

RUSSIAN IDEOLOGY AFTER CRIMEA

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Following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the Russian public has embraced an increasingly conservative and nationalistic ideology. Any repudiation of this ideology, let alone the transformation of the country as a whole, will only happen if demand for change from the bottom coincides with a desire for modernization from the top.

Key Findings

- The new social contract demands that the Russian people surrender their freedom in return for Crimea and a sense of national pride. It seizes on changes that have already occurred in the minds of many Russians.
- The new ideology is based on a deliberate recycling of archaic forms of mass consciousness, a phenomenon that can be termed the sanctification of unfreedom.
- Confined to a besieged fortress, surrounded by external enemies, and faced with a domestic fifth column, the people of Russia have begun to experience Stockholm syndrome and have thrown their support behind the commander of the fortress, President Vladimir Putin. They have adopted his logic and even defended his interests, believing that they are members of his team.
- Freedom of expression has been significantly curtailed through a system of bans and strict forms of punishment, including criminal prosecution, which have both didactic and deterrent components. Pressure on democratic media outlets has also increased drastically.
- Ideology in Russia is a mass product that is easy to absorb; it is legitimized by constant references to the past, glorious traditions, and occasionally fictional historical events.
- Although ideology emanates from the top, there is demand for it from the bottom.

Looking to the Future

- With economic concerns mounting, at some point, the energy behind the mass mobilization of the Russian body politic will begin to dissipate, and the social contract that emerged during the period of high oil prices will start to lose steam. At a minimum, the sausage that was exchanged for freedom, so to speak, will have to get worse—and more expensive.
- While the Crimea gambit proved to be amazingly effective at generating popular support for the leadership, the regime will have to supply the people with something new in the near future. Supply will have to drive demand. Modernization of the new ideology will only come when there is a supply of reformist ideas from above and a demand for them from below.
- The state ideology offers no overriding concept for the future; its foundation is Russia's past glory. In this sense, it may have a decidedly limited life span.
- The strategic problem facing the regime is: What can it offer the Russian people now that the Crimean card has been played?

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