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Two Wars; One Criminal

Мясорубка! You are a meat grinder, the brainwashed motto of Vladimir Putin's armed forces. While the war at the front of western media, and at the front of American hearts is the current devastation between Russia and Ukraine, there is another war to be uncovered. Rooted in the conflicts of a nation carved up by the divide of its people and its government, Vladimir Putin is revealed as the criminal of two wars, clawing at the unity of this world.

Despite its brutality, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 was thought to be settled, not peacefully, but settled in its work. As Russia started a large military build-up surrounding its Ukrainian border In March of 2021, Ukraine felt its first threat since Crimea. Russian Government Officials attempted to settle any feeling of threat by denying that there were any plans to invade Ukraine, regardless of the 190,000 troops along the border. Clearly a plan was in the works all along as on February 24th, 2022 a "special military operation" was launched by Russia in the form of airstrikes and missiles (Stares). But now I correct myself. A "special military operation" was launched by the Russian government. Formed by irredentism and ravenous greed for power, the Russian government has villainized itself, enforcing the victimization of Ukrainians as well as Russian civilians. This story, and this war isn't black and white. It's easy to just say that the Russians are the bad guys, but a greater understanding of this crisis reveals that Russians have become victims to their own nation and its ideals often referred to as "the empire of evil".

While the Russian government claims to be an election based system for the selection of its political leaders, under Putin's rule this claim has been corrupted. Putin was first elected in 2000 and was in office until 2008. Following Putin's time in office, Dmitry Medvedev was president until 2012. Medvedev was said to have conceded to Putin who ran again regardless of the two consecutive six year term rule in Russia (Stares). The terms of Medvedev's consignment are unclear, but it can be suspected that unfair play was involved, as Putin has previously had political opponents jailed and repressed as well as engaged in secret elections, committing election fraud (Stares). Putin has been president of Russia ever since. This first insight into corruption is enough to tell us that Russian civilians lack control of the actions or contributions of their government, as their nation and leaders have shown their disregard of their people.

Besides elections that Russians don't get a say in, we can assume a lot more is happening behind the scenes. A large percentage of Russians do not want to be involved in the current War between Russia and Ukraine (Oleinik). In an article titled *Russian's Are Putin's Victims Too* the author says "I cannot imagine how Ukrainians feel today. Because I do not know how it feels to wake up to sirens, to hide in tube stations, to be scared that the next shell can land on your apartment. But I do share their outrage, their disgust, and hatred. And I know so many Russians like me feel the same" (Oleinik). Russian's too don't want to stand for the actions of their government. In fact, protests of the war have started in larger Russian cities, but have resulted in masses of incarcerations of civilians practicing peaceful revolt. One protest resulted in 1800 arrests in just 24 hours (Oleinik). There is a fear created by the Russian government that speaks for the lack of a voice Russian citizens are given. *Russian's Are Putin's Victims Too* then shares: "Like our Ukrainian neighbors, overnight, we ordinary Russians too had become victims of the

Russian government” (Oleinik). Fear and corruption enlisted the victimization of Russian’s in this second war to be uncovered between the Russian government and its people.

Because of the Russian Government’s unforgivable and destructive actions, most of the world has turned against Russia as a whole, including its people regardless of their action in these matters. “The Russian government’s outrageous actions did not hurt us, ordinary Russians, only by fuelling Russophobia and turning the global community against us. These actions, which caused so much suffering to so many, also crippled our lives in much more concrete ways” (Oleinik). While the global hostility towards Russian’s is emotionally understandable, their lives have had to face unfathomable sacrifices during this time as well. Particularly the Russian economy suffers due to the lack of importation and exportation, leaving many Russians in financial crisis (Oleinik). “With all our savings in Russian currency, the cost of education in another country, the cost of living, the cost of rent had almost doubled” (Oleinik). And to think their own government is the one robbing them, and villainizing them is terrifying.

The tactic methods of the Russian government to brainwash and control its citizens are also at the head of this conflict. As revealed in *Russian Soldiers are also Victims of Putin’s War* Putin’s Soldiers are not men, but merely young boys. “A famous Ukrainian journalist, Dmytro Gordon, has been posting dozens of videos of these boys calling home to tell their mothers that they are in Ukraine, only to hear the silence and shock on the other side of the line” (Kole). Putin has torn apart families, stealing young sons away from their mothers, not even knowing their whereabouts, but knowing they will have to confide to all of Putin’s demands. “And looking at the footage from the conflict, I have felt a growing pity for them, too, those boys who did not ask for this war, who were not told they would be sent to Ukraine, and who are dying like flies as a

result of Putin's senseless war" (Kole). There is a pity for the vulnerability of these young boys. Putin can gain so much power by taking a young generation, and twisting their morals to match his own as their mother's are told that they are defending their country proudly.

The Russian government also does not value the individual person or people of its nation, but just of the power that it obtains (Bort). In an article called *Why the Kremlin Treats Its Own With Contempt* the concept of "putinism" is explained as "placing the state over the individual" (Bort). In reference to the deaths of Russian Soldiers, said to be a role model of Putin's, Georgy Zhukov used to say "Women will give birth to more" (Kole). This phrase is "...used in Russia today to sum up the leadership's attitude toward people as replaceable cannon fodder" (Kole). With the Russian government's advocacy for irredentism, the political vantage point of the nation has solely been to legitimize the powerful legacy and reign of a government so capable of destroying the words life and unity. Outside of this greed for power, the Russian government also won't acknowledge or recognize its soldiers and people who have passed because of the embarrassment of death and its association with failure. "...the same chain of command neglected to claim those soldiers' bodies because acknowledging their deaths might embarrass the Kremlin" (Bort). (Kremlin: the Russian or (formerly) Soviet government) Mortality is not taken as sorrow or something to grieve over but something to shun by the Russian Government. This manipulative attitude takes the sole out of the value of life for many, if not all Russian soldiers.

War is traumatic for anyone involved or fighting in it regardless of their position in the battle. As previously mentioned, Russian soldiers are seen as nothing more than a body in a billion to their commanders. The devastation that Russian soldiers face at war is not

acknowledged by their country, and the soldiers that return home with PTSD or shell shock are ignored. The Russian armed forces recognizes PTSD as an American drama that Americans developed and made up in Iraq, but not actually a validated condition (Kole). As Russians return from war scarred from watching their peers die, having to pull the trigger on an innocent person because of the demands of their commander, their country will just watch them suffer as they live the rest of their lives reliving the trauma of war. Any war is war; graphic and brutal, and the sorrow that develops during that time for a soldier is time they can never forget nor get back, and will constantly relive.

“The losers of this game are the Ukrainian people, taken hostage by one of the world’s most powerful armies with nuclear capabilities...Yet, Russian soldiers’ lives should be added to the expensive bill of this war” (Kole). The bill of this war is not necessarily the cost of land destroyed, or the bill of apartments blown up, or the cost of weaponry, but the cost of lives tossed aside by the Russian government. The Russian government has enlisted fear into the eyes of every nation on this planet. Holding a power like that is manipulative to everyone, but mostly Russia’s own people. I encourage everyone to look at this war as not just one conflict, but two. The depths of Putin’s ungodly behavior have served as a wake up call to the way Russians are held captive by the immorality of their government. As we pray for Ukraine, as we pray for the lives lost, and a peaceful solution to this conflict, I ask that we recognize the loss of an entire culture because of its government. In these two wars, antagonized by the same criminal, let us serve it all justice.

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