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## **Ihanus' Fine Synthesis on Putin and Ukraine**

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*Keywords: fantasy, group-psychodynamic, history, Hitler, motivations, psychobiography, psychohistory, Putin*

Juhani Ihanus has set himself an almost impossible task by trying to lay out a comprehensive explanation for the many motives behind Premier Putin's ordered invasion of Ukraine. It is an ambitious goal for a short essay.

He has done us a great service. Juhani presents a grand synthesis that is multi-layered, multi-causal, and illuminating, successfully interweaving history—real, distorted, and mythical—with psychobiography, group psychodynamics, and projected fantasies. Each plays its own part. Juhani's successful interweaving of these various strands disarms those critics who claim all of psychohistory is reductionistic. One of the not-so-nice aspects of scholarly dialogue is the practice of criticizing colleagues for what they did not say rather than concentrating on what they did say. So I shall confine myself to some connections and speculations stirred by Juhani's paper.

I am especially struck by the way Juhani integrated the still-living mythic past with Putin's present motivations in much the same way as the work of pioneering psychohistorian Jay Gonen skillfully brings a group's mythic past (as currently understood) into the present by showing how that mythic past plays a part in the fantasy-driven decisions of the historical moment. It is refreshing to see Juhani grappling with the complexity of motives, historical, personal, and group, which came together in Putin's mind and convinced him to launch his aggression. The psychohistorical question is always: Why now? It is this conjunction of tendencies that determined when Putin decided to act.

What Juhani says spun off a few thoughts I had not thought about before. One was the possible influence on Putin (coincidentally or on purpose) of being named Vladimir. From Juhani's elaboration

of the creation myth of the Rus' connected to past Vladimirs and Putin's first name made me wonder what fantasy role he (and others) imagined him to be playing. Was he delegated to re-enact the Savior role? The Avenger role? Both? We may never know what role his mother may have played in assigning him those tasks as was the case with Hitler according to psychoanalyst Helm Stierlin, but we can offer a speculation or two.

As Russia's Savior and the current incarnation of Saint Vladimir, I fear Putin may be in the grip of the fantasy notion that the cleansing of the nation, or a neighboring territory, can happen only if the territory is totally destroyed; otherwise, the Phoenix cannot rise from the ashes. He must make sure rebirth takes place. This is another consideration in what he may be planning for Ukraine and a reinforcement of the compulsion to force Ukrainians to re-enact the siege of Leningrad on his unconscious behalf.

The irrational connections Putin makes between Nazis and Ukraine are not mere propaganda. They are part of Putin's mixed-up conceptions, the entangled irrational memories of what he has heard and seen about Russia during the Great War as well as his own projections and fantasies from the Cold War to the present. He wants to conquer Europe at the same time that he needs to resist his imagined fantasy attack that is being launched against Russia by the U.S. and NATO. In the process, he will become a new Stalin by completing Stalin's unfinished business at the end of World War II, namely, establishing a Russian Empire over Western Europe.

Of course, Putin is not Hitler. Yet, by our affirming that Putin is *not* Hitler, I wonder if we affirm in some ways that he *is* Hitler. In identifying with the aggressor, Putin's Hitlerian tactics as directed against Ukraine are also directed at the Hitler inside himself. Indeed, in our collective group fantasy, he is both Hitler and Stalin combined.

As I read Juhani's essay, I noticed several places where his interpretations were inspired by the ideas of a number of pioneering psychohistorians before him—for example, Lloyd deMause's modes of childhood and his concept of the Social Alter, Rudolph Binion's explorations of traumatic reliving, Peter Loewenberg's concept of the traumatized cohort, several ideas acquired from Vamik Volkan, and findings from dysfunctional family systems acted out in the public arena. I find Juhani's integration of these several approaches gratifying in that they show how sophisticated

psychohistorical analysis can be when drawing from many different perspectives.

In my appreciation of Howard Stein in his *Festschrift* elsewhere in this issue, I sought to honor Howard by applying his techniques of listening deeply to the media reports coming out of Ukraine. I was and still am gathering raw data from the underlying fantasies revealed in the metaphors used by the prominent actors in our current eastern European and worldwide drama. It is too soon to make analytic sense of these communications. That is another reason why I am particularly grateful for Juhani's essay. It provides a framework, offers some new information, reminds me of the importance of several processes, presents a number of new ways to look at the complexities of a truly significant event, and has led me to new associations that I feel have given me a better understanding of what is happening and why.

I cannot change my feelings that we are already stepping into World War III. Of course, perceptions, connections, and insights change from hour to hour. This is where I am today.

*David R. Beisel's* biography can be found on page 264.  
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## Russian National Identity Quest as Motivation for Policymaking

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*Abstract: A vague and undeveloped identity is Russia's key national characteristic. Throughout their history as a nation, Russians have been striving to define who they are, and today they are as far from their goal as they have ever been. The nation's common values, goals, and aspirations remain ambiguous, having been endorsed, denied, redefined, and re-adopted in their original form, soon to be altered to sustain a new official ideology. Exploring the painful sacrifices the nation has made, this article looks at Russia's political leadership and Putin's strategies.*

*Keywords: ambiguous, Crimea, messianic, national-identity, political-culture, propaganda, Putin, Russia, "Third Rome"*

An indistinct and ambiguous national identity is Russia's key national characteristic. Throughout their thousand-year history as a people, Russians have been trying to figure out who they are,