



Between providence and revolution: Russian religious philosophical and Marxist interpretations of war and victory in the 1910s–1930s

Arseniy Kumankov^{1,2}

Received: 22 June 2025 / Accepted: 27 November 2025
© The Author(s) 2025

Abstract

This article examines the intellectual history of war and victory in early twentieth-century Russia, focusing on two distinct traditions: Russian religious philosophy and early Soviet Marxist thought. While differing profoundly in worldview and method, both traditions conceptualized victory as more than a military outcome, reflecting on its moral, political, and even ontological legitimacy. Within the religious–philosophical tradition, a whole range of positions can be identified: from radical Slavophile notions of war as a means of securing Russia’s long-overdue distinctiveness (Ern, Bulgakov) to more universalist views that emphasized the necessity for Russia to follow a path of reconciliation and service to all humanity (Frank). What united these thinkers, however, was their shared conviction that Russian people held a spiritual mission and Russia could be transfigured through war. By contrast, Marxist theorists (Lenin, Bukharin, Trotsky) interpreted war through the lens of historical materialism and political pragmatism, presenting victory in the Civil War as a teleologically necessary stage in the global struggle for emancipation and socialism. Despite their differences, these discourses converged in attributing world-historical significance to war and triumph in it, thereby legitimizing violence and structuring moral justifications for authorities.

Keywords Russian religious philosophy · Soviet Marxism · Victory · War · Legitimacy · Eschatology · Teleology · Discourse of war

Introduction

This article is conceived as the preliminary part of a broader study devoted to the genealogy of the official discourse on war and victory in post-Soviet Russia. In contemporary Russian political culture, war is understood not only as an instrument of

✉ A. Kumankov
adkumankov@gmail.com

¹ Department of Russian Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Mainz, Germany

² The Independent Institute of Philosophy, Paris, France

foreign policy, but also as an event endowed with symbolic and even sacral meaning (Malinova 2017; Smytsnyuk 2023). Such a perspective is not new; rather, it is deeply rooted in an established intellectual tradition. If an armed conflict begins, it is not enough merely to end it; it must be brought to a conclusion in the form of a tangible, significant victory. A peace agreement without triumph and without reaffirmation of Russia's status as a great power is insufficient. Ideally, such a victory would possess world-historical significance and alter the paradigm of international relations (as in the victory over Napoleon in 1812), or serve the spiritual perfection of humanity led by Russia (as was expected as the outcome of the First World War or the world revolution that Soviet international involvement was supposed to bring on).

In this system of coordinates, the termination of a conflict, whether armed or even nonviolent, appears incomplete unless accompanied by an appreciable victory. The true end of the war is possible only in the form of a victory endowed with world-historical meaning—whether “the salvation of Europe from itself” (as Russian religious philosophers of the early twentieth century hoped), the world revolution (in its Leninist–Trotskyist formulation), or the Great Victory of 1945. In earlier periods, the cult of victory in the Great October Socialist Revolution played a significant role in Soviet thought of the interwar years (and later, in the 1940s–1960s). Yet over time this was supplemented and gradually overshadowed by the cult of the Great Victory (Gabowitsch 2021; Torbakov 2018).

Thus, in the Russian (hereafter referring to the prerevolutionary, imperial period) and Soviet intellectual and political tradition of the twentieth century, the dominant conviction was established that the most meaningful element of war is triumphant victory, rather than, for example, the mourning of the fallen, the search for reconciliation, or the critique of violence as such. As the well-known Soviet song declared: “We will not stand for the price.”

This article seeks to compare the principal approaches to justifying war and interpreting victory that emerged in Russian and Soviet intellectual life in the first half of the twentieth century. I identify two traditions that have left a significant mark on Russian-speaking thought. One of them is Russian religious philosophy, which flourished in the early twentieth century. At that time, the authors analyzed in this paper such as Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Semyon Frank, Evgeny Trubetskoy, Ivan Ilyin, Fyodor Stepun, Vladimir Ern, and many others created a specific intellectual Russian-speaking environment. These philosophers, forming a distinct intellectual tradition of the early twentieth century, are important as their writings offer some of the most systematic and influential philosophical projects in Russian thought of that period. They were trying to integrate Orthodox Christian theology with philosophical exploration of ethics, history, culture, and the human condition. It is telling that in most comprehensive histories of Russian thought religious philosophers (along with Marxists) are seen as representing the most productive and prominent group of thinkers in the first half of the twentieth century (see, for example, Copleston 1986, pp. 201–399; Zenkovsky 2003, pp. 729–916). Another important tradition is Russian Marxism, which subsequently, after the Russian Revolution, became Soviet. Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, Emelyan Yaroslavsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Joseph Stalin discussed at that time Marxist stances on military violence, which they would soon use as principles for building a Soviet state. The central research question regarding these traditions is: how was war

and victory conceptualized in Russian religious philosophy and in Soviet Marxist thought?

There exist a number of studies devoted to war in Russian and Soviet philosophy, yet they remain relatively limited in scope. General observations on Russian religious–philosophical reflections on war can be found in works such as (Biriukov 2025; Dobrokhoto 2014; Kashnikov 2012; Kumankov 2014; Minchenko 2024; Robinson and Antonov 2021; Skvortsov 2001). By contrast, the treatment of war within Russian Marxism is even less extensively explored, and systematic philosophical discussions of victory are particularly scarce. The existing scholarship tends to focus instead on sociological, anthropological, or political-science analyses of the Russian/Soviet military strategy (Fabian 2019; Fridman 2021; Pynnöniemi 2018; Vigor 2021), Russian officials' militant rhetoric (Allison 2024; Pateman and Pateman 2025), or cult of the Great Victory and its development (Gabowitsch 2021; Gudkov 2005; Malinova 2017; Monaghan 2008), rather than on the philosophical interpretations of war and victory itself in Russian thought.

The aim of this study is to analyze the approaches to justification of war and interpretations of victory offered by Russian religious philosophers of the early twentieth century and by early Soviet Marxist thinkers. Fundamentally, the first correlation of these two traditions begins with the fact that these are mainly ideas that appeared and were discussed in the 1910s–1930s. In this study, victory is understood as success in war and the defeat of a military adversary. I intend to reveal how these approaches legitimized war and endowed victory with moral and political significance.

The method of this study combines historical–philosophical analysis with historical contextualization. For each of the two traditions, three analytical nodes are examined. The ontology of victory—what makes victory meaningful: divine providence, spiritual transfiguration, or historical necessity. The ethics of victory—does it justify violence, and if so, in what register: universalist, eschatological, or teleological. The political function of victory—how victory is used to legitimize power and construct identity.

It is worth explaining why precisely these two traditions can and should be analyzed together. At first glance, Russian religious philosophy, with its moralism and often eschatological motifs, and Soviet Marxism, with its historical–materialist determinism, appear as stark opposites. Yet in post-Soviet Russia we observe a paradoxical return to both sources: to the Soviet legacy and simultaneously to the philosophical religious and nationalist thought once rejected by the Soviets (Laruelle 2024, pp. 16–17; Robinson 2019, pp. 183–214; Suslov and Uzlaner 2019, pp. 12–14; Zavoronkov 2024). Their coexistence in contemporary discourse demonstrates that political ideas, including conceptions of war and victory, are interpreted in an eclectic manner in present-day Russia, capable of bringing together even opposing worldviews if they help in legitimizing foreign and domestic policy.

To a certain extent, we can speak of an intellectual dialog between Russian religious philosophy and Marxism. Several religious philosophers, such as Berdyaev and Frank, were deeply influenced by and even fascinated with socialism. In their social philosophy of the 1920s and 1930s, they often reflected on the experience of the Russian Civil War and the construction of the Soviet state. For the Bolsheviks, however, these thinkers periodically became targets of criticism. For example, as early as

1935, Bukharin—though somewhat ironically—referred to Berdyaev as “a mastodon of ‘our’ religious-philosophical movement,” mentioning his intellectual association with the “priest” Sergei Bulgakov (Bukharin 1935, p. 2). Yet Berdyaev was not a merely rhetorical opponent for Bukharin, but a serious one: analyzing Berdyaev’s “The Fate of Man in the Modern World,” Bukharin claimed that it contained “all the constituent elements of a fascist worldview” (Bukharin 1935, p. 2).

The basis for comparing these two traditions lies in another respect as well. Both Russian religious philosophy and early Soviet Marxism advanced not partial interpretations but totalizing, world-explaining conceptions of war and victory. Turning to them makes it possible to trace how victory came to be invested with the highest legitimacy—either within a religious horizon (victory as spiritual transfiguration) or within a historical–materialist horizon (victory as the emblem of social progress). These concepts not only justified war, but also structured the moral foundations of power and violence, leaving a lasting legacy to which contemporary Russian political discourse continues to appeal.

The central empirical points of reference in reflections on war differed between religious philosophers and Bolshevik thinkers. For the former, the primary event shaping their views was the First World War, followed later by the Civil War. For the latter, the key historical experience was the Revolution itself. Yet despite focusing on different events, both intellectual traditions sought to derive universal insights about the moral meaning of war and the role of struggle in human history.

Finally, it should be noted that any comparison between Russian religious philosophy and Marxism faces an obvious limitation rooted in the institutional inequality of these intellectual traditions. The Bolshevik rise to power enabled their theorists to become the ruling elite, turning political philosophers into state actors. As a result, the comparison is inherently asymmetrical: on one side stand thinkers who developed theoretical reflections, while on the other are those who not only implemented their ideas in practice but later had to interpret and justify that practice through theory.

Russian religious philosophy on war

The issues of war and peace were not central to Russian philosophy during the imperial period. However, we can find references to this theme in the works of many prominent nineteenth-century authors, including Fyodor Dostoevsky, Konstantin Leontiev, Leo Tolstoy, and Vladimir Solovyov. Of course, historians, military theorists, and strategists, as well as Russian lawyers and diplomats, had their own traditions of interpreting wars. However, it has become a common theme among Russian intellectuals. After 1914, many now-renowned Russian religious philosophers enthusiastically engage in debates on war and its significance for Russia. In a symbolic sense, one might say, most Russian religious philosophers rejected Tolstoyanism and sought to justify war through a variety of arguments.¹ It is important to note, particularly in light of the question of their influence on contemporary official Russian

¹The polemic with Tolstoy’s ideas would become an important task for many Russian philosophers in later years as a reaction to the revolution and the civil war. Tolstoy was accused either of passively accepting evil or of contributing to the moral disintegration of Russian society that made the Bolsheviks’ rise to power

discourse, that these philosophers primarily operated within a religious framework. As Christian thinkers, they approached social and political problems from a Christian perspective rather than a secular or religiously neutral standpoint.

Several common elements can be identified in the approaches of Russian religious philosophers. Firstly, they believed that war could serve as a catalyst for the mystical unification of the nation and the establishment of harmony between the people and the Tsar (Bulgakov 2005a, p. 314). In this sense, the sacred nature of war manifested itself in compelling Russians to believe in Russia. The sin of disbelief had afflicted the Russian people, but war provided the means for overcoming it. Russia, in turn, had the opportunity to purify itself of this sin and undergo spiritual rebirth. In this struggle against both external and internal enemies, the Orthodox spiritual knights Peresvet and Oslabya were seen as guiding figures—monks who nonetheless participated in war.

Secondly, Russian religious philosophers shared a common approach to justifying war, which consisted in revealing its spiritual essence. The justification of war was achieved by pointing to a special mission entrusted to the Fatherland. To refuse to fight at the moment when Russia's "world-historical task" (Trubetskoi 1915) was at stake would mean betraying the homeland. The uniqueness of Russia's historical mission necessitated difficult decisions, including the waging of war, thereby elevating the significance of victory. It is important to emphasize that the discussion was not about any war, but specifically about the Great War—the First World War.

And thirdly, what is particularly noteworthy is that many thinkers perceived the First World War not as a geopolitical confrontation or an imperialist struggle, but rather as a conflict between West and East, between Europe and Russia, or even between Russia and the entire world. Similar sentiments had already emerged during the Crimean War and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 (Hellman 2009, p. 9).

While agreeing on the general characterization of war, philosophers diverged in their interpretations of its meaning. These differences in interpretation had far deeper foundations than the broadly used, albeit often inaccurate, division of Russian thought into Slavophiles and Westernizers. Several distinct approaches to the interpretation of war's meaning can be identified among Russian religious philosophers.

For example, Sergei Bulgakov and Vladimir Ern saw the ongoing conflict as a battle between two worlds, two civilizations—the struggle of a spiritually enlightened Russia against the "civilised barbarism" of the West. For Bulgakov and Ern, war represented a value conflict between the West and God-chosen Russia, which was destined to realize its lofty vocation. Bulgakov and Ern found the meaning of war in the religious and spiritual sphere. Perhaps the most radical expression of this worldview can be found in Pavel Florensky's reflections on the war. For him, war was inseparable from the sins that had accumulated and defiled the people and the Fatherland. As a practice bound to the shedding of blood, war itself became a means of purification. Its very apologia was thus linked to the attribution of a redemptive

inevitable (Berdyayev 1994, p. 470; 2009, pp. 695–697; Ilyin 1975; see on criticism of Tolstoy in Russian religious philosophy: Gel'fond 2009; Troitskiĭ 2018). Peter Bojanic makes an original observation in this regard, noting that resistance to Tolstoy by Russian religious philosophers ultimately "incorporated a kind of 'original' Tolstoy into" their approaches to justifying force as a legitimate means of countering evil, even as violence as an act of aggression continued to be rejected (Bojanic 2020, p. 660).

meaning: war was to “serve as a pledge of our renewal” (Florenskiy 1997, p. 161). Yet Florensky represents the extreme pole of this spiritual logic, in which war appears above all as a means of cardinal cleansing.

By contrast, Evgeny Trubetskoy and Nikolai Berdyaev were united in their conviction that the war signified a turning point after which Russia would be able to fulfill its historical mission. Here, too, one finds a belief in the divine predestination of Russia’s special role. However, for Berdyaev and Trubetskoy, victory would signify not only Russia’s triumph but also its integration with the Western world. Spiritual and cultural differences would dissolve once Russia had deciphered its own national enigma—an enigma that lay in the recognition of its liberating mission and the necessity of determining the fate of European nations. Thus, for Trubetskoy and Berdyaev, the justification of war extended into the political or even cultural–political sphere. Its victorious completion will signify a transgression in national and cultural spheres, as well as the activation of the most significant, though perhaps currently dormant, forces of the Russian people.

War is, in essence, a struggle for the transfiguration of Russia, for the activation of her spiritual and creative principle. Russia must remain mindful of her universal culture and religiosity, in contrast to the nationalism of the Russian state and the Church. Genuine victory can be linked only to a spiritual effort undertaken after the war. The “unveiling of Christ within the individual and the nation” will mark the beginning of a new Russia (Berdyaev 2005b, p. 283).

Finally, Semyon Frank and Fyodor Stepun discerned the meaning of war in the moral domain. The question of the right to use force required answering a fundamental ethical question: what values were being upheld in war? According to Frank, “the search for the meaning of war, whatever it may be, must be subordinated to the overarching requirement that the truth for which the war is waged be truly universal, equally necessary not only for us but also for our adversary” (Frank 2005a, pp. 410–411). Thus, paradoxically, the struggle was not merely about military victory but also about moral victory for all participants in the conflict. Victory was to bring about harmony in the world and the realization of a universal principle of justice based on shared fundamental values.

It is worth examining these concepts of war in more detail. Evgeny Trubetskoy took a relatively moderate position. He combined universalist ideas—Russia as a hegemon, liberating rather than enslaving peoples—with neo-Slavophile ideas declaring the need to occupy Constantinople, the Bosphorus, and Dardanelles Straits, or the annexation of Western Armenian lands. In Evgeny Trubetskoy’s interpretation, Russia’s victory in the First World War was conceived not as an end in itself, but as a means of liberating oppressed nations and overcoming the crises of European civilization. Russia, in his vision, was to attain global hegemony as a result of victory—not for the sake of expansion or domination, but in pursuit of a universal mission, the “general political rebirth of all subjugated nationalities” (Trubetskoi 1915, p. 11). Freedom, both democratic and political, appeared to him as the ultimate outcome of the war. After 1917, he would even describe the revolution as a victory precisely because he saw in it a chance to extend freedom to all peoples. At the same time, Trubetskoy clearly warned that world supremacy carried inherent moral dangers: the evil fate that hangs over victors and world leaders threatens every nation that succumbs to the temptation of world primacy and “puts to sleep the spiritual forces of

the victorious people and thereby condemns them to death” (Trubetskoi 1915, p. 13). In other words, only the moral and cultural task alone can justify world power. From this perspective, Russia could preserve its “global task” only if victory were not an act of national egoism, but an expression of a Christian attitude toward other nations.

For this reason, victory for Trubetskoy was both a matter of the freedom of the world’s peoples and a question of life and death for Russia itself (Trubetskoi 2005, p. 397). Defeat threatened not only external losses, but also internal collapse—the destruction of democratic gains and the danger of renewed despotism. However, victory in itself did not mean relaxation. By contrast, victory was imagined as an examination on which the future of Russian freedom would depend. Along with claim of spiritual effort, Trubetskoy firmly rejected compromise peace formulas such as “peace without annexations,” insisting that democracy in both Russia and Europe required the complete destruction of German imperialism and the monarchic system. At the same time, he argued for the transfer of certain Turkish territories and for Russia’s continuing role as protector of small nations. Victory, in his view, could not be achieved by one country alone; it demanded the solidarity of all the world’s democracies against the “league of monarchies.” In this way, his conception fused Russia’s national interests with a universal moral task—the Christian resolution of the national question.

In discussing the causes of war, Bulgakov identified a crisis in modern European civilization, which he attributed to its rationalism, egocentrism, and, most importantly, capitalism. Understanding the meaning of war required answering the question of who was responsible for it and why Western civilization was in decline. The answer, according to Bulgakov, was evident: war was a consequence of “national-economic rivalry, a product of the struggle for power and wealth, for world hegemony, aimed at the political and economic enslavement of the *orbis terrarum*” (Bulgakov 2005a, p. 305). Capitalism, within the framework of national states, exacerbated competition in Europe, particularly between the major economies of Britain and Germany. Amid this spiritual crisis of Western civilization, Russia had the duty to “save Europe from itself” (Bulgakov 2005b, p. 370) by pointing the way to salvation—the path to the Heavenly City. The war, therefore, is perceived as a spiritual awakening, and victory in it opens the way to liberation from philistinism and lack of faith. Although this seems to be a common perspective for all the peoples involved in the war, Russia is distinguished by Bulgakov as a unique nation with more successes on the path of spiritual correction.

Similarly, Ern asserted that “the proud, materialistic, external German idea collides with the humble, spiritual, and internal Russian idea” (Ern 2005a, p. 441). Responding to Solovyov’s famous question to Russia—“What kind of East do you wish to be? The East of Xerxes or the East of Christ?” (Solov’ev 1970, p. 28)—Ern simply refused to see in Russia the traits of despotism, ignorance, and inertia, instead accusing Emperor Wilhelm of imitating Xerxes. Christian Russia was forced to solve the problems of the Western world, a task requiring the utmost national effort and a deep sense of responsibility. Only under these conditions could Russia become a legitimate world leader, one that Europe would follow. Ern emphasizes that the suffering endured and the victories achieved or yet forthcoming are not meant to allow Russia to “trail behind European history.” The only subordination that Russia can permit itself, he insists, is a spiritual one. Russia must “humbly bow before Providence, which calls her to great historical activity” (Ern 2005b, p. 449). The Russian

people are thus assigned the role of a creative force capable of resolving the crises and contradictions of European culture, harmonizing them with global cultures or civilizations, and thereby revealing their own universal essence.

However, was Russia truly so far removed from the East of Xerxes? The danger of neglecting internal spiritual work was clearly recognized by Frank: “The fact that we are fighting against a new paganism does not in itself make us an army of Christ” (Frank 2005b, p. 439). Just as Byzantium did not escape invasion from the East, so too was Russia constantly at risk of disappearing. Christ’s teachings guided Russia on its great path, but the weaknesses and vices of the Russian people—laziness, malice, and irresponsibility—remained well known. These unresolved dilemmas cast doubt on Russia’s ability to fulfill its divine mission.

Here, too, according to Frank, a logical error becomes apparent—one that is easily committed when reflecting on war. “The moral consciousness of humanity,” the philosopher writes, “cannot relinquish the faith that victory is destined for the just cause, that truth is a force capable of overcoming falsehood” (Frank 2005b, p. 416). At the beginning of the war, Germany appeared corrupt, while Russia’s own weaknesses were disregarded. This perception encouraged the belief that victory would be both easy and inevitable. German materialism and utilitarianism seemed inherently vicious and thus appeared to constitute sufficient grounds for triumph over an immoral foe. Such reasoning, however, merely reflected the mentality of the war’s early period, when the conflict was still viewed triumphally.

Over time, the tone and content of the philosophical debate changed. The protracted nature of the conflict exhausted not only the soldiers in the trenches but also the intellectual warriors. Military failures called into question the original sanctity of Russia’s mission, undermining faith in its spiritual purity and exceptional power. Frank captured this shift when he asked: had Russia made an error in its moral assessment of the enemy? His unsettling answer was that Germany, despite its spiritual decline, had nevertheless managed, through sheer force of will, to sustain its struggle effectively. Russia, by contrast, had failed to maintain the purity of its original purpose, resorting to unacceptable means of warfare and increasingly tolerating immorality and disgrace (Frank 2005b, p. 437). In this regard, the only solution Frank finds is to endow war, struggle, and victory with a personal dimension. The victorious success rests upon the personal responsibility of each person and as a matter of their individual conscience.

By 1918, in his essay “Reflections on the Nature of War,” Berdyaev no longer discerned any purifying meaning in war. To him, war appeared as both sinful and, nonetheless, necessary (Berdyaev 2005a). Only after the war—and he began writing about this as early as 1915—will it be possible to attain a true victory, one that can be achieved solely through spiritual exertion at the conclusion of armed fighting. The “revelation of Christ within the individual and the people” (Berdyaev 2005b) will inaugurate a new Russia. Genuine efforts, therefore, are made not in the course of the war itself, but upon its completion. This spiritual struggle he saw as a profound means of curing humanity’s spiritual ailments, without which health could not be restored. His conclusion: armed conflict is always paradoxical—it suppresses the darkness of worldly existence, yet the horrors and suffering it engenders preclude any optimistic view of it.

These changes are significant, as they demonstrate that Russian philosophers did not consider every war waged by Russia to be just or worth supporting. They were prepared to adopt a critical stance toward the actions of the Russian military, leadership, and government. Although the Great War was initially perceived as a spiritually transformative enterprise, over time, it ceased to be viewed as such. If one were to generalize the Russian religious philosophers' approach, two points are particularly relevant to their influence on contemporary Russian war discourse. First, these philosophers articulated a religious—and specifically Christian—doctrine of war, centered on divine providence, sin, and Christian unity. Second, based on this premise, their doctrine of war ultimately aimed at reconciliation with the world and, as we might say today, with the West. The goal of war was spiritual renewal and the overcoming of divisions, not the pursuit of geopolitical ambitions or the fragmentation of the world into rival civilizations.

Another Russian philosopher, Ivan Ilyin, deserves special mention. In his major works devoted to organized violence he was responding not only to the First World War (although to that as well) and the dynamics of combat during it, but more significantly to the Russian Revolution, the Civil War, the Bolshevik victory, and later the spread of fascist regimes. A detailed and concise exposition of Ilyin's ideas on violence can be found in Santeri Kytöneva's recent paper (Kytöneva 2025) as well as in Budraitskis (2016, 2022) and Robinson (2003). Alongside Alexander Dugin, Ilyin is arguably the most widely known Russian political philosopher, frequently cited as Vladimir Putin's favorite thinker or as an intellectual source of inspiration for contemporary Russian conservatism (Barbashin and Thoburn 2014, 2015; Budraitskis 2016, 2022; Laruelle 2016; Millerman 2022; Østbø 2016; Eltchaninoff 2018; Snyder 2019). However, the relationship between Ilyin and Dugin as well their impact on the views of Russian political leaders is neither straightforward nor direct. Still, Ilyin's reflections on violence, war, and Russia's enemies were, to borrow a physical analogy, synchronized with the mindset of Putin's political elite (see Pynnöniemi 2021, pp. 99–102).

Ivan Ilyin's reflections on war emerge from his broader moral and religious philosophy, particularly articulated in *On Resistance to Evil by Force* (1925). As the name suggests, it is supposed to be an explicit polemic with Leo Tolstoy's Christian preaching of nonviolence. Indeed, Ilyin "advocates active fighting against evil in the world" (van der Zweerde 2022, p. 135). For him, war is not simply a geopolitical or strategic phenomenon but a moral ordeal that places individuals and nations before the necessity of confronting evil. He rejects both absolute pacifism and unreflective militarism, instead positing that evil, when embodied in violence and aggression, must at times be resisted by force. This resistance is never a celebration of violence for its own sake; rather, it is justified as an act of moral duty, carried out with sorrow and reverence, what could be called a cross-bearing dimension of force. War thus becomes for Ilyin a tragic but at times unavoidable task, in which violence acquires legitimacy only insofar as it is animated by spiritual prudence.

At the same time, Ilyin develops a vision of war as a religious and national vocation. He famously described the ideal of a Christ-loving army, a collective that resists evil not for conquest or domination but for the defense of truth, faith, and the moral order. This concept sought to sacralize military service, casting the soldier as a moral

agent who, through discipline and sacrifice, participates in a divine struggle against evil. In this sense, victory in war was not to be understood as the annihilation of an enemy, but as the vindication of a higher moral order that preserves the spiritual essence of the nation.

Victory, in Ilyin's thought, is associated with the overcoming of evil in the human soul—not only in one's own soul, but also in that of the enemy. In this violent compulsion toward the good, true love for the other and for the good itself is revealed. In the social sphere, the guarantee of victory lies in the solidarity of state and people “in their understanding of evil and good and in their common will to reject evil” (Ilyin 1975, p. 155). As we can see, war and victory are interpreted as a joint spiritual effort. That makes Ilyin insist that not every war receives spiritual justification, but each carries spiritual significance for the state. War itself, insofar as it can be justified as a spiritual effort, must lead to a national spiritual ascent. And this ascent, “if achieved and maintained at the proper height, excludes any defeat” (Ilyin 1915, p. 48). A spirited army knows no defeat. Fyodor Stepun, unlike most Russian philosophers—having himself served in the army during the First World War—anticipated such speculations when he wrote: “Oh Lord, how easy it is to write about war without having rolled one's gun carriage over the legs protruding from the earth. Here are meaning, and history, and freedom, and a new culture...” (Stepun 1926, p. 21). However, importantly, Ilyin does not write about abstract Christian warriors, but about Orthodox Russian fighters, first against German imperialism, then against Bolshevism. Ilyin's synthesis of patriotism, Christian ethics, and justification of violence endowed his writings with lasting influence, providing contemporary Russian national-patriotic, religious or military audiences with a symbolic vocabulary to frame war as both a moral trial and a sacred duty to protect and uphold spiritual uplift of the nation. And in this sense, he turns out to be in demand and relevant in the political rhetoric of the modern Russian authorities.

Soviet thought on war in the interwar period

The Russian Marxist tradition constitutes another crucial element in the spectrum of Russian-language approaches to the problem of war and peace. It is particularly interesting—and in many ways unique—because, in the wake of the October Revolution of 1917, its theorists were not confined to the role of intellectual commentators but became political actors who seized and exercised state power. Whereas religious philosophers treated war primarily as an object of spiritual and moral reflection, Marxist thinkers redefined it as a practical instrument of revolutionary strategy, inseparably linked to class struggle, proletarian internationalism, and the anticipation of world revolution. Religious philosophers might have expected to have an intellectual impact on political debates, but Marxist thinkers faced the radical, practical tasks of fighting for power during the civil war, and then defend the “Socialist Homeland.” Within this framework, war and victory acquired a distinct conceptual meaning: no longer an eschatological transfiguration or a moral trial, but an historically determined stage in the progression of class dynamics. Victory was not to be understood as the spiritual renewal of the nation, but as the necessary outcome of socioeconomic forces, securing the triumph of a new social order.

It may seem that the Marxist understanding of war is focused exclusively on its political interpretation or economic roots of belligerence, which does not require moral argumentation. Vladimir Lenin proposed interpreting war solely as a political phenomenon (with politics reflecting socioeconomic conditions). Criticizing the “social chauvinism” of Plekhanov and Kautsky, Lenin referred to Clausewitz and emphasized the relevance of his famous thesis for the Marxist tradition:

“War is simply the continuation of politics by other (specifically violent) means.” This is the formulation of Clausewitz, one of the great writers on military history, whose ideas were influenced by Hegel. And this has always been the viewpoint of Marx and Engels, who considered every war as a continuation of the politics of the states involved—and of the different classes within them—at a given moment. (Lenin 1969a, p. 224)

Outside the Marxist context, Clausewitz is often considered one of the forerunners of political realism, which regards ethical consideration of political issues—including war and peace—as difficult, if not outright false. Lenin and Stalin (despite differences in their views), perceived war as an expression of class antagonism, which can again be interpreted as a demand for a nonethical interpretation of wars. Nevertheless, a peculiar ethical perspective on war can still be traced in the writings of Soviet theorists.

A central element of the Soviet Marxist justification of war was Lenin’s theory of “transforming the imperialist war into a civil war.” Here, war was not conceived as a clash between states or nations, but as the intensification of contradictions within the global capitalist system. According to Lenin, an imperialist war inevitably generated crises among the ruling classes and opened the possibility of revolutionary upheaval. Within this horizon, victory was understood not as the military triumph of one state over another, but as the political triumph of the proletariat, which, by utilizing the war for its own needs, could dismantle the old social order and lay the foundations of a new one. This shift of focus—war that is waged not for a national victory but for international class victory—decisively shaped the Soviet discourse on war in the first decades after the revolution and further.

Violence and conflict are understood in Marxism as historically and socially conditioned practices. Marx famously claimed that “violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.” Lenin’s legitimization of violence was far more radical: “Without violence against the oppressors who hold the instruments and organs of power, it is impossible to free the people from their oppressors” (Lenin 1969b, p. 382). This perspective also determines a specific attitude toward war. Military violence is permissible if it serves the goals of emancipation:

We fully recognise the legitimacy, progressiveness, and necessity of civil wars, i.e., wars of the oppressed class against the oppressing class, of slaves against slave owners, of serfs against landlords, of wage workers against the bourgeoisie. (Lenin 1969c, p. 311)

or:

Socialists always take the side of the oppressed and, therefore, cannot be opponents of wars whose goal is a democratic or socialist struggle against oppression. (Lenin 1973a, p. 262)

In another context, when discussing the moral education of the working class, Lenin emphasized the moral significance of struggle, calling for revolutionary war “against the concrete bearers of evil” (Lenin 1973b, p. 91). Here, struggle is justified and deemed necessary precisely because a struggle is directed against evil and is being waged for the liberation of the world from it.

A rather precise Marxist typology of wars was presented by Dmitry Nikolaevich Fedotov-White, a Russian naval officer and participant in the White movement, who was arguably the only author to provide a systematic overview of early Soviet philosophy of war. Fedotov-White identified three types of wars within the Russian Marxism. The first type is an imperialist war waged by bourgeois governments, including wars aimed at combating communism, the Soviet system, and the USSR itself. This type of war may include elements of what we would now call “hybrid warfare,” such as the stimulation of civil war within the Soviet state. The strategy of Bolshevik participation in such wars should primarily focus on ideological critique, exposing the true nature of such conflicts, and propaganda work to transform them from international conflicts into revolutionary civil wars. The second type consists of properly revolutionary class wars, which are progressive and just. The third type involves struggles for the liberation of oppressed nations, which then evolve into revolutionary proletarian wars (Fedotoff White 1936, pp. 324–325).

“History, as such, entrusted the USSR with a universal mission: the defense of culture” (Bukharin 2008, p. 235). Capitalist and imperialist states, and especially fascist ones, were seen “to reveal an ever-deepening spiritual impoverishment and an increasing barbarization of human relations, everyday life, and ideology.” In contrast, progress and cultural development were thought to exist in their most concentrated form within the USSR. Hence, the historical task of defending the Soviet Union was equated with “the defense of the entire future of culture” (Bukharin 2008, p. 230). This was how Bukharin justified the legitimacy of that defense, but this approach itself remained significant until the collapse of the USSR.

To this typology, one should add the tendency among Marxist authors of the 1910s–1930s to classify wars as either just or unjust (Stalin 1938, p. 161). While reiterating that war manifests the antagonism of class relations, Soviet theorists began to seek ways to morally justify and legitimize military violence. Arguments in favor of war were found not only in historical materialism but also in political pragmatism and, most notably for our purposes, in the moral sphere. In his 1938 article *Their Morality and Ours*, Leon Trotsky effectively argues that revolutionary civil war is not immoral, as it might seem when considering it as an act of brutal violence and the violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Rather it must be viewed as a justified war, since it is literally an act of self-defense by the oppressed against the oppressor (Trotsky 1992, pp. 230–231; 235). A similar position—moral reasoning in terms of ends and means—is expressed by Stalin in 1940 in his reflection on the Soviet–Finnish War. He emphasizes the need to secure Leningrad as a crucial military–industrial center and as a city whose potential occupation by bourgeois and White Guard forces would lead to a new civil war (precisely the kind of hybrid, imperialist war noted by Fedotov-White). At the same time, however, the war against Finland is presented as a forced measure and an extreme necessity: “Since peace negotiations with Finland yielded no results, and the security of Leningrad had to

be ensured unconditionally, for its security is the security of our homeland” (Stalin 1997, p. 347).

War is thus portrayed as permissible only as an exceptional, last resort. This is a crucial conclusion (which, moreover, is placed at the beginning of a speech addressed to military commanders). At least rhetorically, it was not enough for Stalin to provide a political interpretation of war; it was also important to emphasize its status as the least desirable and acceptable means of achieving goals. War as such is abnormal, and only when compelled by extreme necessity—namely, the necessity of securing a safe future—does the USSR launch an attack. Remarkably, this happens only after all peaceful means have been exhausted. This assessment, which contains a moral critique and imposes a limitation on war, was probably just a rhetorical device, but nevertheless, it was publicly proclaimed and spread among Soviet public thinkers and officials.

The culmination of a justified struggle was conceived as the emancipation of the working masses. Such a victory in a revolutionary war would make it possible to break the vicious cycle of relations between victor and defeated. In cases where the defeated were not annihilated, they inevitably fell under the domination of the victor, who in turn “was in general able to accelerate economic growth and development at the expense of the defeated, and by annexations and contributions increase his economic position” (Kára 1968, p. 8). In other words, war typically ended in the unjust domination of one of its participants. Exploitation, in turn, provoked resentment, revanchism, and new wars. In Marxist theory, however, victory and the expansion of socialist forces were supposed to rupture this vicious circle of violence and counter-violence.

In practice, the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia raised the question of coexistence between a socialist state and capitalist ones. The choice between peaceful coexistence (a position adopted by Lenin after the triumph of the revolution in Russia and later developed by Stalin) and an aggressive policy of exporting revolution (advocated by Bukharin and Trotsky) was ultimately resolved in favor of the former. Yet this decision did not imply finality. Peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world after the victory of socialism in one country meant only a temporary suspension of armed struggle (Kára 1968, p. 20; Moellendorf 1994, pp. 272–276). War with the capitalist state as a means of supporting or defending the gains of the socialist revolution has always been regarded as a justified means. This approach makes the Soviet tradition close to the just war theory, although it does not completely coincide with it.

Militarism—the position of total moral justification and even glorification of war—was explicitly rejected by Bolshevik thinkers as associated with ideological rivals. As Tukhachevsky wrote, “Capitalism entails a tremendous development of militarism. In the era of imperialism, armaments and wars become unprecedentedly grandiose” (Tukhachevskii 1964, p. 3). Lenin, in his work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, provides a detailed analysis of the militarization of capitalist ideology in the imperialist era. Imperialist capitalism cannot function without a constant struggle for new markets and favorable conditions for its own monopolies; often, this struggle takes directly military forms, including occupation, colonial conquests, and world wars. With the collapse of capitalism, militarism would be eradicated, and wars would cease (Lenin 1969d, pp. 304–305; 376; 371–382).

However, pacifism was also rejected. The origins of this rejection can again be found in Lenin, who developed Marx's ideas. Pacifism was described as "one of the forms of deceiving the working class" (Lenin 1969e, p. 165) because it represents an abstract sermon on peace. Grigory Zinoviev formulated this even more harshly: "Marxism is a militant revolutionary doctrine of the proletariat, fundamentally hostile to petty-bourgeois sighs for eternal peace" (Zinov'ev 1930, p. 49). The danger of pacifism was seen also in its counterrevolutionary nature. As stated in the 1932 textbook "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," imperialism likewise creates conditions for opportunism among the upper strata of the working class, corrupted by the bourgeoisie. These groups, having split away from the proletariat, transform into "social fascists," whose task is to oppose the world revolution "under the banner of pacifist slogans about disarmament" (Mitin and Razumovskii 1932, p. 241).

What is meant here, of course, is (petty-) bourgeois pacifism. According to Lenin, the bourgeoisie uses promises to rid their nations of wars as a means to deter the proletariat from revolution—this is what makes pacifism abstract or illusory. The "preaching" of nonviolence by Leo Tolstoy was also seen as limited: while he was correct in denouncing the ruling class's obsession with militarism, he was ultimately utopian and reactionary for rejecting active forms of struggle against this class (Lenin 1973c, pp. 70–71; 1973d, pp. 102–104). Bolsheviks, as Stalin proclaimed, were ready to attack when conditions were favorable for them, and maybe even praised the beginning of another imperialist struggle in 1939 (van Ree 2002, p. 225). However, we cannot recognize this political philosophy as absolutely militaristic. Marxist–Leninist doctrine assumed the possibility of eliminating wars through the transition to communism, and in this sense, it was seen to its adherents as more progressive and just. Numerous examples can be adduced to illustrate this thesis. For instance, Emelyan Yaroslavsky writes on this subject: "Only communism creates the conditions for people to live without class struggle, because communism abolishes the division of people into classes; it also allows for life without war, since it eliminates all the causes that lead to wars" (Iaroslavskii 1958, p. 106). A very similar passage can also be found in Bukharin's works: "Socialism, possessing fundamentally unique historical prerequisites never before seen, eradicates the contradictions of capitalism and ultimately brings an end to wars as well" (2008, p. 194). In other words, the ultimate goal of the Soviet Marxist thinkers was precisely a world without war, that made Bolshevik's ideology of war messianic in turn (Robinson and Antonov 2021, pp. 405–406) and in its ultimate form, it attains absolute pacifism.

It is particularly important to point out the complexity of studying Soviet thought, which is linked to the gradual decline in polemics and discussion as well as the ossification of language. Specifically, the philosophical and theoretical dimension of research on war was hollowed out and subordinated to the form of discourse that M. M. Bakhtin called "authoritative discourse," whose semantic structure is "immobile and dead because it is finalised and unambiguous," in which "meaning is dominated by the letter and petrifies" (Bakhtin 1975, p. 156). The development of philosophical problems in the USSR increasingly came to be determined by the necessity of aligning research results with ideological dogma. In all areas of philosophy, the "dishonest references to Marx and Engels," which Lenin had criticized as a weakness in Plekhanov and Kautsky, became the norm. The views of Marx and Engels were

canonized, and this was even more true for the views of Lenin and Stalin. Leaders of the Soviet state were in their turn canonized as prophets of Marxism. This state of affairs had particularly significant consequences in the military sphere, where after the end of the Great Patriotic War, the timeless moral authority of victory and Stalin's role in achieving it made it possible to disregard the need for discussion on the moral dimension of war, as all answers and evaluations had already been predetermined.

Conclusion

Both Russian religious philosophy and Soviet Marxism conceived of war as a phenomenon exceeding sheer brutality and violence, and of victory as an achievement surpassing the limits of military success. Both traditions saturated war and victory with ontological, ethical, and political significance. In ontological terms, both traditions treated victory as an event of world-historical importance: religious thinkers saw it as an act of transfiguration of Russian nation or the whole world, while Marxists regarded it as the inevitable outcome of historical necessity rooted in class struggle. Ethically, each tradition sought to legitimize violence, though in different registers. Religious philosophers often justified it in eschatological or universalist terms, construing war as a path to a national purification and the fulfillment of Russia's Christian mission, whereas Marxists grounded their justification in teleology—violence was legitimate if it accelerated the demise of capitalism and advanced emancipation. Politically, both traditions mobilized victory to legitimize authority: for the religious philosophers, victory affirmed Russia's mission as a spiritual hegemon and new global leader, while for Soviet Marxists, it underpinned the legitimacy of the socialist state and its global revolutionary vocation.

Yet the differences are also worth paying attention to. Religious philosophy interpreted victory through the language of sin, redemption, and spiritual rebirth, emphasizing Russia's eschatological role as a bearer of divine mission and Christian reconciliation. By contrast, Soviet Marxism rejected metaphysical explanations, defining war as a continuation of politics by violent means and victory as a teleologically determined stage in the class struggle. The religious tradition valorized the unity of state and people and attributed a divine destiny to this unity. The case, the war and the military successes obtained a meaning relevant to a certain part of humanity. The Marxist tradition of the 1910s–1930s insisted on the primacy of class solidarity and international proletarianism, which transcended the borders of one state and did not focus on one nation or one church.² At its extreme, military violence has been justified on the grounds of its purported association with the greater good of all humanity. In their political functions, the trajectories diverged too: religious thinkers sought to position Russia as a universal Christian mediator between nations, while Marxists framed the Soviet Union as the instigator and defender of a revolution that will eventually destroy national differences. This granted legitimacy to the USSR's military campaigns,

²The conceptualization of war in the context of the development of nationalist ideology and the mass perception of Russian national identity under Stalin lies beyond the scope of this article (see: Brandenberger 2002).

whether in promoting revolution abroad or in defending the achievements of October by military means when necessary.

These two patterns—spiritual eschatology and historical teleology—have not disappeared or suppressed one another but continue to coexist in contemporary Russian political culture as resources for casting bullets of officials' military rhetoric. Their combination helps to explain the eclectic character of today's rhetoric, in which religious and messianic motifs stand alongside critiques of Western imperialism and capitalism. Rather than clashing, the eclectic foundations of post-Soviet conservatism tend to reinforce each other (Curanović 2022), particularly in the military sphere, where the cult of victory and heroism predominates.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Professor Mischa Gabowitsch for his generous intellectual support during the development of this article. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers, whose rigorous and insightful comments greatly contributed to making the text more sound, focused, and conceptually precise.

Author contributions The author solely conceived, researched, and wrote the manuscript. All theoretical frameworks, primary and secondary sources, and interpretive conclusions were developed independently by the author. The author also prepared the final version of the manuscript and is responsible for its content in its entirety.

Funding information Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL. No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

Data Availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Allison, Roy. 2024. Russia's case for war against Ukraine: Legal claims, political rhetoric, and instrumentality in a fracturing international order. *Problems of Post-Communism* 71(3):271–282.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. 1975. *Voprosy literatury i estetiki: Issledovaniya raznykh let*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura.
- Barbashin, Anton, and Hannah Thoburn. 2014. Putin's brain. *Foreign affairs*, March 31. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-31/putins-brain>. Accessed 30 March 2025.
- Barbashin, Anton, and Hannah Thoburn. 2015. Putin's philosopher. *Foreign affairs*, September 20. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2015-09-20/putins-philosopher>. Accessed 30 March 2025.
- Berdyayev, Nikolaï Aleksandrovich. 1994. *Filosofia tvorchestva, kul'tury i iskusstva*, Vol. 2. Moscow: Iskustvo.

- Berdyayev, Nikolai Aleksandrovich. 2005a. Mysli o prirode voyny. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 286–294. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Berdyayev, Nikolai Aleksandrovich. 2005b. Dusha Rossii. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 248–285. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Berdyayev, Nikolai Aleksandrovich. 2009. Dukhi russoi revoliutsii. In *Manifesty russkogo idealizma*, ed. Vadim Veniaminovich Sapov, 665–700. Moscow: Astrel'.
- Biriukov, Dmitry. 2025. Russian philosophers and war. *Public orthodoxy*, February 21. <https://publicorthodoxy.org/good-reads/russian-philosophers-and-war/>. Accessed 30 March 2025.
- Bojanić, Petar. 2020. Violence and counter-violence. On correct rejection. A sketch of a possible Russian ethics of war considered through the understanding of violence in Tolstoy and in Petar II Petrović Njegoš. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* 24(4):657–668.
- Brandenberger, David. 2002. *National bolshevism: Stalinist mass culture and the formation of modern Russian national identity, 1931–1956*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Budraitskis, Ilya. 2016. Strashnaya Sila Ochevidnosti. Chitaya Ivana Il'ina. *Raznoglasiya Zhurnal Obshchestvennoy i Khudozhestvennoy Kritiki* 11:151–167.
- Budraitskis, Ilya. 2022. The terrible power of obviousness: Reading Ivan Ilyin. In *Dissidents among dissidents: Ideology, politics and the left in post-Soviet Russia*, 63–79. London: Verso.
- Bukharin, Nikolai. 1935. Filosofiya kul'turnogo filistera. *Izvestiya* 284:2.
- Bukharin, Nikolai. 2008. Sotsializm i ego kul'tura. In *Uznik Lubyanki. Tiuremnye rukopisi Nikolaia Bukharina. Sbornik dokumentov*. Moscow: AIRO-XXI.
- Bulgakov, Sergei Nikolaevich. 2005a. Russkie dumy. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 305–315. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Bulgakov, Sergei Nikolaevich. 2005b. Voina i russkoe samosoznanie. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 332–384. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Copleston, Frederick C. 1986. *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Curanović, Alicja. 2022. *The sense of mission in Russian foreign policy*. London: Routledge.
- Dobrokhoto, Alexander. 2014. The spiritual meaning of war in the philosophy of the Russian silver age. *Studies in East European Thought* 66:69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-014-9198-x>.
- Eltchaninoff, Mitchel. 2018. *Inside the mind of Vladimir Putin*. London: Hurst Publishers.
- Ern, Vladimir Frantsevich. 2005a. Mech i krest. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 441–443. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Ern, Vladimir Frantsevich. 2005b. Golos sobytii. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 444–449. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole.
- Fabian, Sandor. 2019. The Russian hybrid warfare strategy – neither Russian nor strategy. *Defense & Security Analysis* 35(3):308–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1640424>.
- Fedotoff White, Dmitrii. 1936. Soviet philosophy of war. *Political Science Quarterly* 51(3):321–353.
- Florenskiy, Pavel. 1997. V sanitarnom poezde Chernigovskogo dvoryanstva. *Novyy mir* 5:146–161.
- Frank, Semën Liudvigovich. 2005a. O poiskakh smysla voyny. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 402–412.
- Frank, Semën Liudvigovich. 2005b. O dukhovnoi sushchnosti Germanii. In *Russkie filosofy o voine*, 413–440.
- Fridman, Ofer, ed. 2021. *Strategiya: The foundations of the Russian art of strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gabowitsch, Mischa. 2021. Victory day before the cult: War commemoration in the USSR, 1945–1965. In *The memory of the second world war in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia*, 64–85. London: Routledge.
- Gel'fond, Mariya L'vovna. 2009. Kritika ucheniya L. N. Tolstogo o neprotivlenii zlu nasiliem v otechestvennoy religiozno-filosofskoy mysli kontsa XIX–nachala XX v.: Tri osnovnykh argumenta. *Voprosy Filosofii* 10:121–133.
- Gudkov, Lev. 2005. The fetters of victory: How the war provides Russia with its identity. *Osteuropa Web Special*.
- Hellman, Ben. 2009. Kogda vremya slavyanofil'stvovalo. *Russkie filosofy i Pervaya mirovaya vojna*. In *Slavica Helsingiensia 36. Meetings and clashes. Articles on Russian literature*, 9–29. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Iaroslavskii, Emel'ian. 1958. Mozhno li prozhit' bez very v boga? In *O religii*. Moscow: Gospolitizdat.
- Ilyin, Ivan. 1915. *Dukhovnyi smysl' voyny*. Moscow: Tipografiya T-va I. D. Sytina.
- Ilyin, Ivan. 1975. *O soprotivlenii zlu siloiu*. London: Zaria.
- Kára, Karel. 1968. On the Marxist theory of war and peace: A study. *Journal of Peace Research* 5(1):1–27.
- Kashnikov, Boris. 2012. Pacifism vs necessary war in Russian philosophical discourse of the late 19th–early 20th century and the lessons we can draw from it. *Belgrade Philosophical Annual* 25:366–377.

- Kumankov, Arseniy. 2014. Mirovaia zadacha Rossii: Chleny Moskovskogo religiozno-filosofskogo obshchestva pamiati VI. Solov'eva o Velikoi voine. *Vestnik Viatskogo gosudarstvennogo gumanitarnogo universiteta* 10:81–86.
- Kytöneva, Santeri. 2025. Ivan Ilyin's Views on War and Violence and Their Use Among Russian Religious and Military Audiences, 2005–2023. *Studies in East European Thought* 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09714-0>.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2016. Russia as an anti-liberal European civilisation. In *The new Russian nationalism: "Imperialism, ethnicity and authoritarianism 2000–2015"*, eds. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, 275–297. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474410427.003.0011>.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2024. Russia's ideological construction in the context of the war in Ukraine. *IFRI Studies: Russie. Eurasie. Reports*.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1969a. Krakh II Internatsionala. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 26, 209–265. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1969b. K istoriivoprosu o diktature. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 41, 369–391. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1969c. Sotsializm i voina. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 26, 307–350. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1969d. Imperializm kak vysshaya stadiya kapitalizma. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 27, 299–426. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1969e. Konferentsiya zagranichnykh sektsii RSDRP. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 26, 161–167. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1973a. Otkrytloe pis'mo Borisu Suvarinu. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 30, 262. Moscow.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1973b. O kharaktere nashikh gazet. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 37, 91. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1973c. Tolstoi i proletarskaya bor'ba. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 20, 70–71. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich. 1973d. L. N. Tolstoi i ego epokha. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 20, 100–104. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Malinova, Olga. 2017. Political uses of the great patriotic war in post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin. In *War and memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, 43–70. Cham: Springer.
- Millerman, Michael. 2022. Inside "Putin's Brain": The Political Philosophy of Alexander Dugin. Millerman School.
- Minchenko, Tatiana. 2024. The ethics of war and peace in Russian philosophy and the ethical consequences of modern legal precedents on warfare and armed forces. *Conatus – The Journal of Philosophy* 9(2):161–194. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35354>.
- Mitin, Mark and Isaak Razumovskii, eds. 1932. *Dialekticheskiĭ i istoricheskiĭ materializm: Uchebnik dlia komvuzov i vuzov*, Vol. 2. Moscow: Partiinoe izdatel'stvo.
- Moellendorf, Darrel. 1994. Marxism, internationalism, and the justice of war. *Science & Society* 58(3):264–286.
- Monaghan, Andrew. 2008. 'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'? Russian foreign policy. *International Affairs* 84(4):717–733.
- Østbø, Jardar. 2016. Securitizing 'spiritual-moral values' in Russia. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33(3):200–216.
- Pateman, Joe, and John Pateman. 2025. The ideological significance of Joseph Stalin's Great Patriotic War statements. *Studies in East European Thought*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-025-09752-8>.
- Pynnöniemi, Katri. 2018. Russia's national security strategy: Analysis of conceptual evolution. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31(2):240–256.
- Pynnöniemi, Katri. 2021. Ivan Il'in and the Kremlin's strategic communication of threats: Evil, worthy and hidden enemies. In *Nexus of patriotism and militarism in Russia: A quest for internal cohesion*, ed. Katri Pynnöniemi, 81–110. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1qp9h9r>.
- Ree, Erik van. 2002. *The political thought of Joseph Stalin: A study in twentieth century revolutionary patriotism*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, Paul. 2003. On resistance to evil by force: Ivan Il'in and the necessity of war. *Journal of Military Ethics* 2(2):145–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570310000289>.
- Robinson, Paul. 2019. *Russian conservatism*. Ithaca; London: Northern Illinois University Press/Cornell University Press.

- Robinson, Paul, and Mikhail Antonov. 2021. *In the name of state sovereignty? The justification of war in Russian history and the present*.
- Skvortsov, Alekseĭ. 2001. Ėticheskie problemy voĭny v russkoĭ religioznoĭ filosofii XX v. *Ėticheskaja mysl'* | *Ethical Thought* 2:216–230.
- Snyder, Timothy. 2019. *The road to unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Reprint edition. New York: Crown.
- Smytsnyuk, Pavlo. 2023. Rationalizing the war in Ukraine through religion: The Orthodox church and Russia's imperialist motif (a response to Hans-Herbert Kögler). *European Journal of Social Theory* 26(4):542–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310231170363>.
- Solov'ev, Vladimir Sergeevich. 1970. Ex oriente lux. In *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 12, 27–28. Brussels: Zhizn's Bogom.
- Stalin, Iosif Vissarionovich. 1938. *Istoriya VKP(b). Kratkii kurs*. Moscow: Pravda.
- Stalin, Iosif Vissarionovich. 1997. Vystuplenie na soveshchanii nachal'stvuyushchego sostava Krasnoi Armii 17 aprelya 1940 goda. In *Sochineniya*, Vol. 14, 347–360. Moscow: Pisatel'.
- Stepun, Fëdor Avgustovich. 1926. *Iz pisem praporshchika-artillerista*. Praga: Plamia.
- Suslov, Mikhail, and Dmitry Uzlauer. 2019. *Contemporary Russian conservatism: Problems, paradoxes, and perspectives*. Leiden: Brill.
- Torbakov, Igor. 2018. Celebrating Red October: A story of the ten anniversaries of the Russian revolution, 1927–2017. *Scando-Slavica* 64(1):7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2018.1447820>.
- Troitskii, Konstantin Evgen'evich. 2018. Polemika vokrug ucheniia L. N. Tolstogo o neprotivlenii zlu nasiliem v pervoe desiatiletie posle 1917 goda. *Gumanitarnye vedomosti TGPU im. L. N. Tolstogo* 3(27):95–114.
- Trotskii, Lev Davidovich. 1992. Ikh moral' i nasha. In *Ėticheskaya mysl': Nauchnye i publicisticheskie chteniya. 1991*, ed. Abdusalam Abdulkirimovich Guseinov, 212–244. Moscow: Respublika.
- Trubetskoi, Evgenii Nikolaevich. 1915. *Voĭna i mirovaia zadacha Rossii*. Moscow: Tipografiia t-va I. D. Sytina.
- Trubetskoi, Evgenii Nikolaevich. 2005. Groza s zapada. In *Russkie filosofy o voĭne*, 394–401. Moscow: Tipografiia t-va I. D. Sytina.
- Tukhachevskii, Mikhail Nikolaevich. 1964. Voĭna kak problema vooruzhennoi bor'by. In *Izbrannye proizvedeniya*, Vol. 2, 3–23. Moscow: Voenizdat.
- Vigor, Peter. 2021. *The Soviet view of war, peace and neutrality*. London: Routledge.
- Yakhot, Yehoshua. 1991. The suppression of philosophy in the USSR, 1920s–1930s. *Voprosy Filosofii* 9:44–68.
- Zenkovsky, Vasilii. 2003. *A history of Russian philosophy*, Vol. 2. London: Routledge.
- Zhavoronkov, Alexey. 2024. Russian pseudo-conservatism in an international context. *Studies in East European Thought*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-024-09659-w>.
- Zinov'ev, Grigorii Evseevich. 1930. *Uchenie Marksa i Lenina o voĭne*. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo.
- van der Zweerde, Ewert. 2022. *Russian political philosophy: Between autocracy and revolution*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.