Russians Feel The Pain

Ukraine's strikes cut through the propaganda

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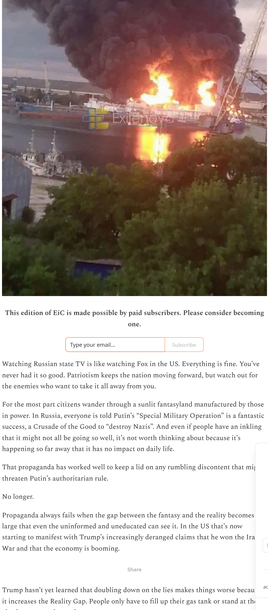

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Watching Russian state TV is like watching Fox in the US. Everything is fine. You've never had it so good. Patriotism keeps the nation moving forward, but watch out for the enemies who want to take it all away from you.

For the most part citizens wander through a sunlit fantasyland manufactured by those in power. In Russia, everyone is told Putin's "Special Military Operation" is a fantastic success, a Crusade of the Good to "destroy Nazis". And even if people have an inkling that it might not all be going so well, it's not worth thinking about because it's happening so far away that it has no impact on daily life.

That propaganda has worked well to keep a lid on any rumbling discontent that might threaten Putin's authoritarian rule.

No longer.

Propaganda always fails when the gap between the fantasy and the reality becomes large that even the uninformed and uneducated can see it. In the US that's now starting to manifest with Trump's increasingly deranged claims that he won the Iran War and that the economy is booming.

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Trump hasn't yet learned that doubling down on the lies makes things worse because it increases the Reality Gap. People only have to fill up their gas tank or stand at the checkout to see the truth.

The same is happening in Russia. It's been a long time coming, and it's only in its nascent phase, but it's going to become very grim. However hard he tries, Putin can't roll back reality.

Russian Telegram channels are filled with videos from bewildered, frightened and angry Russian citizens.

Previously the distant regions were the ones who paid the biggest price as their men were sent off to die in the meatgrinder. But they had no voice. No one cared.

Now the horrors of what Putin has inflicted in Ukraine are starting to bleed into the prosperous middle classes in Moscow and St Petersburg and that can start a dangerous chain reaction.

Ukraine's relentless strikes on Russia's energy infrastructure has caused a fuel crisis across Russia. Gas stations are shuttered. Any that might still have supplies have ramped up the prices or introduced draconian rationing.

In occupied Crimea there is a complete ban on selling fuel to private citizens. Only government agencies and emergency services can fill up their vehicles and that too will soon be gone.

One video from an elegant, educated young woman was particularly striking. "I watch the news, of course I do, but I never expected anything like this," she said to her phone with an expression of incomprehension. After detailing her attempts to find a garage where she could fill up, she said she had now been forced to abandon her car. "I can walk, but what about all those who make their living behind the wheel?"

The spreading fuel crisis is the biggest threat to Putin because there's nothing he can do about it. The shortages strike at the heart of day to day life for every Russian, disrupting even the smallest part of their routines. No propaganda can hide that.

Ukraine's advances in missile and drone technology mean Moscow and St Petersburg are now easy targets. And while Ukraine's attacks are accelerating, Russian air defences are failing everywhere. Ukraine seems to be able to control the skies with impunity.

Those same Telegram channels have videos and images of thick palls of smoke hanging over cities and black oil-infused rain falling on to the streets. The commentary from people who recorded them are filled with fear. They were told everything was fine and suddenly it's not. What could happen next?

They're right to be worried. Ukraine will continue to bring the war to their doorsteps. On Wednesday June 24, Ukrainian drones hit the Orenburg Gas Processing Plant, sending up huge clouds of smoke. The plant produces about a quarter of Russia's entire gas capacity.

It was announced the same day that Moscow's largest oil refinery has been crippled and will remain offline for at least six months because of repeated Ukrainian strikes.

And on the previous night partisans from the Freedom of Russia Legion launched a daring raid within Russia: "Our comrades in the Resistance carried out an operation behind enemy lines: six gas distribution stations in the Moscow and Tver regions were destroyed."

If Moscow wants to know its future, it only needs to look to occupied Crimea where Ukraine has been undertaking a successful campaign to isolate the peninsula. A strike on the Kerch thermal plant took out half of Crimea's electricity generating ability.

The Russian authorities have ordered local residents not to use excessive amounts of electrical appliances and the water supply has been restricted in several cities. In Sevastopol, supermarkets, cafes and restaurants have had opening times restricted and limits placed on food purchases. Excursions, gatherings, festivals, and training camps have also been banned.

Propaganda is fine until it isn't. As both Putin and Trump are finding out, you can control what the people get to know, but once the pain is felt you find yourself in a dangerously precarious position where your once-supine followers find they can no longer believe the lies you tell them.

The Reality Gap for both leaders is only going to widen.

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Stella Hamilton 1d
Liked by Mark Chadbourn
Sometimes I picture what it would feel like to have another " Berlin Wall" moment. Imagine him being removed by the people or fleeing and Russia ending the attacks on Ukraine. And a new less hardline govt forming. It would be incredible to have the threat his rule has brought removed from Europe. Peace very well could be achieved. And then only two aging rulers would be left.
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1 reply by Mark Chadbourn

Carla Martin 1d Edited
Liked by Mark Chadbourn
Another fabulous article Mark :)
Thank you :)
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