

Mental disorder in Vladimir Putin: Hypothesis

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Summary

Both somatic and psychiatric abnormalities are not uncommon among politicians. Clinical insights may help to understand their suboptimal decisions and behavior. If a leader is psychotic while other functions are more or less intact, he or she can preserve abilities to remain in a position of power. Grave consequences occur when paranoid ideas persist in a dictator, so that delusions are put into life. Some people suffering from paranoid personality disorder are belligerent against delusional goals. Governments in democracy are more transparent; therefore, it is less probable that power would be kept by mentally abnormal individuals. In the author's opinion, there is danger of a large-scale war thanks to paranoid ideation in Vladimir Putin. Arguments in favor of this hypothesis are discussed here. More expert opinions are needed. In his childhood, Putin was a victim of maltreatment. Reportedly, child abuse statistically predicts psychosis and some other mental disorders. Putin formulated the aims of his military operation, one of them being protecting Russian-speakers from genocide. It is known that ethnic Russians have not undergone genocide. Apparently, this idea is delusional. Many people subscribe to delusions at large. Besides, there is a hypothesis that Putin has hubris syndrome. In conclusion, mental derangements in politicians should be diagnosed by psychiatrists on the basis of language and behavior.

Keywords: Paranoia; Hubris syndrome; Child abuse; Vladimir Putin; Russia; Armed conflict

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INTRODUCTION

Both somatic and psychiatric abnormalities are not uncommon among politicians (Ghaemi, 2011; Liapis & Liapis, 2023; Owen, 2016). Clinical insights may help to understand their suboptimal decisions and behavior (Leon, 2007). Apparently, the need to warn the public overrides the duty of confidentiality (Gartner et al., 2018). Several Soviet leaders had mental abnormalities (Förstl, 2020). The psychopathological approach to politics might be successful provided that it identifies politicians or ideologists with limited mental competence (Pettman, 2012). If a leader is psychotic while other functions are more or less intact, he or she can preserve abilities to remain in a position of power. Grave consequences occur when paranoid ideas persist in a dictator along with rationality and efficiency, so that delusions are put into life (Lavik, 2002).

Child abuse is associated with an increased vulnerability to mental and related conditions: affective, obsessive-compulsive, post-traumatic stress disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, possibly also schizophrenia, as well as low self-esteem, anxiety and anger (Boger et al., 2020; Franjić, 2023; Hartley et al., 2024; Janssen et al., 2004; Liapis & Alevizopoulos, 2021; Miller & Brock, 2017; Nemeroff, 2016). Results of an interview study suggested that child abuse statistically predicts psychosis. It was

concluded that early adverse experiences may cause cognitive vulnerability e.g., beliefs about the self as vulnerable and of others as dangerous, leading to paranoid ideations. Some cases of schizophrenia may be within this continuum (Krabbendam & van Os, 2004).

Child abuse has been rarely discussed in Russia. There were several publications in the period 1990-2016 but today the topic is largely avoided; details and references are in (Jargin, 2024a). According to an estimate, the prevalence of family violence in Russia during last decades has been 45-70 times higher than in England and France (Besschetnova, 2015). There is neither uniformly agreed attitude nor consequent policies.

VLADIMIR PUTIN

In 2017 Putin has signed into law an amendment decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence. The physical abuse was described in Putin's biographies. His father is said to have been physically maltreated the boy (Baker & Glasser, 2005; Ihanus, 2022; Myers, 2015; Ressler, 2017; Tismaneanu, 2016; Volkan & Javakhishvili, 2022). Presumably, Putin's early childhood experience of physical maltreatment was recapitulated at school, where he was bullied. His saying "If a fight is [perceived as] inevitable, you must strike first" could

have originated from reminiscences of bullying (Ihanus, 2014, 2022). It was hypothesized that Putin is re-enacting his traumas in conditions of an intergenerational traumatic chain (Ihanus, 2022). There is a “danger of blundering into a nuclear war” (Elovitz, 2022) thanks to this case of child maltreatment. Indeed, Putin has hinted at the tactical use of nuclear weapons (Owen, 2021).

Apparently, it was not so much the Russian population who perceived external threats, as it did their leader, re-enacting his puerile fears. This supposition does not contradict to the hypothesis that Vladimir Putin has hubris syndrome (HS), potentially enticing him to adopt immature coping mechanisms (Liapis, 2024). The symptoms of HS were described by Lord Owen (2008); since then, HS has been supposed to be present in different politicians (Liapis & Alevizopoulos, 2021; Magyari et al., 2022). HS describes individuals with excessive confidence and pride. People having this type of personality tend to use immature coping mechanisms that might lead to the underestimation of a crisis, particularly when facing unpredictable results (Liapis & Alevizopoulos, 2021). The overconfidence in leaders may result in insufficient preparedness, prevent collaboration with global agencies and limit ability to learn from the experience of other countries (Lincoln, 2020). Some individuals with HS exhibit lack of empathy, being less able to understand suffering of other people (Ghaemi et al., 2016).

HS is in some aspects close to narcissistic, antisocial and histrionic personality disorders (Jakovljević, 2011). There are several psychiatric or related conditions that may belong to a continuum around HS: adult ADHD, hypomania and paranoid syndrome (Ghaemi et al., 2016; Owen, 2008). Paranoia is another potential sequel of child maltreatment. Research has demonstrated significant associations between adverse childhood experiences, including physical abuse, with paranoia (Grindey & Bradshaw, 2022). An association between brain injuries and paranoid syndrome was suggested (Heston, 1987). Presumably, the worse a child is treated, especially by his father, the more frequent are paranoid ideations in the adult life (Carvalho et al., 2018).

The association between paranoia and violence is known. A paranoid call may sanction destruction of supposed enemies (Robins & Post, 1997). Putin formulated the aims of his military operation, one of them being protecting Russian-speakers from genocide. It is known that ethnic Russians have not undergone genocide. Apparently, this idea is delusional. The difference between delusions and strongly held ideas is seen in the degree of conviction despite contradictory evidence (Kraus, 2002), irrespective of logic and the “way of the world” (Cutting, 2003). Andrei Snezhnevsky (1986) and some other Soviet

psychiatrists could diagnose sluggish schizophrenia on the basis of such symptoms; details and references are in (Jargin, 2011). Another ex-Soviet psychiatrist Anatoly Smulevich (2019) discussed paranoia within the scope of schizophrenia. Behaviors of paranoid individuals may include arrogance, presumption of privilege and exploitation of weaknesses (Lemert, 1967). Grave consequences can occur when paranoid and delusional ideas coexist in a dictator who otherwise is rational and efficient, but may be influenced by mentally disordered persons. Paranoid rulers tend to promote abnormal individuals and rely on their opinions (Zoja, 2011), which may distort appreciation of reality. An example is the ideologist Aleksandr Dugin, called the “Putin’s Brain” (Rutland, 2016), discussed in the preceding paper by Jargin (2024b). Among others, Dugin’s delusion-like or overvalued ideas include the “Western plot to undermine Russia” and “Eternal struggle between Land and Sea” (Livers, 2020), the latter probably being a reminiscence of the novel “1984” by George Orwell. There is an opinion that Dugin is a “mental patient, albeit a widely read and influential one” (Benedetti, 2004).

Some individuals, maltreated during their childhood, respond by acting out fight or flight responses (Ihanus, 2014). Defensive behaviors include attacking weaker persons and submitting to dominant ones (Lopes, 2013). This seems to be reflected by Putin’s relationships with Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechen Republic, who appears as a dominant personality (Jargin, 2024b). There has been a stereotype of “chechenophobia” in Russia (Khlebnikov, 2003). Certain non-European subjects of the Russian Federation may be interested in a continuation of the Ukraine war, and there are concerns that Putin has come under their influence.

COVID-19 AND VACCINATION IN RUSSIA

COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for less hubristic leadership, revealing the drawbacks of arrogant manner of decision making by those in power (Kavanaugh, 2020; Liapis, 2022; Lincoln, 2020). In regard to the Putin’s coping with COVID-19 pandemic in Russia, the following should be commented. The topic of COVID-19 has been mixed with politics. Restrictions were used to encroach upon civil liberties distracting people from internal problems. Pressures for rapid approval of vaccines are potentially conducive to distribution of preparations having unstable quality. A winner of “the race for a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2” (Pascolo, 2021) ended up with a mass vaccination by suboptimal vaccines. The

preparations administered to the public are not necessarily the same quality as those submitted for official approval. The problem is a premature approval of vaccines without long-term safety data due to political pressure.

There have been reports about blood clotting-related, cardiovascular and other adverse events after vaccinations with Gam-COVID-Vac (Sputnik V) vaccine, over-viewed by Bludau & Jargin (2023). Some official information is neither transparent nor trusted by a part of the population (King & Dudina, 2021). The domestic acceptance of Sputnik V was quite low, among others, due to its perception as a propaganda tool rather than health-saving medicine (Makarychev & Wicaksana, 2023). According to a survey, 12% of Russian doctors opined that vaccines produced in their country are of inferior quality (Deniso-va et al., 2023). The rarity of reports on the side effects may be caused by policies discouraging such reporting (Joob & Wiwanitkit, 2021). Of note, reports on side effects after the use of renowned vaccines do not imply higher risks but indicate that they are better studied than those coming from less open societies tolerating profes-sional misconduct (Jargin, 2020). In future, the increase in mortality from different causes might be ascribed to COVID -19, and subsequent mortality decrease – to “suc-cessful” anti-epidemic measures including vaccinations. Some adverse effects of vaccinations may be misattributed to the COVID-19 infection (Mead et al., 2024). The main problem is a premature approval of vaccines with-out long-term safety data due to ambitions and rivalry. HS in a leader would contribute to the rivalry, pretended or true overconfidence (Liapis & Alevizopoulos, 2021). Fi-nally, it should be mentioned that HS is observed not only in politicians but also in medical personnel (Giannouli & Syrmos, 2021).

DISCUSSION

Paranoid individuals tend to be self-centered, arro-gant and vulnerable at the same time. Their behaviors may include megalomaniac defenses e.g. attempts to de-stroy enemies through a self-destructive war (Ihanus, 2014). Several Soviet leaders had paranoia, other mental and/or neurological abnormalities (Förstl, 2020). Para-noia was recognizable to some extent both in authorities and the society (Soloway & Bogatikova, 2015). Certain populations subscribe to delusions at large. It is possi-ble for a majority to be deluded and a minority not to be deluded (Braithwaite, 2017). The homogeneity of think-ing is a predictor of conformism, which is conducive to dictatorship (Marazziti, 2022). Apart from induced delu-sion-like ideas, political leaders’ views are reiterated by

aides and yes-men; while alternative views are ignored or dismissed as heretical (Liapis, 2024). Paranoid leaders can remain in positions of power in the nations lacking appropriate checks and balances (Lavik, 2002). Govern-ments in democracy are more transparent; so it is less likely that power falls into the hands of mentally abnor-mal individuals.

Paranoid individuals dismiss disconfirming evidence and may sanction a destruction of supposed enemies (Robins & Post, 1997). Some people with paranoid ide-ation are belligerent against delusional goals. A belief that others intend harm contributes to aggressiveness. Such leaders are constantly on alert against supposedly ever-present danger. In a crisis, they have a strong prefer-ence for what is seen as pre-emptive action. The paranoid may initiate a crisis out of the belief that preventive action is necessary. Negotiations and diplomacy are viewed by them as either efforts to ratify the military status quo or exercises in deception. Another feature: overreliance on historic analogies such as the World War II (Post, 2005). This is what we observe in Russia today.

As for HS, the differential diagnosis and exclusion of other conditions is difficult, because persons with HS do not usually collaborate in examinations (Selten, 2023). On the contrary, politicians tend to conceal mental disor-ders (Owen, 2016). Since hubristic leaders are contemp-tuous to the advice of others and reckless in strategic choices, the early identification and prevention of HS is important (Selten, 2023). It can be reasonably assumed that ruling classes with experiences of leadership, espe-cially royal families that have been in the public attention for centuries, have lesser risks of HS than unknown indi-viduals promoted by bureaucracy.

CONCLUSION

Physical abuse in childhood and adolescence can in-duce psychiatric abnormalities, among others, persecu-tory delusions. In the author’s opinion, the world is in danger of global war thanks to paranoid ideation and de-lusions in Vladimir Putin. More expert opinion is need-ed in this area. Many people subscribe to delusions at large. Mental derangements in politicians are dangerous and must be diagnosed by psychiatrists on the basis of speech, language corpora, drawings and behavior. A lan-guage (speech) corpus is a large sample or collection of texts that can be subjected to analysis, sometimes lead-ing to unexpected insights (Garrard, 2016; Magyari et al., 2022). Admittedly, studies of Putin’s publications may be of limited value because they seem to be written by his assistants at least in part. Reportedly, plagiarism has been

found in the Putin's dissertation (Mukhin, 2015), which is unavailable in libraries despite the existing regulations. Published interviews may be edited (Hermann, 2005). An attempt to analyze the writings by Alexandr Dugin, referred to as the "Putin's Brain" (Rutland, 2016), as well

as of drawings by Putin's own hand, has been made in the preceding paper by Jargin (2024b).

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