackerman

Writer, historian, vice-president and editorial director of
Desk Russie (France)

What is Ukrainophobia? What are its roots? How can we explain this relentless persecution of the Ukrainian people? Where does the Putin regime's obsession with its "anti-Ukraine" project come from?

To shed light on these sentiments and actions, the Centre for Democratic Integrity (Vienna) commissioned a study by several authors to examine the different facets of anti-Ukrainian sentiment in today's Russia and the genocidal war the Russian regime is waging against Ukraine.

It is well known that Moscow's false accusations about an alleged NATO encirclement serve as a smokescreen to conceal Russia's true objective: to destroy the Ukrainian state and eradicate Ukrainian national identity, in the name of chauvinistic imperialism and a distorted historical narrative.

This volume brings together ten contributions to this innovative project, exploring the manifestations of Ukrainophobia in Russian official discourse, propaganda, the military, and academia – as well as the origins and motives behind this blind hatred of the Ukrainian people.

British researcher Andrew Wilson's masterful study traces the phenomenon to ideas of Russian supremacy and hegemonic control over the Eurasian space – inspired by Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt – and to mass manipulation techniques developed during the Soviet era, notably by philosopher Georgiy Shchedrovitsky, founder of the Moscow Logic Circle in 1952 and, later, the Moscow Methodological Circle in 1958. These techniques were modernised in the 1990s, during the rule of President Boris Yeltsin. Hence the

idea of “reforming” the Ukrainian people by subjecting them to military rule.

Russian writer Sergei Lebedev, for his part, recalls Sandarmokh in Karelia, a site of mass executions carried out in 1937. The Ukrainians murdered there – writers, scientists, artists, painters – were generally victims of the Soviet authorities’ late-1920s shift away from *korenizatsia* (“indigenisation”), which had encouraged the development of national identity (a socialist one, but with its own cultural and linguistic features), towards the criminalisation of nationalism and the imposition of a chauvinistic imperial agenda. This shift coincided with the policy of collectivisation and operations against former elites who had served the Soviet regime. According to Lebedev, Putin is merely continuing Stalin’s destruction of Ukrainian identity. The Russian intelligentsia – even those who oppose the war – reject responsibility for it. Yet in reality, they bear a heavy moral burden because, through their silence, they contribute to the concealment of past crimes and their repetition today.

Admittedly, Putin draws heavily on the figure of Stalin and even allows himself to write (or commission) historical essays – most notoriously, his text on the “historical unity” of Russians and Ukrainians. But it is several influential figures in his inner circle who have implemented the regime’s anti-Ukrainian ideology. Chief among them is Nikolai Patrushev, Putin’s aide and former Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, who is still highly influential over the “first person”. Swedish researcher Martin Kragh and German researcher Andreas Umland dedicate their study to this central figure of the regime, driven by a paranoid hatred of Ukraine. They show how Patrushev and other pan-Russian nationalists have come to believe that all Ukrainians conscious of their identity are “Nazis”. In the pan-Russian imagination of Patrushev and other proponents of Russian imperialism, a sovereign Ukraine can only be anti-Russian – and therefore fascist. This label, in turn, serves to justify Russia’s genocidal policies in Ukraine, which, for these ideologues, are a form of anti-fascism.

Cultural philosopher Alexander Etkind also analyses Putin’s aforementioned essay but poses original questions: What does it mean for the ruler of a country at war to proclaim that his friends

and enemies are one and the same people? What rhetorical or political benefits did this idea offer, and what challenges did it encounter? And what does the letter Z symbolise?

“Putin’s Kremlin was determined to destroy the ‘national pattern’ of the Ukrainians and replace it with the ‘national pattern’ of the Russians while proclaiming that they were one and the same people,” writes Etkind. Russians and Ukrainians have indeed shared close ties for centuries, but “those who sent soldiers to Ukraine needed to establish their own marks of difference. Since in their view, there were no real words or cultural symbols that could serve to differentiate friends from foes, a symbol had to be invented from scratch. It does not really matter where the Z first appeared – entirely senseless, it is the belief in the Z, the love for the Z, the identification with the Z, that identifies what the Russians call a true patriot”.

Several contributions examine other aspects of Ukrainophobia in greater depth. Andreas Heinemann-Grüder focuses on Russian war propaganda, designed not only to mobilise society as a whole, but also to legitimise violence against Ukrainian military personnel and civilians. This is also the theme explored by human rights defenders Andrey Kalikh and Yuri Dzhibladze, who analyse the hateful – even genocidal – rhetoric of Russian propaganda and show how it has likely contributed to the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In cases of genocide, they stress, international law treats incitement as a criminal act in itself.

Russian historian and ethnographer Dmitry Dubrovsky, now in exile in Prague, highlights the theories circulating in Russian higher education and academic circles aimed at “proving” the “deficiency” of the Ukrainian nation and state. Former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev explains how Russian diplomats – once the most enlightened segment of the state apparatus – have been reduced to mere executors of the supreme leader’s will. Even Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is compelled to repeat Putin’s conspiratorial and genocidal narratives, making diplomats an integral part of the Russian propaganda machine.

The powerful propaganda machine is dumbing down even those citizens who do not support the war. Russian sociologist

Alexey Levinson, drawing on independent polls (which no longer exist), reaches a striking conclusion: “Russians have not yet realised that the war is a national disaster and a catastrophe of two peoples”.

This volume helps us understand not only what is going on “in Putin’s head”, but also among Russian elites and ordinary citizens. To conclude the volume, Viennese researcher Anton Shekhovtsov – who initiated and coordinated this publication project – offers a compelling interpretation of Putin’s obsession with Ukraine. As in a science fiction tale, the Russian head of state, in search of symbolic immortality, seeks to correct the course of history by subjugating the Ukrainian people, who gained sovereignty with the collapse of the USSR. But, as Shekhovtsov concludes, such a fantastical goal of “correcting” history by force can only lead to one outcome for Russia and its president: ruin.

One can only agree with this conclusion. History has already seen moments when messianic ideas, fantasies elevated to dogma and mingled with resentment, took hold of entire societies – as happened in Nazi Germany. And just as Hitler’s Germany was defeated, only a Ukrainian victory, supported by its allies, can overcome the deeply rooted evil of Russian imperialism. This evil is not only destroying Ukraine, but also corroding the Russian economy and the minds of its people. To grasp this fully, reading this volume is essential.

Ukrainophobic Imaginations of the Russian *Siloviki*

The Case of Nikolai Patrushev, 2014-2023

Martin Kragh

Deputy director of the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (Sweden), senior research fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (Sweden)

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Policy Fellow at the European Policy Institute in Kyiv (Ukraine), co-founder of the Centre for Democratic Integrity (Austria)

Introduction

The so-called *siloviki* (literally: “people of the force”), i.e. representatives of the Russian government’s armed ministries and agencies, are today the primary decision shapers and makers in Moscow.¹ Within this larger group, the representatives of Russia’s security services, which have emerged out of the USSR’s Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti, better known as KGB) and Main Intelligence Directorate (Glavnoe razvedovatel’noe upravlenie, GRU), play an especially prominent role.² Sometimes it is argued that one should speak of a “militocracy”, i.e. that men (and only very few women) in different uniforms rule Russia today.³ Within the *siloviki* group in Russia’s leadership, the second most important figure – after Vladimir Putin himself – is commonly assumed to be Russia’s Security Council Secretary, Nikolai Patrushev.⁴

In a *Post-Soviet Affairs* essay published in May 2023, we briefly compared the political views of Patrushev and the Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Sergei Naryshkin, during the period 2006-20.⁵ This investigation touched upon several of Patrushev’s favourite political topics, including Ukraine. It dealt

with his published utterances before the start, in late 2020, of Moscow's preparations of a large-scale invasion into Ukraine.⁶ During that period, "Patrushev's statements [on Ukraine were] more frequent and overtly anti-Ukrainian than Naryshkin's less dualistic discourse", and the "main theme in the Security Council Secretary's statements [was] the allegedly central role [in Ukraine] of ultra-nationalists in the Euromaidan and its aftermath".⁷

However, our 2023 essay documented Patrushev's anti-Ukrainian views which were circulated by various Kremlin-controlled and other Russian media only in small part. These views were expressed on many other occasions before and after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. The Security Council Secretary has, over the years, frequently and with increasing consistency expressed his growing Ukrainophobia.

Patrushev's anti-Ukrainianism mainly but not exclusively circles around two themes familiar to observers of Russian politics from similar statements by Vladimir Putin and other official Russian representatives: Ukraine's alleged fascism, and the country's instrumentalisation by the United States.⁸ This chapter documents Patrushev's Ukrainophobic views with numerous quotes, including his statements after Russia started its full-scale invasion into Ukraine.

Whereas our recent paper on Naryshkin and Patrushev was structured around particular themes, the below chapter follows a chronological line. Often the quotes are partly or fully repetitive regarding their general contents and main messages. They are here, nevertheless, extensively documented, as this allows us to observe certain nuances between them as well as occasional shifts in the evolution of Patrushev's views on Ukraine, during the period from October 2014 to May 2023.⁹ This chapter will deconstruct not so much the lack of truth and balance in Patrushev's assertions about Ukraine than their context, function, and implications within contemporary Russian discourse and politics.

Patrushev's Pan-Russian Nationalism

A central theme not only in Russian propaganda, but also non-Russian and even some Western debates around the nature of the Russian-Ukrainian War, is the allegedly crucial role of the West and especially the United States in starting and escalating this intra-Slavic conflict. This is also a recurring topic within – as documented below – Patrushev's narrative about Ukraine. This discourse could be seen as being less a variety of anti-Ukrainianism than of anti-Westernism, and especially anti-Americanism.¹⁰

However, the latter themes turn into Ukrainophobia via a well-known pan-nationalist supposition about Ukraine extrapolated from Russia's mainstream nationalism.¹¹ According to this axiom, a once innocent, sub-ethnic Ukrainian people with largely cloudless relations to its Russian elder brother has been poisoned by Western influence. Depending on the concrete statement of the particular Kremlin representative or pro-Kremlin stakeholder, the cultural differences between the two "brotherly" Ukrainian and Russian people are either somewhat or not at all acknowledged. Some pan-nationalist agendas allow for certain uniquely Ukrainian traditional traits while others do not; the latter see, for instance, the Ukrainian language as merely a dialect of high Russian. Often the dividing line between the two approaches is blurry.

In any case, within mainstream Russian nationalism the distinctions between the two ethnic groups are, if at all, only culturally yet not politically relevant. This virulent, expansive, and disrespectful form of colonial pan-Slavism can thus be specified as "pan-Russianism". The more important generic community to which both ethnicities supposedly belong is a greater Russian nation and not a larger Slavic community.

The pan-Russian variety of pan-Slavic ideology asserts not merely politically relevant cultural similarities between different peoples using Slavic vernaculars. "Pan-Russianism" pretends that the "Great Russians" or "velikorossy" (i.e. ethnic Russians), "White Russians" or "belorussy" (i.e. Belarusians), and "Little Russians" or "malorossy" (i.e. Ukrainians) together form the "Russian people"

or “russkiy narod”. They belong to one and the same East Slavic Orthodox / Russian super-nation or civilisation.¹²

This idea is, of course, not new; it will be familiar to most students of Russia, as it appeared already in the pre-revolutionary Russian nationalist discourse of the late Romanov period.¹³ Surprisingly, it continues to be reproduced in its original form in the 21st century regardless of the many changes that have taken place over the last two centuries, and despite the existence of three different, fully recognised East Slavic post-Soviet states since 1991. The rather antiquated, but still salient narrative is not only ignorant of the new political realities of the last thirty years. It also plays down many older and, partly, age-old linguistic, religious, cultural and other differences between Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians.¹⁴

Patrushev’s Ukrainophobia in 2014-2021

As shown below, Patrushev identifies the West as being responsible for most relevant domestic developments in Kyiv as well as the concomitant estrangement between Russians and Ukrainians during the last several years – if not also before. The United States is portrayed as the main culprit behind the armed escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict since 2014. According to Patrushev and the general Kremlin propaganda line, growing Western influence in Eastern Europe and not Russia’s actions have triggered a rise of Russophobia within, among other countries, Ukraine. Eventually, it was Western mingling that triggered the large-scale war between the two countries in 2022.

This narrative of outside seduction, subversion, and instigation fulfils, as in the case of other phobias expressed in different historical situations and regions of the world, various political and psychological functions. The destructive machinations of a third party provide the rationale for Patrushev and other official Russian opinion shapers to present their Ukrainophobia as a defensive reaction rather than an offensive agenda. In the eyes of most Russian nationalists – but also a surprisingly large number of non-Russian observers – Ukrainophobia is thereby fully or partly legitimised. It

supposedly constitutes simply a response to the Russophobia of the West and its Ukrainian vassal state.

According to Patrushev, before the start of armed hostilities in early 2014, Russia was supportive of Ukraine. The Russian Security Council Secretary presented Moscow as an initially well-meaning and partially naïve partner of Kyiv. Says Patrushev in October 2014:

[I]t should be recognised that the likelihood of a one-step seizure of power in Kiev,¹⁵ supported by militant groups of outright Nazis, was not foreseen [at the end of 2013]. Let me remind you that before the mentioned coup, Moscow had been fully fulfilling all its partnership obligations to Kyiv. We were continuously providing material and financial assistance, without which Ukraine was unable to cope with the economic difficulties that had become chronic. Tens of billions of dollars in material and financial resources were mobilised to support our neighbours.¹⁶

Yet, a competing flow of money from the United States was, according to Patrushev in October 2014, designed to destroy the previously harmonious relationship between the two countries:

[T]he Ukrainian crisis was quite an expected result of the systematic activities of the United States and its closest allies. For the last quarter of a century, these activities aimed at a complete separation of Ukraine and other former Soviet republics from Russia, a total reformation of the post-Soviet space according to American interests.

For example, Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, has repeatedly stated that Washington spent \$5 billion between 1991 and 2013 to “support the aspirations of the Ukrainian people for a more powerful, democratic government”. Even according to publicly available sources, such as US congressional documents, the total public funding for various US “assistance” programs to Ukraine from 2001 to 2012 amounted to at least \$2.4 billion. The US Agency for International Development spent about \$1.5 billion, the State Department spent almost half a billion, and the Pentagon spent over \$370 million. [...] [A]s a result of these activities, a whole generation has been raised in Ukraine, completely poisoned by hatred for Russia and the mythology of “European values”.¹⁷

The idea that the West and in particular the United States have promoted domestic tensions in Ukraine to divide Russian- and Ukrainian-speakers within Ukraine, and the Russian and Ukrainian peoples at large, is a recurring theme in Patrushev’s rhetoric. According to the Russian Security Council Secretary, Western-inspired

measures by the Ukrainian government were allegedly often responsible for escalation of tensions in those places where Russian proxies and agents were active.¹⁸ For instance, in May 2017, Patrushev says:

I would like to draw attention once again to the nature of the current crisis in Ukraine: It is the result of an anti-constitutional coup organised by the West, which residents of a number of regions could not put up with. The most acute conflict has arisen between Kiev and the proclaimed republics of the Donbass, which is fuelled by Kiev's military and punitive actions against its own citizens. [...] The arson and shooting in the Trade Union House in Odessa [in May 2014], the murders of journalists and politicians in Kiev, threats against veterans of the Great Patriotic War, radical atrocities against everything that has anything to do with ethnic Russians or is Russia-related – remain unpunished.¹⁹

In January 2019, Patrushev previewed a major line of apology of the Kremlin for Russia's 2022 large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Security Council Secretary claimed that (a) Ukraine was split, (b) Ukraine's nationalist government as well as its even more radical allies oppressed Russian-speakers in eastern and southern Ukraine, and (c) the country might thus lose its statehood. Such pre-emptive victim-blaming reminds one of Adolf Hitler's infamous January 1939 speech announcing the coming world war, which blamed the Jews for its impending outbreak: "if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevism of the earth, and thus a victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!"²⁰

Almost exactly 80 years later in January 2019, Patrushev writes:

The Kiev authorities are doing everything to split Ukraine, practicing the Western scenario of tearing Ukraine away from Russia, while ignoring the interests of their own people. As a result, the country is de facto split. The population of the western regions is distrustful of natives of the southeast, considering them supporters of the "Russian world". In the southern and eastern regions, Kiev's power is largely ensured by moral and physical oppression of the local population by national radicals. As a result, anti-government sentiments are growing in these regions. The social schism is exacerbated by inter-church confrontation. The continuation of such policies by the Kiev authorities could contribute to the loss of Ukrainian statehood.²¹

In the anti-Western narrative of Patrushev and other opinion shapers of Russia, allegedly foreign-inspired “colour revolutions” do not lead to the establishment of liberal regimes. Instead of democratisation, the countries coming under Western influence – with Ukraine as the most prominent example – experience fascistisation. In early August 2020, Patrushev argued in a long interview on fascism that, after 1945, only the USSR engaged in serious de-fascistisation, while elsewhere fascists were prosecuted either not seriously enough or not at all. The US’s post-war strategy was to scare countries with the warning that “The Russians are coming!” and then to bring ultra-nationalists to power.²²

Patrushev concludes:

The results of this were not slow to show already in the 1960s and 1970s: dozens of political regimes with more or less pronounced fascist features (so-called para-fascism) emerged in the world. The overwhelming majority of them were in the camp of US allies. [...]

[The reapplication of old anti-Soviet methods in the 21st century] was especially evident in Ukraine, where such neo-Nazi organisations as Svoboda, UNA-UNSO, Right Sector, National Corps, and the Volunteer Movement of the OUN (banned in the Russian Federation) broke through to leading roles in politics after the events of 2014. Their leaders are in favour of building a “corporate-syndicalist” and essentially Nazi state in Ukraine.

Russophobia, which these organisations inherited from the Ukrainian accomplices of the fascists of the 1930s and 1940s, is being imposed on the brotherly people. Inspired by the examples of Nazi Germany, Ukrainian neo-Nazis smash stores with signs in Russian, burn Russian-language books, and sometimes even people – like the Anti-Maidan activists in Odessa’s Trade Union House on 2 May 2014. Ukrainian radicals intimidate their fellow citizens and interfere with normal socio-political processes.²³

When, in early 2021, Russia started openly preparing for the 2022 large-scale invasion, Patrushev was following Putin’s line of denying Russia’s war preparation while reserving the right for Moscow to take action. In an interview for the relatively liberal Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant*, Patrushev outlined a narrative, also popular among many Western commentators, about a division within Ukraine going far beyond those of other divided countries, while also asserting its ridiculously incompetent leadership and its nature as a dependent or client state of the United States.²⁴

In April 2021, Patrushev says:

We are not hatching such plans [of interfering in the alleged inner-Ukrainian conflict], no. But we are closely monitoring the situation. Based on its development, specific measures will be taken. [...] I am convinced that this is a consequence of serious internal problems in Ukraine, from which the authorities are trying to divert attention in this way.

They are solving their problems at the expense of Donbass, as capital has long been flowing out of the country, the economy is still sustained only by onerous foreign loans, the debt on which is growing, and those remnants of industry that have managed to stay afloat are being sold off by Kiev to foreigners, as they say nowadays, at democratic prices. Even the famous Ukrainian black soil and timber are exported abroad by railroad trains, depriving the country of this asset. And in return – only the same cookies that the Americans handed out on the Maidan [i.e. Kyiv's Independence Square, in December 2013].²⁵

In November 2021, Patrushev argued that Ukraine had less to fear from Russia than other countries, because its population was tied to the Russians through family resemblance. Moscow's stationing of military equipment on Ukraine's border was thus entirely innocent:

The rhetoric of the Western press and high-ranking US officials that Russia is hatching aggressive plans has no basis in fact. The Russian Federation has never shown hostility towards any state, and especially not towards Ukraine, which is home to a people common to us in blood, language, and history. There are no unjustified movements of Russian troops and no unscheduled exercises near the border with Ukraine.²⁶

Patrushev and the Full-Scale War since 2022

Since the start of Russia's large-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Kremlin's propaganda line has been increasingly proclaiming an instrumental character of Ukraine within the United States' alleged proxy war against Russia. In earlier comments by Patrushev and other Russian regime representatives, the emphasis on – or assertion of – endogenous defects in Ukraine's history, state, society, economy, culture, and elite also played a prominent role.

By contrast, in the wake of the transformation of the Russian-Ukrainian war into the largest armed conflict in Europe after the Second World War (1939-45), the Russian official rhetoric – including Patrushev's – shifted. On the real-world determinants of this

general shift in Russian propaganda, Anton Shekhovtsov noted in early 2023: “As [the Russians] consider the Ukrainians inferior to them, they fail to cope with the military successes of the Ukrainian army on the battlefield, so their defense mechanism is to imagine that they are fighting with mighty NATO rather than with Ukrainians”.²⁷

Since early 2022, the justification for Russia’s attack on Ukraine has more and more accentuated the supposedly exogenous transformation of an initially Russia-friendly and innocent Ukraine into an anti-Russian fascist state. Influence from the West, and, in particular, the United States, according to this narrative, is mainly if not exclusively responsible for the war. The Ukrainian nationalists, allegedly mobilised by the US for this purpose, are – according to Patrushev and other Russian spokespersons – so unpopular that a purported widespread fear of them has united most Ukrainians.

For instance, in April 2022, Patrushev writes:

In an attempt to suppress Russia, the Americans, using their proxies in Kiev, decided to create an antipode of our country, cynically choosing Ukraine for this purpose, trying to divide an essentially united [pan-Russian] nation. [...] However, history teaches us that hatred can never be a reliable factor in popular unity. If anything unites the people living in Ukraine today, it is fear of the atrocities of nationalist battalions.²⁸

Throughout 2022, Russia’s official aims of a “denazification” and “demilitarisation” of Ukraine were among the most important narratives in the Kremlin’s official pronouncements and propaganda campaign explaining the war.²⁹ The Kremlin’s propaganda line mixes, in this explanation, a missionary apology referring to Moscow’s extraterritorial responsibilities with a defensive justification alluding to an alleged threat emanating from Ukraine for the Russian people.

As a result, Russia’s 2022 escalation of the war appears as the implementation of a comprehensive Russian rescue plan in, for and from a Ukrainian state and elite infiltrated by Western values, programmes, and agencies. The urgency of this operation is asserted with reference to a purported development, in Ukraine, of Western

and/or Ukrainian weapons of mass destruction – presumably to be used, in the future, against Russia.

Two months after the start of the so-called “special military operation”, Patrushev formulated Russia’s at that time major official war aim in this way:

Speaking of denazification, our goal is to defeat the bridgehead of neo-Nazism created by Western efforts near our borders. The need for demilitarisation is due to the fact that a Ukraine saturated with arms poses a threat to Russia, including in terms of the development and use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.³⁰

Like in other Kremlin pronouncements regarding Russia’s war against Ukraine since 2014, the alleged blueprint for Moscow’s behaviour vis-à-vis Kyiv is the Allies’ treatment of Germany during and after the Second World War. Within this historical framework, Ukraine is an Eastern European reincarnation of the Third Reich, and thus needs to be treated similarly. Historical lessons can be drawn not only from the Anti-Hitler Coalition’s war against the Axis Powers, but also from its early post-war policies towards Nazis in occupied Germany.

In an article published exactly three months after the start of Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine, Patrushev asserts far-reaching similarities between Germany in 1945 and Ukraine in 2022:

Denazification meant a range of measures. In addition to punishing Nazi criminals, the laws of the Third Reich legalising discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, language, religion, and political opinion were abolished. Nazi and militaristic doctrines were removed from school education.

Our country had set such goals in 1945 and we are setting them now, when we are freeing Ukraine from neo-Nazism. [Back] at that time, however, England and the USA were together with us. Today [by contrast], these countries have taken a different stance supporting Nazism and acting aggressively against most of the world.³¹

In the same interview, Patrushev asserts a parallel of current events with the Soviet Union’s war against Nazi Germany.³² In a particularly bizarre turn, he portrays Russia’s war against Ukraine as a continuation of a special Russian mission of waging wars out of compassion.³³