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ARTICLE

# "Orange Plague": World War II and the Symbolic Politics of Pro-state Mobilization in Putin's Russia

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**Abstract**
This article examines the symbolic politics of three pro-state movements that emerged from the "preventive counterrevolution" launched by the Kremlin in response to Ukraine's Orange Revolution. In 2005, youth movement Nashi played upon war memory at its rallies and branded the opposition "fascist"; in 2012, the Anti-Orange Committee countered opposition protests with mass gatherings at Moscow's war commemoration sites; in 2015, Antimaidan brought thousands onto Russia's streets to denounce US-backed regime change and alleged neo-Nazism in Kiev. I show how evocation of the enemy image, through reference to the war experience, played a key role in the symbolism of the preventive counterrevolution. Interviews with activists in these movements discussing their symbolic politics reveal an opposing victim/victor narrative based on an interplay of two World War II myths—the "Great Victory" and the "fascist threat." Moving beyond approaches that view the Soviet and Russian World War II cult as a triumphalist narrative of the Great Victory over fascism, I conclude that its threat component is an understudied element.

**Keywords:** Antimaidan; Nashi; symbolic politics; Great Patriotic War; World War II

> *The opponents of statism favor the path of radicalism, the path of liberation from Russia's historic past, liberation from cultural traditions. They want great upheavals; we want Great Russia!*
>
> —Pyotr Stolypin in a speech to the Russian State Duma, May 10, 1907

## Introduction

In February 2015, one year after the "Maidan" revolution toppled president Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine, 35,000 people gathered for a rally in central Moscow. The organizer was Antimaidan, a union of pro-Kremlin groups formed with state backing to mobilize support for Vladimir Putin's government. Participants held signs branding opposition leaders Western stooges. A group in white coats carried an orange mannequin on a stretcher, an American flag stuck to its chest and dollar bills taped to its limbs. The message was clear: There will be no Maidan in Russia. The United States was charged with orchestrating the downfall of strongmen in Ukraine, Egypt and Libya, and Russia would not fall victim to the kind of bloodshed and socioeconomic collapse that had ravaged those states since.

There was also subtler messaging involved. Those who gathered that day wore the orange and black Saint George ribbon, a symbol of the Soviet victory over fascism in World War II. Above their heads flew banners of Antimaidan, its emblem a shield in the colors of the Saint George ribbon decorated with an image of the *Motherland Calls* statue, which commemorates the battle that turned the tide against Nazi forces in Stalingrad. From a stage erected beside Red Square, activists chanted a call to arms coined at the height of the Great Patriotic War: "We won't forget! We won't forgive!"[1]

What was going on here? Why was the Soviet experience in World War II being used as a symbolic platform for pro-regime demonstrations? Was its invocation a spontaneous reaction to a perceived threat, a default consolidation mechanism for a society socialized in a calendar of war commemoration? Or did the government, fearing the spread of unrest at home, exploit a historical myth to rally political support?

In the decades following World War II, the "Great Victory" over Nazi Germany became a political instrument in the Soviet Union. In a book-length study, historian Nina Tumarkin (1994) argues that a veritable cult of World War II emerged in the Brezhnev period, centered not on the catastrophic loss of life but on the uplifting victory in May 1945. A failure to confront the tragedy of the war thus encouraged an unambiguous celebration of its conclusion and yielded a resource for rallying support among the population. In a later article, Tumarkin (2003) notes striking continuity between the Brezhnev-era World War II cult and its celebration under Putin. The myth will "continue to be used to legitimate the history of the USSR, to bolster national pride," she predicted. Contemporary studies have drawn similar attention to continuity between official commemorative practices in the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia (Bernstein 2016; Khapaeva 2009; Dubin 2004; Smith 2002; Forest and Johnson 2002).

Like Tumarkin's, most such studies see the victory myth as part of a top-down campaign to consolidate the population around a cross-ethnic identity rooted in a common experience of the war.[2] In the Soviet Union as in Russia, the myth functions as a non-ethnic-centered narrative for a multi-ethnic state, a moment when the country's various nations came together to defeat an outside aggressor; conjuring up that effort helps conjure up the solidarity that the war inspired. As Amir Weiner puts it, "the supra-class, cross-ethnic aspect of the myth provided the polity with a previously absent integrating theme and folded into the body politic large groups that previously had been excluded" (1996, 660).

However, excessive focus on the unifying force of the war myth comes at the expense of another central aspect: the symbolic function of the outside aggressor. Too often, the "fascist threat" element is overlooked in favor of a focus on the "Great Victory" component. In short, it is the positive unifying force of the victory myth that is emphasized, and not its utility as a negative consolidating force. This article attempts to bridge that gap by casting light on historical politics in Putin's Russia through the prism of the threat component of the war cult.

In December 2004, when Ukraine's Orange Revolution overturned Yanukovych's rigged election, Kremlin ideologue Gleb Pavlovsky launched in Russia a "preventive counterrevolution." Robert Horvath (2013) identifies three dimensions of the political program. The ideological dimension spread the narrative that opposition forces represent a minority working on Western orders. The repressive targeted civic and political forces accused of aiding the opposition. And the mobilizational spawned a "loyal opposition" and an ersatz, "patriotic" civil society to counter the revolutionary threat.

Horvath's analysis of the campaign ends with the election cycle of 2007–2008. But the discourse it gave rise to and the World War II myths it exploited continued to develop in the years that followed. This article looks at three key moments in that campaign. The first came in 2005 in response to the Orange Revolution and was embodied by pro-Kremlin youth movement Nashi. The second saw the launch of the so-called Anti-Orange Committee, amid opposition protests in 2012. The emergence of Antimaidan in 2015 was the third key phase.

In the summer of 2016, I conducted interviews with 36 current and former activists of the preventive counterrevolution about their use of Great Patriotic War symbolism. Many were publicly known figures; others had worked or were working in the power structures of these organizations and were able to provide details about how they operate. As I show, these activists developed over time a symbolic and discursive platform that would be entrenched by Putin's fourth presidential term.[3]

Analysis of these three phases of the mobilization dimension of the preventive counterrevolution offers an insight into how a symbolic platform focused around the "fascist threat" helped suppress

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dissent and mobilize support for Putin amid attempts to delegitimize his regime. In this article, I show how evocation of the enemy image, through reference to the war experience, played a key role in the symbolic politics of that political program. Activists may have taken cues from the state, but the slogans and symbolism were their own.

Russia's invocation of the "fascist threat" is not new. In the Soviet era, World War II was used as a primary frame of reference for perceived outside aggression, both a rhetorical tool to remind of past crimes by "Western imperialists" and a rallying cry for the Soviet population, which was repeatedly told it had conquered the threat before and could do so again. Each year on May 9, or Victory Day, the Soviet population was reminded of the victory over fascism and the price the USSR paid. The Soviet press used anniversary dates to highlight the achievements of the socialist bloc and warn the West that it stands ready to defend itself. This rhetoric gradually shifted from denunciations of alleged revanchism in West Germany to comparisons of the Nazi regime's crimes and intentions with the actions of the United States and its allies, who were regularly warned about the fate suffered by Hitler.[4]

The channeling of perceived threats through memory of World War II was used also amid anti-Soviet uprisings in satellite states. On June 18, 1953, Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* described events in Berlin as "the provocative forays of certain groups of fascist agents" carried out under "a single plan, devised in West Berlin and timed for a particular moment." On October 28, 1968, page three of satirical magazine *Krokodil* showed several dozen armed men and officials marching in the shape of a swastika, many with Nazi symbols on their uniforms, pounding their fists on the Czechoslovak border. On the opposite page, an article titled "A Lesson" mocked the arrogance of Western "imperialists" and their "defeat" in Prague: "diversionary groups were hurriedly amassing on Czechoslovakia's western borders, and their leaders, on assignment from the CIA, were already accommodated in Prague hotels. But help came in time. The counterrevolutionary 'accident' did not prevail."[5] In the margins of the text, small sketches depicted crying "capitalists" alongside an image of a despairing Hitler, who is leaning, head in hands, over a tabletop apparently wet from his tears. Subversive actors in socialist countries were thus linked with the fascist aggressor in World War II.

The "fascist threat" played upon during Soviet times was revived as a tool of pro-regime mobilization in Putin's Russia. What was new this time, however, was that use of the World War II myth evolved from an outward-oriented rhetorical instrument in Soviet times, used to denounce "fascist counterrevolutionary" forces working to undermine the socialist system, and adapted to new conditions after the Soviet collapse. In Putin's Russia, the "counterrevolution" would be reimagined as a pro-regime campaign. With a real political opposition present, the "fascist threat" was instrumentalized to bolster the system, thus adding a domestic enemy image that was officially absent before 1991.

## 2005: Nashi. The "Antifascist" Youth Movement

On November 21, 2004, protesters descended on Kiev's Maidan, or Independence Square. Supporters of presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko, they came to denounce the results of a dubious election that indicated a victory for Moscow-backed candidate Yanukovych. Above a makeshift tent encampment, they hoisted orange banners. During the day, they stood in a crowd of thousands, many in orange scarves and with orange ribbons pinned to their chests. Orange was the color of the Yushchenko campaign and would soon give its name to the revolution that brought the pro-Western candidate to power.

For Horvath, the Orange Revolution transformed the notion of color revolution "from a diplomatic challenge into a catalyst for fundamental change within Russia" (2011, 6). Already in 2004, efforts were made to classify color revolution as a new "technology" of bloodless coup. The mastermind behind the Kremlin's response to this perceived threat was Gleb Pavlovsky, director of the Moscow-based Foundation for Effective Politics and a self-styled "political technologist."[6] As an advisor to the Yanukovych campaign, Pavlovsky played an active part in engineering the election

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result which sparked the protests. That December, he reflected on his defeat in Ukraine and proposed a reactionary popular mobilization program for Russia (*Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 2004), in an interview that first advanced the ideas that would underpin the Kremlin's preventive counterrevolution (Horvath 2011).

The recourse to World War II symbolism only later enthused a campaign that began as a top-down project. In January 2005, appearing before students at Moscow State University, Putin proposed a proactive approach toward Russia's youth. "The force of action should be matched by the force of counteraction," he said. "If you see that extremism is gaining a certain momentum and a certain strength, it must be countered with the same activity" (Putin 2005). Vladislav Surkov, then deputy head of Putin's administration, echoed the sentiment in a speech to the country's business elite on May 17 that was leaked to the press in July, stressing Russia's need for a movement to act as a bulwark against Western attempts at regime change (Surkov 2005).

In February, Surkov hosted a meeting in Saint Petersburg with 40 freshly minted "commissars" of a new pro-Kremlin youth movement. "Nashi" would recruit up to 250,000 members, it was announced, targeting students between 18 and 22. Vasily Yakemenko, appointed to lead the movement, told those gathered that state coups had resulted in "external control" in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine and could not be permitted in Russia. Youth movements active in the Orange Revolution were already forming chapters in Moscow, Yakemenko warned, and Nashi would act as a counterweight by seizing the streets and squares which the opposition might use to stage protests against the Putin regime (*Kommersant* 2005).

Nashi accompanied its launch with a stridently nationalist manifesto. It rejected conceptions of freedom advanced by liberals, who "are prepared to sacrifice [their] country's sovereignty for the sake of achieving personal freedom," and denounced communists and fascists as ready to relinquish personal freedom to make their country great. "Personal freedom and national sovereignty are two sides of the same coin … Russia is and will be a sovereign democracy," the manifesto read, citing a political doctrine popular in the Kremlin (Nashi 2005).[7]

For Nashi, Russia had shaped the 20th century through three key events: the 1917 revolution, the "Great Victory" over Nazi Germany, and the collapse of the Communist system. The idea of every nation's right to free development is a result of "Russia's victory over fascism," which created the foundations for a world order which "has until recently guaranteed the defense of the world from the global hegemony of one country (be it Nazi Germany or the US) and the repeat of a new world war" (Nashi 2005). The manifesto fell short of equating the contemporary United States with Hitler's regime, but it drew a connection between the Soviet victory in 1945 and Russia's new struggle against a foreign power determined to circumscribe its sovereignty. That connection was elaborated in more explicit terms further in the text:

> Russia is the central military-strategic space of the Eurasian mainland. Control over it is important for those who today want to dominate in Eurasia and the entire world. This is precisely why Napoleon and Hitler dreamed of imposing their control over Russia. Today the USA, on one hand, and international terrorism on the other, are aspiring to control Eurasia and the whole world. Their gaze is fixed on Russia. To defend the sovereignty of our country today, in the same way our grandfathers defended it 60 years ago, is the task of our generation. (Nashi 2005)

Both this conflation of the United States and Nazi Germany as imperialistic powers bent on global domination and the link between that idea and the concept of self-determination reveal much about the Nashi worldview. By the same logic that it used in comparing US foreign policy with that of Hitler, the manifesto equated Western sympathizers in Russia with fascists and nationalists of all stripes. To Nashi, both groups represented the same threat: "Fascist organizations in Russia … serve as allies to Russia's liberals. Only by spreading our ideational influence over the young generation can we counter the youth's involvement in extremist organizations of a fascist and liberal bent … The fight with fascism is today the primary part of the fight for the unity and sovereignty of Russia" (Nashi 2005).

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Fascism and liberalism were closely connected here.[8] The crucial element was not the essence of liberal or fascist beliefs; it was that both liberals and fascists were extremists seeking the state's collapse, and both groups had to be stopped. The passages quoted from the group's manifesto hint at the belief system guiding Nashi's ideological fight with the political opposition. The narrative blurs the lines between fascism as a historical phenomenon and fascism as a symbol of an enemy which must be overcome. Throughout, the two meanings are conflated, making their use in the Nashi lexicon almost interchangeable.

Nashi's launch coincided with the 60th anniversary of the Great Victory, and the movement—whose official name was "the youth antifascist democratic movement Nashi"—declared its fight against all forms of fascism in Russia. For its founders, the movement was aimed against a growing tendency in Russia to normalize and even justify Hitler's actions, coupled with efforts to undermine the Great Patriotic War. In interviews, Nashi leaders spoke of a "destaticized fascism" that reigned in Russia at the time. The movement, one former leader said, was designated antifascist to "show resistance not only to an external but also a domestic threat, in the form of this destaticization and the reanimation of certain fascist ideas."[9]

What emerged from this ideology was a symbolic campaign against an abstract "fascist threat," which had both external and internal elements. External was the threat of an imperialist United States, which, like Nazi Germany before it, was allegedly striving to achieve domination over Eurasia by way of usurping Russia's sovereignty. Internally, the "fascist threat" encompassed members of nationalist movements in Russia and the liberal opposition.

This narrative was promoted at Nashi gatherings. In 2010, at its recruitment camp at Lake Seliger, mannequin heads with the faces of Russian opposition activists and their Western "patrons" protruded from wooden pikes. On them were replica hats of the Nazi Wehrmacht, and above, a large banner read "You are not welcome here!" (*Ekho Moskvy* 2010). At another event that November, Nashi members reenacted a scene from the 1945 victory parade: they marched forward in columns and flung down banners with the faces of opposition activists, just as Soviet soldiers had done with Nazi banners on Red Square. "These people have declared war against us," a loudspeaker boomed. "They should not be here" (Monday Production 2012).

Nashi's threat-focused campaign was also advanced through events commemorating the war. From 2005 on, it gathered thousands of war veterans at choreographed rallies on anniversary dates. The idea of Nashi activists as descendants of those who saved the country from fascism was a key component. In December 2006, some 70,000 activists and war veterans gathered for "A Holiday Returned," an event meant to give the veterans the New Year's celebration they were denied during the war (*Izvestiya* 2006). A promotional video drew a direct line between Nashi members and the war victors. "Europe did not halt the fascists—the fascists were halted by 'nashi,'" it said, playing on the Russian word meaning "our guys" or "our people" (Nashi 2007). By implication, only those involved in Nashi or supporting its cause were inheritors of the Great Victory.

Nashi members thus felt themselves to be continuing a historic battle against foreign enemies. The new confrontation with fascism allegedly backed from abroad was seen as the latest iteration in a centuries-old geopolitical tussle with the same actors in key roles. This worldview was laid out in the movement's manifesto; Nikita Borovikov, a former "commissar" in Nashi, elaborated on it:

> It was hard for us not to recall [the Great Patriotic War] because this was simply the new phase of a fight with the same people … The First World War was fought on our territory. When we look at the participating countries, and we compare it with the occupation during the [Russian] Civil War—it's a very similar list. Then we take the Second World War—it's the same actors. Then we take the Cold War—it's the same actors … It's clear that this is a never-ending game … [The technology of state coups] is a new instrument in the confrontation between those same actors.[10]

But why did Nashi come to brand the opposition fascist? Was this simply a propaganda ploy, or did members see this denigration of their adversaries as justified?

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The Nashi manifesto warned that Russia was witnessing "an unnatural union of liberals and fascists, of Westernizers and ultra-nationalists, of international funds and international terrorists" (Nashi 2005). At opposition protests, banners of the far-right National Bolshevik Party were often present, and the party soon forged an uneasy alliance with parts of the liberal opposition.[11] Party members used a straight-arm salute and intentionally provocative symbolism, including a flag evocative of the Nazi swastika.[12]

Interviews with Nashi activists suggest that this perceived union inspired the movement's antifascist stance. One former "commissar" explained how the liberal opposition's overtures to the National Bolshevik Party fueled Nashi's campaign to thwart it. "We called the liberals fascists because they went to rallies with fascists, defended fascists, and entered into political coalitions with them," he said. "If you ally with those people, you should be ready for people to associate you with them."[13] This aligns with a view expressed by Vasily Yakemenko in an interview shortly after Nashi's launch:

> A paradoxical situation has arisen: an organization called the National Bolshevik Party exists, which uses fascist symbolism and declared itself fascist at its first rally. Together with that organization, and consequently in solidarity with its methods and symbolism, marches our liberal opposition… . It follows that in a country which defeated fascism, fascists are scrambling for power. (*Izvestiya* 2005)

The Great Patriotic War thus emerged as a source of inspiration in the movement's fight against threats real and imagined. As "descendants" of the war victors, Nashi activists were symbolically continuing a battle that their forefathers had waged. The "fascist threat"—embodied by the liberal opposition, its nationalist bedfellows and alleged American patrons—was an abstract rallying cry for the movement. If you were *nashi*, you were a successor to those who ensured the Russian state's survival; if you were not *nashi*, you were not welcome.

Lessons learned from events in Ukraine were used to prevent disorder within Russia itself, and World War II emerged as an organic symbolic platform for that campaign. Nashi helped bring the fight against revolution to the streets, and enlisted the masses in that fight. The threat discourse which underpinned its campaign, based on a conflation of US liberalism with fascism, would evolve in the preventive counterrevolution's next phase.

## 2012: The Anti-Orange Committee

In 2011, in the wake of the US-led intervention in Libya and Muammar Gaddafi's assassination that October, a wave of protests erupted against Putin's reelection. In early November, nationalists marched through Moscow with banners reading "Mubarak, Gaddafi, Putin," hinting at their desire to see Putin overthrown in an Arab Spring-style coup (Boycko 2012).

The pro-regime pushback was initiated by Sergey Kurginyan, a prominent television personality and founder of neo-Soviet movement Sut Vremeni (Essence of Time). When Kurginyan saw opposition activists gather on Moscow's Bolotnaya Square in December 2011, he decided to organize an "anti-orange" meeting, so named to signify aversion to the prospect of an Orange Revolution in Russia.[14]

As a symbolic platform for the event, Kurginyan chose the Great Victory of 1945. Participants wore both the Saint George ribbon, revived in 2005 as a symbol of that victory,[15] and a red ribbon representing communism. Denouncing the "orangists" from onstage, Kurginyan produced a white ribbon—a symbol of the opposition protests—and set it alight to the sound of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Essence of Time 2011a).[16] "Maybe there aren't as many of us as there are on Sakharova Avenue," another speaker said, referring to the location of an opposition march that day, "but the Red Army's first counter-advance in 1941 came on the second day of the war, and today is our counter-attack against the orange plague" (Essence of Time 2011a).

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According to Kurginyan, the December 24 rally was the catalyst for a united front against the "orange threat":

> After the rally, a certain awakening occurred among those who do not share "orange values." I was approached by businessmen, representatives of [state] structures, people who head some pretty large organizations, and they said "Let's organize a major rally. We won't focus on your values, but rather common patriotic values."[17]

This initiative spawned the Anti-Orange Committee, an umbrella movement spanning Russia's political spectrum. Its symbol was a clenched fist suffocating an orange snake,[18] and the "Anti-Orange pact" was its manifesto. "Orange revolutions" are "pseudo-revolutions," it read, "surrogate, insidious and dangerous. They end in the misery and suffering of millions of people, the collapse of the country, and the loss of the social conquests of the nation" (Anti-Orange Committee 2012a).[19]

The Anti-Orange Committee's first rally was set for February 4. A promotional video showed monuments to Great Patriotic War heroes and urged Russians to unite in defending the country from Western-fomented chaos. "I'm for Russia, for Russians to have brains of their own, and not for us to be controlled by the West," a young man says, as images of opposition activists appear on-screen. "My political views are not important—I can be for Putin or against him. What's important is that I don't want them to try and destroy, break and crush my country" (Anti-Orange Committee 2012b).

The rally took place in Moscow's Victory Park, and the stage was positioned directly before the Great Patriotic War museum. The crowd stood facing the Obelisk of Victory, which towered behind the stage and the eternal flame beyond.[20]

In his theatrical style, Kurginyan screamed to the crowd: "Yes to fair elections! No to the orange plague!" and "We will take out the orange trash!" The crowd had gathered to say "no" to "orangism" and "yes" to Russia, declared Nikolai Starikov, another of the movement's leaders. "On March 4 we should vote for [the candidate] who is not infected with the orange plague, who has not been sending his people to the American embassy." Speeches followed from other public figures, among them television presenters Mikhail Leontev and Maxim Shevchenko, writer Aleksandr Prokhanov, and Eurasianist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin. Valentin Lebedev of the Union of Orthodox Citizens warned that "the enemy stands at the gates of the Kremlin, but these are not tanks or planes" (*RIA Novosti* 2012b).

Use of the phrase "orange plague" was a new element in the rhetoric of the preventive counterrevolution. A play on the term "brown plague" used in Russia to denote Nazis, whose paramilitaries wore brown uniforms,[21] it reflected language that was now being used at the highest level. Speaking at a press conference on February 3, Putin said that Moscow's Hill of Prostrations would play host to "those people who will sincerely profess their anti-orangist [*antioranzhistskoy*] position … I am thankful to them, and I share their views" (*Interfax* 2012a).

That became clear on February 23, when Putin's election campaign held a rally at Luzhniki stadium. The date was Russia's Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, and the rally was held under the slogan "We'll Defend the Country." Above the entrance to the stadium, the Russian flag was projected alongside the Saint George ribbon (*RIA Novosti* 2012d). Many participants wore the ribbon, and some even arrived in World War II–era vehicles and uniforms (*RIA Novosti* 2012e). The symbolism played upon the same threat narrative advanced by the Anti-Orange Committee, and the speakers, among them Anti-Orange Committee members, urged the crowd to defend Russia from external enemies aided by traitors inside Russia. The country was allegedly threatened by malevolent political forces, and Putin was the only leader capable of ensuring stability.

Appearing before the crowd, Putin denounced anyone meddling in Russia's affairs and warned those in attendance against "betraying their Motherland." He then invoked a Soviet-era phrase: "We are the victor-nation [*narod-pobeditel'*]. This is in our genes. And we'll be victorious again now!" (*Lenta.ru* 2012a). Putin told his followers that electing him as president was tantamount to ensuring

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the country's continued existence. "It's symbolic that we have gathered here on February 23, on the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland, because you and I are, today, during those days, the defenders of our Fatherland," he said (Pravda 2012).

The symbolism of that official event, and the rhetoric used, closely aligned with the narrative underpinning the preventive counterrevolution, whose activists denied affiliation with the Kremlin. For Kurginyan and his supporters, the Anti-Orange Committee was defending Russia's sovereignty by bolstering the official narrative. Their symbolic platform combined the new counterrevolutionary language with use of World War II symbolism, but what was new in 2012 was how remembrance of the Great Victory merged with the idea of patriotism, a concept actively promoted by Putin's government. According to Kurginyan, the myth of the Great Patriotic War was the most useful resource for popular mobilization in 2012, and the Saint George ribbon was chosen as an expression of "patriotism."[22] February 4 was billed as "The rally of Patriotic Forces," a slogan displayed on the stage above projections of the Saint George ribbon.

In interviews, Anti-Orange Committee members also conflated liberalism with fascism in ways similar to Nashi members. Maxim Shevchenko, who, like Gleb Pavlovsky, had worked in the Yanukovych camp during Ukraine's 2004 election, echoed his fellow activists by describing both fascism and liberalism as methods to achieve domination over others. Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia had brought to power liberals "of a new type," he said, who have interest only in maintaining their hold on power:

> Contemporary neoliberalism leads to the fascization of society … It veils itself with liberal-democratic phrases about human rights, about freedom, but essentially ensures the absolute power of a narrow elite. Everywhere that liberals come to power, nationalism begins … And I'm an antifascist to the core.[23]

When followed to its logical conclusion, this argument provides some insight into how a United States viewed as the bastion of liberalism can be seen as fascist.

By May, the protest movement had largely fizzled out. Only eight thousand people joined an opposition rally on May 6, compared to the 30,000 who attended on February 4 (*RIA Novosti* 2012f). The Anti-Orange Committee disbanded. According to Kurginyan, it was created only as a temporary measure to unite disparate political forces around the aim of preventing an Orange Revolution in Russia. He was ready to resurrect the movement if it was needed again.[24]

But the atmosphere it helped engender continued. On October 26, United Russia deputy Aleksandr Sidyakin appeared before the State Duma with the Saint George ribbon pinned to his chest. Sidyakin described the ribbon as a symbol of patriotism, or "respect for one's history and one's values." He then produced a white ribbon and called it "a symbol of capitulation, of betrayal, the color of revolution for export, which foreign political technologists are trying to impose on us." Turning on liberal deputy Ilya Ponomarev, and others who had been seen wearing the white ribbon, Sidyakin accused them of collaborating with opposition forces. "I want to do with this ribbon what people who ordered provocations wanted to do with our country," he said, throwing the ribbon on the ground and stamping on it (*Interfax* 2012b).

This World War II–inspired narrative of patriots versus traitors fitted neatly into the threat image that underpinned the preventive counterrevolution. In 2005, the "fascists" in opposition constituted a vague group. In 2012, the white ribbon was seized upon as a convenient symbol to identify the enemy, accompanied by the neologism "white ribbonist" (*byelolentochnik*), used to smear members of the opposition.[25] At counterrevolutionary rallies, posters depicting a sinister Uncle Sam with a white ribbon, calling for a color revolution in Russia, were widespread, and the Saint George ribbon was often juxtaposed in pro-regime propaganda with an image of the white ribbon alongside the US flag.[26] This helped to symbolically divide those representing Russia's national interests from those representing the interests of foreign governments, whose liberalism was being equated with the thirst for domination of the World War II–era enemy.

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## 2015: Antimaidan

The third key moment in the World War II–rooted preventive counterrevolution began in 2014, amid protests against Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. By this time, the campaign against the "orange threat" had been institutionalized. In September 2012, Prokhanov launched the Izborsk Club, an ultraconservative think tank. Dugin, Leontev, Starikov, Shevchenko, and other members of the Anti-Orange Committee were made permanent members, and Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky attended its inauguration meeting that month (*Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 2012).[27] On its website, the Club called for "a solid political-ideological coalition of patriot-statists, an imperial front to counter the manipulations in Russian politics undertaken by foreign centers of influence and the 'fifth column' inside the country" (*Izborsk Club* 2012).[28]

On February 13, 2014, as protests in Kiev turned violent, the Izborsk Club published a statement warning that the "fascization" of Ukraine is catastrophic for Russia's future. It proposed a concerted "antifascist" campaign, urging the Kremlin to undertake measures to contain the Ukrainian crisis. Among them was official denouncement of the creeping putsch "as fascist and Nazi"; a call to Russians and Ukrainians to unite forces to counter the "fascist plague seizing power in Kiev"; a state television campaign to "expose the fascist nature of the ongoing coup"; an open declaration to the international community about "the unacceptability for Russia of the emergence of a fascist, anti-Semitic state on our borders"; and an appeal by Putin to Ukraine, the U.S. and Great Britain to decisively protest against "US interference in Ukraine's internal affairs."[29]

The subsequently launched mobilizational campaign closely aligned with the measures proposed by the Izborsk Club. While state-owned media outlets ratcheted up their propaganda against Ukrainian "fascists," and the Kremlin began denouncing the West's actions with increasing belligerence, various rallies were held in defense of the Kremlin's policies in Ukraine and in protest against events there.

The first was staged on March 15, to coincide with the opposition's "Peace March" against Russia's intervention in Crimea.[30] Essence of Time activists marched in military formation through the streets of central Moscow, wearing identical red jackets with epaulettes, before gathering on Teatralnya Square in front of a stage backdropped by Aleksandr Deyneka's famous World War II painting, *The Defense of Sevastopol.* There they sang along to Great Patriotic War songs before Kurginyan delivered a speech filled with war references. The thousands-strong "regiment" chanted "There will be no Maidan in Moscow!"[31]

On September 27, a rally was held in Moscow's Victory Park. The event followed a discovery by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's monitoring mission in Ukraine of several small unmarked graves in the Donetsk region, to which the organization had been alerted by pro-Russian rebels fighting in the area (*OSCE* 2014). Russian state media reported "mass burials" as a result of war crimes carried out by Ukrainian forces (*NTV* 2014), and the September 27 rally was promoted as a way to pay tribute to their victims. The World War II connection was clear: the rally was held in front of the "Tragedy of Nations" monument "to victims of fascist genocide"[32]; participants wore the Saint George ribbon and waved small black and orange flags[33]; and speeches noted the symbolism of the location.[34]

"It's completely not a coincidence that our action today takes place by the memorial to victims of fascism," said Marianna Shevchenko of the National Association of Parents, the non-profit listed as the event organizer. She went on to denounce the mass killings: "this is how fascists treated people during the Great Patriotic War" (*RT* 2014). After Shevchenko's speech, a dozen schoolchildren, some apparently as young as five, mounted the stage holding red roses. They recited a poem about the rebirth of fascism in Ukraine and the joy with which the Ukrainian president allegedly greets news of Russian deaths. "Lord, defend us from the fascists!" they cried in unison (*RT* 2014). After the song, several activists stamped on an American flag in front of the cameras (*Ekho Moskvy* 2014). Once again, a tacit link was being made between the United States and fascism.

By January 2015, the protest organizers joined forces into a single movement to combat the threat of revolution. Antimaidan—a play on "Maidan," the square where Ukraine's latest revolution

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took place—gathered together several dozen organizations including the Military Brotherhood, a war veterans' group with hundreds of regional branches and over 100,000 members.[35] At a press conference held to launch the movement, Military Brotherhood leader Dmitry Sablin described Antimaidan's enemy as the abstract, unspecified threat of color revolution, which imposed a minority's will over that of the majority (Saakov 2015).

Antimaidan imagery and slogans fused World War II symbolism with the now-entrenched narrative of US-sponsored attempts at regime change in Russia. Its emblem featured the Saint George ribbon and an image of the *Motherland Calls* statue, which symbolizes a call to arms directed toward the nation (Palmer 2009, 391). Its manifesto laid out its aims:

> We are gathering together to prevent "color revolutions," street disorders, chaos and anarchy. We will not allow forces which profess hatred towards a strong and sovereign Russia, and which receive approval and support from abroad, to call the shots [*khozyaynichat'*] in our cities … All key decisions in the life of our nation should be taken in Moscow, not in Washington or Brussels (*Antimaidan* 2015b).

The manifesto ended by paraphrasing Russian statesman Pyotr Stolypin: "We don't need great upheavals; we need Great Russia!" (*Antimaidan* 2015b).[36] This would become a popular slogan of the preventive counterrevolution in 2015.

On February 21, Antimaidan held its first rally. Marking one year since Yanukovych fled Kiev amid bloodshed on its streets, the event gathered some 35,000 people, including groups from Chechnya and Dagestan (Aksyonov 2015). It was held under the slogan "We won't forget! We won't forgive!" made famous by an article published in the Red Army newspaper in 1941 (Pavlenko 1941)[37] and featured on dozens of billboards placed across Moscow to advertise the rally, alongside the words "Be there if you're a patriot!" Once again, the concept of patriotism was being appropriated for the counterrevolutionary cause.

The rally was a well-planned event broadcast live on news channel Rossiia 24 (*Lenta.ru* 2015). Organizers armed with walkie-talkies wore jackets with the Antimaidan emblem and scarves in the colors of the Saint George ribbon. The ribbon was distributed to passersby.[38] And the crowd waved banners with the faces of prominent opposition activists and the words "organizer of the Maidan" (Azar 2015).[39]

An enormous screen played a video explaining to the passing columns how America's alleged plan to engulf Ukraine had left the former Soviet republic on the brink of collapse. "Soon Europe will come to us, telling us everything will be better if we take their hand. But we will not listen, as we now know the consequences," boomed out of speakers almost as tall as the surrounding buildings.[40]

The crowds chanted "Russia! Russia!" then stood silent as an instrumental version of "The Sacred War" played from the speakers (*RT* 2015). Nikolai Starikov, the former Anti-Orange Committee member, told the crowd Ukraine's "civil war" had claimed 50,000 lives, and drew a direct parallel between Kiev's alleged American patrons and the Nazi regime:

> Maidan is the grin of the American ambassador, who rejoices as he watches brothers killing each other from his penthouse on Kreshchatyk … Maidan is the embryo of Goebbels, which has been transplanted into an anthropoid being and is dancing in a church … Just as an organism mobilizes all resources in the fight against viruses and infections, so does the great Russian nation unite and mobilize its patriotic resources in the fight against fascism (*RT* 2015).[41]

Paradoxically, Starikov's portrayal of the political opposition as a virus that needed eradicating is redolent of rhetoric used by the Nazi regime in propaganda against Jews in the Third Reich.[42] Starikov has on several occasions equated liberalism and fascism with a disease, suggesting the two ideologies are closely connected in his thinking.[43] In an interview, he framed Antimaidan's battle

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with Russia's "fifth column"—which he defined as people paid to serve the interests of a foreign power—in much the same terms:

> Microbes are dangerous for an organism at specific stages in its life—sometimes you may not even fall ill, and sometimes you may die. That's why you need to make sure that their concentration is not too great.[44]

After his speech, Starikov handed the stage to members of the Night Wolves biker club. The club's leader, Aleksandr Zaldostanov, appeared beside a banner with the logo of SMERSH, the counterintelligence bureau formed by Stalin in 1942 to detect agents infiltrated into the USSR by foreign security services. Zaldostanov told the crowd that the Maidan had "raped" Ukraine, and that no empire in history had ever done to its colonies the things the United States is now doing to the world (*RT* 2015).[45]

The February 21st rally played on the Great Patriotic War myth to divide perceived patriots from traitors, and warn Russians against foreign enemies and their collaborators at home. It was the first of many events staged by Antimaidan using Great Patriotic War symbolism to mobilize against the threat of revolution. The accompanying language blurred the boundaries between liberalism and fascism, a conflation that had become entrenched over the preceding decade. The United States had emerged in this discourse as the primary actor inciting nationalist movements abroad to stage coup attempts against their governments.

Antimaidan leaders interviewed for this article elaborated on the movement's use of World War II symbolism. Zaldostanov said that the 2014 Maidan revolution had made him understand that America is an enemy, not a friend, and he saw the Great Victory as the primary reference point in Russia's fight against that enemy. "Defending the victory, we are defending our very selves," he said.[46] Starikov drew attention to the significance of the Saint George ribbon for Antimaidan: "A symbol calls to action, it speaks of something, and we chose a symbol that not only represents the most important part of our history but also mobilizes."[47]

Another striking thread emerged in their statements. Like the Nashi and Anti-Orange Committee activists that came before them, they voiced a conception of fascism as an ideology rooted in notions of supremacy over other nations, and drew a strong link between Hitler's imperialism and Western attempts at regime change.

"This is not new," said Antimaidan activist Anton Demidov. "When Hitler was fighting he was doing the same thing, in order to make our brotherly nations collide headfirst, and control us that way."[48] Demidov cited attacks in Ukraine on Russians wearing the Saint George ribbon, including a purported incident involving a girl who was beaten at a Victory Day celebration and had her ribbon taken away. He described the ribbon as a symbol of resistance in a new war against fascism. "In 1941–1945 we fought under a red banner, with a particular set of values, and so we fight today under the Saint George ribbon," he said. "We're also fighting ideologically, and physically, with fascism, twenty-first-century fascism."[49]

In the summer of 2015, Demidov launched Antimaidan's youth wing, which organized discussion forums and Nashi-style summer camps where lectures about "color technologies" combined with paintball outings and ropes courses.[50] The youth program supports the stated goal of Antimaidan: to educate the public about the dangers of color revolution. Since its inception, the movement has hosted events highlighting the alleged consequences of American interference abroad. In February 2015, an exhibition titled "The face of American democracy" showed images of suffering from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Vietnam, Ukraine, Egypt and Georgia (*Channel One* 2015). In June 2016, another exhibition commemorated victims of the war in the Donbass and featured "letters to the front" from children in Donetsk, folded into triangles like those which soldiers sent home during the war. In an adjacent room were drawings by schoolchildren depicting war scenes.[51]

June 2015 saw the launch of another spin-off, a quasi-academic project called Antimaidan Analytics, which has hosted public seminars and published books on the "color threat."[52] At one

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seminar in June 2016, Andrew Korybko, an American contributor to Russia's state-funded *Sputnik* news agency, was called upon to outline ways in which Russia can scupper attempts to foment revolution within its borders. Korybko said that nationalism fueled by outside forces must be countered by homegrown patriotism. He recommended "patriotic upbringing," use of history as a source of national pride, and, particularly in Russia's case, a championing of the World War II experience amid the rise of destructive nationalism. Korybko's proposal aligned closely with the symbolic politics of the preventive counterrevolution and the discourse that has accompanied it since 2005 (Starikov 2016).[53]

## Conclusion

The preventive counterrevolution, embodied by the movements Nashi, the Anti-Orange Committee and Antimaidan, brought together actors of various political persuasions—Soviet nostalgists such as Kurginyan, Eurasianists such as Dugin, Stalinists like Prokhanov—united in the view that an opposition aided by the West represents a threat to Russia's sovereignty. They saw a strong state as a guarantor of that sovereignty, not a political patron. As Laruelle (2016: 643) argues, Russia's public space cannot be effectively controlled by the state; instead, a permissive approach is adopted in respect to movements capable of bolstering the regime, which exist "in a gray area that is neither totally official nor totally dissident."

While these activists chose their own symbolic platform, their movements actively and passively advanced the myths and rituals revived under Putin's government through its "patriotic education" campaign, its promotion of commemorative practices, and its increasingly threat-focused discourse. Rather than a top-down campaign to exploit popular support for commemorative practices relating to World War II, the preventive counterrevolution can thus be seen as an example of how the myth of the Great Victory over fascism can serve as a default symbolic cue in Russia at times when an outside threat is perceived.

Interviews with activists of the preventive counterrevolution reveal that many had drawn a strong connection between the actions of the United States and those of Nazi Germany, a conclusion perhaps prompted by the definition of fascism that most interviewees put forward: as the ideology of a nation or group determined to demonstrate its dominance over others. Today, those activists see in the United States a dominant foreign power attempting to assert control over Russia, just as was the case during the Great Patriotic War. The opening of political life and the rise of opposition forces have paved the way for new ways to harness collective memory of the war; forged as a way to consolidate public opinion and fan patriotic sentiment, language and symbolism rooted in war memory are now creating a hostile divide between "patriots" and "traitors." Incorporated into the Kremlin's new discourse of "patriotism", the resurgent victory myth is pitting regime supporters against the embattled opposition.

Two recent examples help illustrate how warnings of a fascist resurgence can tap into fears of instability and disorder and bolster the counterrevolutionary narrative that has held sway since 2005. On March 28, 2016, a youth center in Tula premiered a documentary titled "Inoculation against Fascism," part of a government initiative to educate schoolchildren about the dangers of fascism. "A virus seeks to annihilate the largest amount of people," the narrator says, as images of disorder on Ukraine's streets mix with archive footage of Nazi rallies. "Those whom we call fascists behave in exactly the same way in human society. This is why we compare fascism with a disorder and call it the 'brown plague.'" Viewers are then assured that president Putin is doing everything to stop the spread of fascism (*Channel One* 2016a).[54]

On October 23, 2016, Russia's Rossiia 1 channel aired a special report on the anti-Soviet uprising in Communist Hungary. "Already in 1956," presenter Dmitry Kiselyov says, "the West was developing methods to turn peaceful protest into bloody chaos. Maybe that was the first color revolution in a country friendly to us" (*Rossiia 1* 2016). [55]

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The abstracted historical myths of fascism and revolution are instrumentalized by state propaganda, but their prevailing narrative in Russia results as much from what seems an organic, bottom-up recourse to historical experience at times of upheaval and instability. When questioned on their decision to take up arms, those fighting Ukrainian forces in the Donbass today may well echo a sentiment expressed by a Soviet tank driver involved in the violent suppression of the 1968 Prague Spring: "because they were all Fascists" (Smith 1976, 314). The fascist threat, in its abstracted form, maintains strong symbolic purchase also today.

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## Notes

1 The term *Great Patriotic War* refers in Russia to the eastern front of World War II, from Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 until his surrender in May 1945.

2 See Valerie Sperling (2009); Jonathan Brunstedt (2011); Scott Palmer (2009). For instance, Elizabeth Wood argues that "Vladimir Putin has created a myth and a ritual that elevates him personally, uniting Russia (at least theoretically)" (2011, 198). Some even link popular support for state-approved commemorative practices in Russia, such as the Saint George ribbon campaign, with support for Putin. Pål Kolstø acknowledges the ribbon's legacy as a symbol of Russian military glory but overlooks its unique appeal for Communists and imperialists alike, arguing that "the Victory is ever more closely associated with the Russian state and the introduction of the St George ribbon symbolizes that turn" (2016, 697).

3 Recollections of past events can be unreliable, and where possible I have checked statements by my informants against other sources. However, some studies reveal that direct involvement can sharpen memory of events over time, and some distant events can even be remembered with greater clarity than the recent past (Berntsen and Thomsen 2005). For Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat (2017), the historical value of the remembered past rests on three strengths. Firstly, it provides significant and sometimes unique information from that past. Secondly, it can convey the individual and collective consciousness which shapes understanding of that past. And thirdly, it precludes potentially inaccurate inferences about the past by incorporating witnesses who can corroborate it, even if their memory is fallible.

4 For instance, on May 9, 1950, *Pravda*'s front page warned that the "Anglo-American imperialists" are "heading along Hitler's path." In Brezhnev's time, from 1966 onward, May 9 editions featured caricatures of NATO generals coming upon a maimed and starved Hitler, who warns them about the danger of aggression toward the Soviet Union, often accompanied by poems about the Soviet bloc's readiness to overcome aggressors. The first sketches portrayed West Germans as recidivist criminals intent on exacting revenge on the Soviet Union, but from around 1970 they began to depict the United States as the aggressor. For comparison, see *Pravda*'s May 9 editions between 1966 and 1986.

5 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian are mine.

6 For more on the role of "political technologists" in post-Soviet politics, see Andrew Wilson (2005).

7 The movement is now defunct. Quotations throughout the article are taken from its manifesto (Nashi 2005).

8 For examples of this connection in Nashi's online propaganda, see Julie Fedor and Rolf Fredheim (2017).

9 Boris Yakemenko, interview with author, Moscow, June 30, 2016.

10 Nikita Borovikov, interview with author, Moscow, July 4, 2016.

11 For a detailed discussion of this, see Horvath (2013), especially chapter 7. In April 2007, the National Bolshevik Party was deemed an "extremist organization" and banned in Russia.

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12 For more on the National Bolshevik Party, see Andreas Umland (2002) and Fabrizio Fenghi (2017). Charles Clover (2016: 227) suggests that the National Bolshevik Party was in fact a precursor to Nashi and other youth leagues that sprang up in the Putin era as the Kremlin sought to control the streets.
13 Borovikov, interview with author.
14 Sergey Kurginyan, interview with author, July 29, 2016.
15 For more on the revival of the Saint George ribbon, see *Moskovskii Komsomolets* (2016).
16 Kurginyan had done this before. On December 21, in his video blog, he incinerated a white ribbon while warning then secretary of state Hillary Clinton that Russia will not succumb to a US-orchestrated color revolution. See *Essence of Time* (2011b).
17 Kurginyan interview.
18 The image is evocative of Sergey Igumnov's 1937 propaganda poster, "We Will Eradicate the Spies and Saboteurs, the Trotskyist-Bukharinist Agents of Fascism!" The image also appeared in 2012 on banners held at rallies in support of Putin's election campaign. See *RIA Novosti* (2012c).
19 The movement is now defunct. Quotations throughout the article are taken from its manifesto, the "anti-orange pact" (*Anti-Orange Committee* 2012a).
20 For an annotated map of the rally location, see *RIA Novosti* (2012a).
21 See, for example, Golaev and Golaeva (2016). Chapter 18, "Orange euphoria in brown tones," makes a direct comparison between contemporary Ukraine and Hitler's regime, and suggests "The orangists [*oranzhevye*] have got carried away with playing brown games" (2016:139).
22 Kurginyan interview.
23 Maxim Shevchenko, interview with author, July 29, 2016.
24 Kurginya interview.
25 The "Patriot's Manual," a pro-Kremlin Wikipedia imitation, describes a "white ribbonist" as "any active opponent of Putin who thirsts for regime change in Russia by any price, and spreads to this end false and ignorant propaganda, often under the banner of liberalism and pro-Americanism." See Spravochnik Patriota (2018).
26 See, for instance, *Lenta.ru* (2012b). For a more recent example, see *Orsk.ru* (2015).
27 The *Izborsk Club* received a 10 million ruble government grant in 2015. See *RBC* (2015).
28 For more on the *Izborsk Club*, see Laruelle (2016)
29 The statement was published by Prokhanov's newspaper. See *Zavtra* (2014). Other movements issued similar statements. For instance, a February 19 statement by nationalist party Rodina denounced "the liberal-fascist mutiny" being attempted in Ukraine. See *Rodina* (2014).
30 According to the BBC, a Russian Interior Ministry statement released at the time referred to the Peace Marchers as "opponents of Crimea's reunification with Russia," and the pro-government marchers as activists standing up "against fascism" (Malover'ian 2014). The claim is corroborated in news portal *Lenta.ru*. See *Lenta.ru* (2014).
31 The rally was sanctioned by the Kremlin for 2,000 participants, but a far greater number came. Kurginyan claimed 16,000 had attended; the BBC placed the figure at 10,000. See Malover'ian (2014).
32 According to its description on the websites of various tourist organizations. For instance, Rutraveller (2018) and *Mosgid* (2010).
33 This is clear from video and photos of the event. See, for instance, *Ekho Moskvy* (2014).
34 The significance of the monument was also made clear in a social media post advertising the event. See National Association of Parents (2014).
35 For a partial list of Antimaidan partners, see *Antimaidan* (2015). For more on the Military Brotherhood, see *Novaia Gazeta* (2015).
36 Stolypin's actual words, uttered in a speech to the Russian State Duma on May 10, 1907, were, "They want great upheavals; we want Great Russia!"
37 The article was about conditions faced by Soviet soldiers captured by Axis forces on the Northwestern Front. On Sept 10, 1944, a poem of the same name by the poet Vasily Lebedev-

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Kumach was published in *Izvestiya* (Lebedev-Kumach 1944). It is interesting to note that the slogan has also featured at opposition rallies, for instance in May 2010. For this, see Varlamov (2010).

38 Author's own recollections from attending.

39 Similar rallies were held in other cities, among them Simferopol and Sevastopol, where an image of the city's "Soldier and Sailor" WWII memorial was displayed on-stage. See Night Wolves (2015).

40 Author's own recollections. See also *Newscaster.tv* (2015).

41 "Dancing in a church" is presumably a reference to Pussy Riot's 2012 performance.

42 See, for instance, Fritz Hippler's 1940 film, *Der Ewige Jude* (Hippler 1940).

43 Compare, for instance, the following comments Starikov made to a reporter in June 2015: "As a student, I was a liberal … And for some time I was held hostage by liberal ideas, but I was cured, thank God. And from that time I'm actively helping others to cure themselves." See Starikov (2015).

44 Nikolai Starikov, interview with author, Moscow, July 6, 2016.

45 People in the crowd also drew World War Two parallels. A man wrapped in a Saint George ribbon flag told the Meduza news agency, "If we don't come out in support of Vladimir Putin, we will die and rot in ditches, like people who didn't understand that the fascists are descending on them" (Azar 2015).

46 Aleksandr Zaldostanov, interview with author, Sevastopol, June 19, 2016.

47 Starikov interview.

48 Anton Demidov, interview with author, Moscow, June 23, 2016.

49 Demidov interview.

50 For examples of Antimaidan youth events, see *Antimaidan* (2019).

51 See *Antimaidan* (2016). The exhibition was co-sponsored by the paramilitary organization Heirs of the Victory, which joined Antimaidan that month.

52 Putin called for such a project in an appearance before the Federation Council in March 2014. See Putin (2014).

53 Korybko is the author of *Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change*. See Korybko (2015).

54 Eight hundred copies of the documentary, which was funded by a 3 million ruble government grant, were later distributed to schools. See Levshits (2015) and *Channel One* (2016b).

55 A similar narrative is advanced in a documentary on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that Rossiia 1 aired on May 23, 2015. The invasion is presented as protection against a NATO coup. See *Rossiia 1* (2015).

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