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# Ivan the Terrible as Pivotal Figure in the Ideology of Information Warfare

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**Abstract:** Ivan IV (1530-1584), also known as Ivan the Terrible, Ivan Grozny, or Ivan Vasilyevich was the first tsar of Russia. Throughout much of history, he has been considered without controversy in his home nation and abroad as a tyrant who instituted the first Russian political police, the Oprichniki. In recent years, a resurgence of nationalist pride has rehabilitated Ivan IV, iterating on earlier positive Stalinist interpretations of the Orthodox monarch. The Russian Federation's efforts to implement a cohesive post-Soviet ideological identity include a historically revisionist view of Ivan IV as the victim of Western conspiracies. Whereas in the West, where the "first information war" is typically viewed in a technological sense as the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), Russian ideologists may associate Ivan as the victim of the "first information war" in history - or in the context of an unending war which has been waged from medieval times to the present day. However, the story is not so simple. Ivan intentionally cultivated an image of himself as an autocrat who punished the perceived anti-Christian enemies of Russian Orthodoxy. This included apparently cultivating intentional comparisons with the so-called "Tale of Dracula" in the popular image of Ivan IV. The idea of Ivan IV as a Dracula-like leader may have strengthened his popularity at home, while reinforcing the negative view in the West (which had a distinct printing press advantage). The celebration of Russian Orthodox autocracy which surrounds the figure of Ivan IV by modern Russian nationalists - who have strong distrust of Western liberalism - may thus serve as pivotal context for understanding diverging perspectives on - and cultural motivations for - "information warfare" in East (that is to say Russia) and West.

**Keywords:** first information war, history as an ideological tool, historical revisionism, Livonian war, memory war, political orthodoxy

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## 1. Introduction

Ivan Vasilyevich or Ivan IV (1530-1584), first Tsar of Russia is a controversial figure in history, whose very name has become symbolic of his diverging legacy in the so-called "East" and "West". Known in the West as "Ivan the Terrible" – a term which may in English connote poor leadership performance – in Russia, he is known as "Ivan Grozny" – a term which does not easily translate to English; however, may be seen as closer in meaning to "awesome", "great", or "fearsome" than "terrible".

In a similar definitional sense, there seems to be a divide in the conception of what the term "information warfare" means in both the East and West; where in the East it has a broader context which encompasses psychological operations, disinformation, and active measures – but in the West has been typically associated primarily with electronic and computational methods of warfare.

Such a divergence is revealed in a comparison of first-page Google results for the term "first information war" (in quotes) in English and its Russian equivalent "первая информационная война".

English language speakers seeking information on the subject would most likely come away with an impression that the first information war was the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) and tied to the computerized, high-tech nature of that conflict. However, Russian language Google users would most likely come away with the impression that the first information war was the (first) Crimean War (1853-1856), the Napoleonic invasion of 1812, or even an alleged plot of the West against Ivan Vasilyevich in the context of the Livonian War (1558-1583) – all historical examples which precede the so-called 'information age'.

An examination of the historical image of Ivan Vasilyevich in East and West as well as his evolving popular interpretation across different eras of Russian history demonstrates the pivotal role which Tsar Ivan plays in the ideology of information warfare and geopolitics.

## 2. Ivan Vasilyevich in the context of historical 'propaganda'

Since his own time and through the Soviet era, scholars have argued as to whether Russian folk tales about Ivan represented a positive, negative, or overall complex popular appraisal of the tsar. In addition, much of the

folklore about him was recorded after his death and is thus of debatable historical value. Even in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Russian historians treated such folklore as accurate reflections of popular opinion passed down through an oral tradition (*byliny*) (Perrie 1987). Separating fact from fiction in research of Ivan Vasilyevich is thus important.

## 2.1 Dracula as an example of tyranny as a matter of popular opinion

The Wallachian boyar prince Vlad Tepes (1428/31-1476/77) – immortalized as “Dracula” – provides a factual basis for the examination of the diverging opinions of Russian autocracy in East and West from a historical information perspective.

In the early days of the printing press, Dracula was himself the subject of a propaganda campaign by adversaries who portrayed him as a monster, creating a popular image which continued to circulate even after his death (Figure 1). Yet today, he remains a national hero to Romanians for his defeat of the Turks and the perception of his cruel-but-just leadership.



**Figure 1:** Woodcut image of Dracula dining among impaled victims that circulated in pamphlet form (Markus Ayrer, German (1499))

The Russian version of the Dracula stories, known as “The Tale of Dracula” has been called Russia’s “first belletristic text” – or novel. It exists in scribed copies which originally came to Russia in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Ivan IV’s grandfather, Ivan III. The text is believed to have been originally brought to the royal court by Fyodor Kuritsyn who was an ambassador to Moldova.

It is of particular note that diverging from other versions circulating in Europe, the Russian versions of the stories seem thematically tailored to contemporary Muscovite sensibilities – apparently positively connotating Orthodoxy (as opposed to Catholicism) and strong one-man rule (McNally & Florescu 1992).

The circumstantial theory has been advanced that following his disappearance from the historical record after his involvement in the so-called “Heresy of the Judaizers”, that Kuritsyn was tonsured into a monastery as the monk Filofei and became the author of the ideological ‘prophecy’ of “Moscow, the Third Rome” (Kämpfer 1970).

The Third Rome prophecy complements Russian Orthodoxy centred in Moscow. Muscovy began to view itself as the new authority of Eastern Orthodox (if not all) Christianity following the fall of “Second Rome” (Constantinople/Byzantium) to the Turks in 1453. When Ivan IV was crowned the first tsar (Caesar) of Russia in 1547, there appears to be a clear attempt to appeal to the Byzantine tradition and adopt the equivalence of the Eastern Roman imperial role by *translatio imperii*.

In addition, it has been said that Ivan IV’s government intentionally emulated the “control system” or “management techniques” of both Dracula (as culled from the “Tale of Dracula”) as well as the Turkish Sultan (TTOLK 2016).

By these measures, there does appear to be some intentional surface continuity between Russian Dracula stories and the Third Rome ideology in the observations of cultural influences on Ivan IV’s rule, regardless of whether Fyodor Kuritsyn was also indeed the same person as Filofei.

## **2.2 Tsar-Dracula**

Keenan (2010) states highlighting this problem of clouded, competing, and contested historical narratives that: *“Ivan was second only to Dracula and the Ottoman Sultan (the Grand Turk) as a subject of prurient interest in his time. Almost every Western traveler to Muscovy in the sixteenth century added something to this literature, which might be compared to the tabloids of our time, with Ivan occupying roughly the place now filled by Elvis Presley. Indeed, as we shall repeatedly have occasion to note, the public image of Ivan created in the vernacular European publications of his time has become, since its rediscovery by scholars in the nineteenth century, one of the greatest impediments to a proper understanding of what Ivan and his time were really like.”*

Ivan did literally become synthesized into a ‘traveling motif’ which was associated with Dracula and has been called “tsar-dracula” (Poe 2002).

Darkly humorous stories which highlighted Dracula’s perverted sense of justice were applied to Ivan. For example, Turkish ambassadors who had their caps nailed to their heads for refusing to remove them in Dracula’s presence were replaced with national enemies like Catholics and Jews in the Russian retellings about Ivan Vasilyevich.

The Boyar class who were the cavalry landholders and the target of Ivan’s terrors during the period of the oprichnina were also apparent subjects of these stories.

It seems that through these tales, the tsar intentionally cultivated and managed this popular image for political ends in order to build support with the Russian people (*narod*) (Perrie 1987).

Rosovetskii (in Perrie 1987) states: *“The most common image of Ivan... is wickedly clever tyrant”* and *“Tsar Ivan was not only a character in the folklore about himself, but one of its creators... the director and main producer of these ‘happenings’. Tales about which give the impression of being legendary.”*

In the application of stories following the Dracula motif to Ivan, *“the ruler’s victim is depicted as a traditional national enemy of the narrator,”* and the reader should be mindful that *“practices which might seem to us and some foreign contemporaries, to represent the most barbaric and macabre types of behaviour, formed part of a ritualistic punishment of traitors which both the tsar and his subjects believed to be ridding the country of evil. Ivan’s terror was likely to gain popular support and sympathy, therefore, not only because its cruelty and violence were mitigated to some extent by the grimly humorous forms which it was presented to the populace, but also because the forms which it assumed were adopted from a common cultural tradition whose idioms and rituals were as familiar to the tsar as they were to his subjects”*. (Perrie, 1987)

Highlighting a contemporary dependence on folkloric oral histories, Russia acquired its first printing press in 1553, nearly 100 years after Gutenberg printed his first Bible in Germany. Still, printing remained insignificant if not repressed in Russia. Objectively, 16th century Russia had a distinct (and potentially self-inflicted) disadvantage in the capability to mass-produce and disseminate printed information compared to potential European adversaries.



It was the sort of “highly politicized” travel literature in Western pamphlets referenced above which led to Ivan’s negative identification abroad as “Ivan the Tyrant”, and later presumably even “Terrible” (in the negative connotation) (Keenan 2006).

Thus, it may be observed that while there is strong evidence Ivan intentionally cultivated an image in parallel with Russia’s version of Dracula stories, and that such stories had potential benefits to strengthening his domestic rule; similar stories emphasizing comparisons with Dracula provided basis for a negative contrast in the West where brutal demonstrations of despotic power were more likely associated with tyranny and injustice, rather than law and order.



**Figure 2:** German woodcut of Russian atrocities in Livonian War (1561)

Western pamphleteering against Ivan and Russia may be viewed as a fundamental case of “information warfare” in a historical sense, where Russia was unable to meet ‘the West’s’ ability to replicate and disseminate information. It may also objectively reflect on Tsar Ivan’s intentional attempts to bolster his image in a rudimentary public relations effort that did not resonate with Western audiences.

This does not mean that the popular Western image of Ivan was simply a fabrication. As illustrated in a contemporary Western print disseminated during his reign (Figure 2), *“Ivan’s way of warfare... was brutal even by the standards of the day. A German print made in 1561 during the Russian invasion of Livonia (present-day Estonia and Latvia) shows naked women hanging from a tree above the disembowelled bodies of their children while Russian archers use them for target practice. By the heads of the women hang their children’s hearts. Though there is no corroboration for these atrocities in the sparse Russian sources, since we know that Ivan committed equally appalling acts of brutality against his Russian subjects it is unlikely that he spared the Livonians.”* (Andrew 2018)

### 3. The evolving view of Ivan Vasilyevich in the context of modern Russian information warfare

#### 3.1 Pre-2000 perspectives on Ivan in the Russian Federation, Soviet Union, and Tsarist Russia

With the general historical exceptions of Russian “Old Believers”, during the reign of Joseph Stalin, and among the hard-core conservative Russian Orthodox faithful, Ivan Vasilyevich appears to have been seen throughout the tsarist and Soviet eras as an unpopular figure who should not be emulated by wise rulers.

In the case of Old Believers, a reactionary group persecuted in the tsarist and Soviet eras but recently rehabilitated in post-Soviet Russia, there is a popular image of Ivan Vasilyevich as a pious and truly Orthodox tsar which is a legacy of reaction to the perceived Westernizing 1666 church reforms of Patriarch Nikon. These reforms precipitated an “apocalypse” and schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. Among Old Believers, subsequent tsars such as the Westernizing reformer Pyotr Alekseevich (Peter the Great, or Peter I (1672-1725)) were seen as representations of the anti-Christ (Christensen 1998). (Modern Russian ideologists such as Aleksandr Dugin have publicly identified as members of this reactionary movement (Clowes 2011).)

Joseph Stalin found a politically expedient historical analogue in Ivan Vasilyevich and actively sought to cultivate a conscious parallel with him, seeing him as “great and wise ruler” (Amos 2016).

During the Stalin era, it was politically incorrect to criticize Ivan’s terrors. Ivan IV and his Oprichniki were reinterpreted as progressive reformers in line with Stalinist ideology, eliminating boyars analogized to reactionaries. This synthesized Ivan’s contemporary 16<sup>th</sup> century attempts at managing his popular image and reforms with Stalin’s own in the 20<sup>th</sup> (Perrie 1987).

The interpretation of Ivan in Soviet scholarly literature during de-Stalinization appears to have again trended to the critical view (Perrie 1987).

Coinciding with the fall of the Soviet Union however, right wing nationalist movements emerged in the Russian Federation which appear to be the foundational basis for a modern hyper-positive, if not patriotic view of Ivan IV which connects his image directly to information warfare and seemingly resurrects the Stalinist position.

This modern perspective seems closely linked to the teachings of Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev) (1927-1995), who has been described as “the ideologist of Russian Orthodox fascism” (Corley 1995).

Metropolitan Ioann’s texts found him as a strong advocate for Ivan Vasilyevich as a champion of autocracy, and opponent of Judaizing. Ioann also advocated for the merits of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin (Levinskaya 1995). He operated in a network which was close to Aleksandr Dugin, publishing in Dugin’s journal, *Elementy* (Umland 2010).

Further, Ioann advocated for the legitimacy of the Okhrana-produced tsarist anti-Semitic forgery “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion”, as well as for the then-controversial idea that Tsar Nicholas II should be canonised for his ritual murder at the hands of Jews (Corley 1995).

#### 3.2 Post-2000 Russian nationalist perspectives

Along these lines, the present-day Russian Orthodox nationalist perspective – including the perspective on Ivan Vasilyevich - seems increasingly linked to the ideological legacy of Metropolitan Ioann (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016). Whereas in the past, the ideas of Ioann and his supporters could be considered fringe, they currently appear to contribute to mainstream ideas of “Political Orthodoxy”.

From a rational lens, this historical-ideological revisionism to support Russian geopolitical ambitions which contrast with perceived Western sensibilities has been cited in the context of so-called “Memory Wars” waged by figures like controversial St. Petersburg University professor Igor Froyanov, and Aleksandr Dugin. Such figures have created an “alternative narrative” to the (West-inspired) “liberal master narrative” of history (Koposov 2017).



Independent scholar of Muscovy, Charles Halperin (2017) for example writes that Igor Froyanov *“is a professional historian and academic, the author of valuable monographs on Kievan Rus’, but when he writes about Ivan he becomes indistinguishable from rabid anti-Semites who have nothing but disdain for the “rational” “Eurocentric” culture of professional scholarship, as compared to the eternal spiritual truths of Russian Orthodox Christianity.”*

Highlighting this observation, in a 2006 interview with the neo-Stalinist, ultra-Conservative paper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* entitled “The Poison of Heresy”, Froyanov for example analogized events surrounding the poisoning death of defected Russian FSB agent Alexander Litvinenko to the “Heresy of the Judaizers”; casting it, and the later Livonian War during the reign of Ivan Vasilyevich as “information-psychological warfare” of the West against Russia (Ivanov 2006). (*Sovetskaya Rossiya* was also a vehicle for Metropolitan Ioann’s controversial anti-Semitic interviews, where he joined the editorial board at the request of Alexander Prokhanov (Laruelle 2016).)

Thus, while observers in “the West” were surprised when the first public statue dedicated to the perceived tyrant Ivan Vasilyevich appeared in the Russian town of Oryol in 2016 (Amos 2016); the thought to connect Ivan’s negative historical memory to efforts of Western “information warfare” seems to have been long blossoming from a Russian nationalist and neo-Stalinist ideological perspective.

As another example, the “Russia, My History” exhibitions carried out across Russia by the Orthodox Church in 2018 sympathized with Stalin and highlighted the role of the “first information war” waged by Europe against Russia in the context of Ivan Vasilyevich. Contrastingly in the West, the story about the Church exhibitions is reported in the context of how Russia is utilizing “history as an ideological tool” (Kurilla 2018).

#### **4. Examining the Modern Russian perspective of Ivan Vasilyevich in the context of information warfare**

A master narrative about Ivan Vasilyevich in the context of Russian military history and modern-day information warfare has emerged from a clique of influential right-wing Russian ideologists and media organizations close to the Putin government and Orthodox Church. (Who have often themselves been associated with information warfare or hybrid warfare in the West.)

For example, a notable figure in association of Ivan Vasilyevich and information war is Vladimir Putin’s rumoured confessor Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov). In 2009, Tikhon claimed that Ivan Vasilyevich and Joseph Stalin had been used to divide Russian society as part of a successful “information campaign” by hostile forces (Regnum 2009).

Tikhon occupies an important informational role as the head of Sretensky Monastery, which operates the largest publishing house of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tikhon has also been a major figure perpetuating the now Church-sanctioned investigation of the anti-Semitic ritual murder conspiracy theory regarding Tsar Nicholas II (Khodarkovsky 2018).

The ‘Orthodox Oligarch’ Konstantin Malofeev is believed to have been close to Metropolitan Ioann in the 1990s. He worked with Tikhon to support the annexation of the Ukrainian Donbas in 2014 on behalf of the Kremlin (Bugriy 2014).

Synthesizing a historical ideological position based on Political Orthodoxy, in his reporting for Malofeev’s “Katehon” think tank, Aleksandr Dugin commented on the 2016 debate surrounding the Oryol statue that Ivan Vasilyevich was: *“the greatest Russian Tsar”, “the true name of Russia”, “anointed and consecrated by the Orthodox Church as the universal Christian Emperor”* and that *“under him, Russia became the Third Rome”. “In 1461, under Ivan III, who was the grandfather of Ivan the Terrible, the Russian Church rejected union with the Catholics and chose its own head - Metropolitan Theodosius of Moscow, first approved only by the Grand Duke.” “It was [Ivan IV] who was anointed to the kingdom as the Byzantine Emperor ... a catechon, the last bastion of truth and love in the face of universal apostasy - the world of Antichrist”. “He expressed in himself the essence of the Russian person, the mission of the Russian statehood and the fate of the Russian Church to be the bulwark of world Christianity, and true Christianity is only Holy Orthodoxy.” “To love Russia and hate Ivan the Terrible is pathological and unnatural. It means hating ourselves. This is not Russian.”* (Dugin 2016)

Appearing to complement such views, high relevance Google results for the queries: ("Иван Грозный" OR "Иван Васильевич" OR "Иван IV") AND ("информационная война" OR "информационно-психологическая война" OR "информационная безопасность") return for web portals and influential figures such as:

- The TopWar.ru website which Polygraph.info calls "part of a Russian Defence Ministry outreach program" which "promotes radical nationalistic ideas and portrays Russian military capabilities as the world's most advanced" (Samsonov 2016, Tlis 2018).
- The news portal Regnum (regnum.ru) which has been accused by Estonia and Latvia of being a tool of Russia's state propaganda and by Belarus of inciting hatred (Petrov 2018).
- The website of the Russian Military Historical Society (histrf.ru), a public-state organization which was formed by Presidential decree of Vladimir Putin in 2012 (RMHS 2016).
- Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation (in 2016), Chairman of the Russian Military-Historical Society, and the former Deputy Chief of Information and Analysis for the Central Executive Committee of the United Russia party Vladimir Medinsky, who delivered a lecture on the subject at the State Historical Museum (Medinsky 2016).
- Radio Radonezh and Pravda commentator Victor Saulkin on the Folkline.ru website which has been associated with disinformation in Belarus (Saulkin, 2016).
- Izborsky Club member and noted ideologist Andrei Fursov (Vandysheva 2017).

Synthesizing the views expressed in these generally uncited articles, lectures, and interviews reveals common themes about Ivan Vasilyevich that may be useful for ideological and information warfare purposes.

*A basic version of the narrative may appear something like this:*

Ivan IV was a pious tsar who was not worse than his Western near-contemporaries such as Henry VIII of England, Elizabeth I of England, Sigismund III of Poland, Charles IX of France, Philip II of Spain, etc. He had many wives, but none were publicly executed – like Henry VIII for example (Churuskaeva 2018, Maltsev 2013, Medinsky 2016, Petrov 2018, Vandysheva 2017). Compared to people like that, Ivan wasn't that bad.

Ivan did commit brutal acts; but unlike those Western monarchs, he atoned for his killings and there is a record of it (Medinsky 2016, Saulkin 2016, Vandysheva 2017). Putin himself says while Ivan was not a "white and fluffy" leader, his negative popular image is based on Western lies (Churuskaeva 2018, Vandysheva 2017).

Ivan defended Russia and Orthodoxy against the encroachment of the interests of Western powers, the Vatican/Catholicism, and England which threatened to subordinate Russian interests. When foreigners were getting what they wanted from Russia, they wrote nice things; but when Russia resisted their exploitations, they wrote that Russia was a barbaric country (Medinsky 2016, Petrov 2018, RMHS 2016, Samsonov 2016, Saulkin 2016, Vandysheva 2017).

Such enemies even almost succeeded to make Ivan look like Dracula, but failed (Churuskaeva 2018, Petrov 2018).

Ideas like Ivan IV forced the conversions of Jews or repressed them are lies (Medinsky 2016, RMHS 2016, Samsonov 2016).

The perspective of historians like Nikolai Karamzin is flawed, because they relied on Western sources, or tried to appeal to the sensibilities of the Romanovs (Maltsev 2013, Medinsky 2016, Petrov 2018, RMHS 2016, Samsonov 2016, Saulkin 2016, Vandysheva 2017). Today, liberals within Russia are an even more destructive force than the West in perpetuating these historical ideas about Ivan (Samsonov 2016, Saulkin 2016, Vandysheva 2017).

Unlike Russia, Russia's enemies had printing abilities, and armies like those of the Polish, Germans, and even later Napoleonic invaders had printing houses which moved with the armies (Maltsev 2013, Medinsky 2016, Samsonov 2016). The printed leaflets distorted the view of Ivan and Russia, and were the equivalent of a "yellow press" and internet-enabled information warfare today (Maltsev 2013, Samsonov 2016, Saulkin 2016).

Even first Russian dissident Andrew Kurbsky aided this information war against Russia (Churuskaeva 2018, Samsonov 2016, Saulkin 2016).

The information war of the West against Russia targeting Ivan IV is hundreds of years old and it has not stopped (Ivanov 2006, Petrov 2018).

Ideas like Russia shot down MH 17 (Medinsky 2016), poisoned Alexander Litvinenko (Ivanov 2006), raped Germans in 1945 (Samsonov 2016), or was the aggressor in the 2008 war in Georgia (Saulkin 2016) are extensions of this information war against Russia. Russia is innocent of these accusations.

## **5. Discussion**

The narratives about information warfare and Ivan Vasilyevich which seem to have high Google relevance in Russian appear to be often connected to ideologists and organizations known to have enabled modern hybrid warfare and information warfare against the West. There is a notable connection to the elite Izborsky Club in figures like Aleksandr Dugin, Andrei Fursov, Konstantin Malofeev, Vladimir Medinsky, and Metropolitan Tikhon.

While Metropolitan Ioann's views were once highly controversial in the Russian Orthodox Church, they may appear to take on the air of semi-official state ideology in support of Political Orthodoxy today.

Russian analysis commonly asserts Western information warfare, while simultaneously denying modern-day accusations against Russia. It also raises significant questions of historical 'whataboutism'. These features give the new Orthodox nationalist perspective on Ivan Vasilyevich the impression of being ideological information warfare in its own right.

It would appear that while problematic from a factual perspective, and likely even enabling "information warfare", the Russian arguments regarding information warfare and Ivan should not be entirely dismissed. There is evidence that Russia's deficiency in printing relative to rivals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century allowed negative information about Ivan IV to spread, leading to his consistently corrupted image in the West, and memory in the historical literature as Terrible and a Tyrant (Keenan 2006).

## **6. Conclusion**

Ivan Vasilyevich is a historically divisive figure who embodies a strong contrast between negative Western perceptions of Eastern despotism and simultaneously positive Russian appraisals of his pro-Orthodox, autocratic rule. In the West, he is called "Terrible" and "Tyrant" but in the minds of Russian nationalists to the East, he is "Grozny" – more "awesome" than "terrible".

The Russian nationalist desire to link Ivan IV with information warfare and dismiss negative foreign records of his rule – or any historian (Russian or otherwise) who relied on such materials - seems to overlook Ivan's intentional attempts to burnish his popular image as a great and fearsome leader. While these efforts may have raised his popular profile at home, they may have 'backfired' somewhat in the West based on the already existing contrary perception of autocratic forms of government there.

Highlighting this continued disparity in impressions of autocracy to the present day, perhaps the Russian Orthodox nationalist defensiveness of Ivan Vasilyevich and Joseph Stalin in the context of information warfare is a sign of defensiveness against the perceived *moral* weakness of their system of government.

As Andrei Fursov says: *"Strikes against Ivan the Terrible are strikes against the founding of the Russian state. This is the same logic as with the so-called 'de-Stalinization'" ... "Ivan the Terrible and Joseph Stalin, their reign - reference points, the axis of this story; yank them out and the rest will fall. Blackening Ivan IV, our opponents want to prove that the origins of Russia were cruelty, filth, blood, and the attitude towards us must be built with this in mind. We are not defending Ivan the Terrible; we are defending the truth about Ivan the Terrible. This is the first thing. Second: this is a battle for our country in an information war."* (Vandysheva 2017)

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