

Russia's self-destructive harmony



by Lev Tsitrin

I still remember how, when I was twelve or so, my father tried to convince me to put more effort into schoolwork. He appealed neither to the nobility of learning, nor to practical, career-helping benefits of good grades. Perhaps he did not feel that such argument would convince me – so he pressed a different point: “you are sitting in that classroom anyways,” he told me; “whether you purposelessly waste that time, or use it to learn something, those hours are gone past recall and cannot be reused. Why would you lose them? Why not get some knowledge in return for that irrevocably lost time? Why not listen to the teacher?”

Of course, he was right. Retrospect is wonderful thing but is

not particularly useful. "If only the youth knew; if only the age could," the French say with a sigh. For all my parents' admonitions, I remained a so-so student.

This is not to say that I was universally mediocre. To me, there were two kinds of subjects: those that could be understood – math, geometry, and for some reason, chemistry (which in my mind, as I now realize, was simply geometry by other means; a game of Lego of sorts). Those were intuitive and easy, and I excelled at them. And then, there were subjects that needed memorization, and those – history and language and literature in particular – I hated with a very considerable passion. Oddly, physics was one of the subjects that I felt required memorization rather than understanding – and while I did not hate it, I did not excel at it either.

Now, so many decades later, I forgot everything I was taught at school; only random snippets remain. One of those came out of the physics class: when crossing a bridge, soldiers have to break the steps or else they may break the bridge – and kill themselves falling down. As the all-knowing google explains, "at a certain point, the bridge would start oscillating to the same rhythm as that of the marching steps. This oscillation would reach a maximum peak when the bridge can no longer sustain its own strength and hence collapses."

When looking at what is going on in Russia, one wonders whether too much in-step harmony can be damaging to a society, just as it can be damaging for a bridge. Having rid Russia of every opposing voice through immigration, imprisonment, or intimidation, Putin turned it into a uniform, harmonious, single-voice society. The Russians march largely in lockstep, their feet beating the ground to drumbeat of official propaganda.

And this propaganda gets shriller by the day. For one, propagandists need to invent new and yet newer means of convincing the Russians of the rightness of their cause. As

the war dragged on, the cerebral, legalistic argument that served as the initial justification for invading Ukraine – that it was an artificial, Bolshevik-created construct, and that Ukrainians longed to return into the fold but were held back by their Nazi drug-addicted rulers acting on behalf of the West – became too stale (and got disproved by Ukrainian resistance). So, the propaganda drum started beating to a different, this time fear-mongering rhythm – that of the secret, America-funded bio labs aimed at developing diseases that would specifically target the Russians, and of Ukrainian plans for arming themselves with nuclear weapons to use on Russia – though Ukrainians abandoned their huge nuclear arsenal under the terms of the Budapest Memorandum.

By now, the story changed yet again. Since the virtue shines best when put next to the vice, and that what is white is the whiter when that what is black that is next to it, is the blacker, the holiness of Mother Russia now got contrasted with the Satanism of her opponents – the Russian public [has been told the other day](#) by “Assistant Secretary to the Russian Security Council Alexei Pavlov ... that the goal of the war in Ukraine should be “complete de-Satanization. Pavlov claimed that Ukrainian society is defined by “fanatics” who seek to abandon values held by the Russian Orthodox church, Islam, and Judaism.” This perhaps being insufficient, Pavlov “has written in an op-ed that he believes “Neo-pagan cults [have] gained strength in Ukraine,” [naming one of them](#) as the [Jewish] Chabad-Lubavitch hassidic movement,” per another report.

As is only natural, this ideological hysteria must result in corresponding military measures. Since Ukrainians, being Satanic, would not think twice of using a “dirty bomb,” it logically follows that they are in the process of making one. Hence, by the very same logic, Russia should be ready for a nuclear response. The West should beware, and better stop supporting the Satanic, Neo-pagan Ukraine, thus handing it over to the Holy Russia.

This continuous escalation brings to mind the bridge that the soldiers are crossing in steps, because this is what seems to be happening in Russia. The country is “oscillating to the same rhythm as that of the marching steps” of its propaganda and its military effort – that after the “partial mobilization” started to strain Russia’s social cohesion. Though we are not at the point yet where Russian society “can no longer sustain its own strength and hence collapses,” it may well happen if Putin keeps listening to his increasingly frenzied rhetoric and keeps escalating the military effort accordingly – and the Russians keep marching to his drumbeat. Just as with passing over a bridge, the best thing is for Russia to “to break the steps” by legitimizing the voices that are opposed to war, creating the much-needed balance that can only exist when there is a genuine and open public debate. If not, the pressure of increasingly shrill and increasingly bizarre ideology, coupled with the corresponding heavy strain of military effort that in turn causes the ever-increasing stream of the wounded and the dead sent back home, may cause a collapse.

Russians are a notoriously long-suffering, obedient people; yet even they may have a limit of endurance, at which point even the most shrill Russian propagandists won’t be inventive enough to prevent the collapse of the Putin regime. He forces the Russians to march in steps – which is not necessarily a good idea. Diversity of opinions may not look pretty, or be convenient to a ruler, but it breaks the steps, and is thus an infinitely safer mode of crossing bridges. And what is human history, with its ups and downs, than more-or-less safely crossing one bridge after another?