



Divine Military Sanction

OE Watch Commentary: According to its constitution, Russia has no official state ideology. Over the past several years, however, the traditions of organized religion, particularly those associated with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), have played a prominent role in shaping the outline of a new ideology. As the two accompanying excerpts suggest, the role of Orthodoxy has grown particularly prominent among the Russian military.

The first excerpt from the military media source *Zvezda TV*, describes the arrival of a special icon to the “Vladimir Cathedral Church in Sevastopol.” As the article points out, this icon “was consecrated by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill at Easter services on 28 April.” The icon was then transported to Crimea, “where Prince Vladimir was baptized,” and will go on to spend the next year travelling among Russian military bases throughout the country, ending up “in Moscow in the Armed Forces Main Cathedral on the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory” (9 May 2020). General Andrey Kartapolov, chief of Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate, commented that “the sacred object will cover more than 57,000 kilometers by air, water, and land. It will be in more than 120 cities, over 150 cathedrals, and more than 300 formations and military units.” The article also explains that “President of Russia Vladimir Putin donated funds for creating the Icon.”



The icon of the Main Church of the Armed Forces of Russia was delivered to the Black Sea Fleet, 30 April 2019. Source: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12228808@egNews_CCA 4.0

The second excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source *Svobodnaya Pressa*, describes some of the religious background to the conflict in SE Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces. In the author’s assessment, the “dominant factor behind this conflict was still the Orthodox component.” He claims that Orthodox icons were “already noticeable on the barricades in Donetsk and Lugansk in March and April 2014,” and that according to one of his fellow separatists, who “considered himself a warrior of Christ, ... Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary, he argued, the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands...” He goes on to argue that “the unified Orthodox faith... remains one of the few brackets that unites them [Ukrainians] with the Orthodox residents of Russia.” The creation of a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church will presumably exacerbate tensions.

On the surface, the notion that the Russian Ministry of Defense would expend the time, effort and resources to transport and display a religious icon throughout the country might appear irrational. However, the symbols of the Russian Orthodox faith have long played a prominent role in providing military personnel with assurances of divine sanction, and will likely remain a complicating factor in the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“... Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary ... the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands...”

Source: Pavel Nastin, Igor Baldin, “Образ Спаса Нерукотворного для главного храма ВС России привезли в Севастополь (The image of the Savior, not made by hands, for the main church of the Russian Armed Forces, was brought to Sevastopol),” *TV Zvezda*, 30 April 2019. <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20194301245-HhQ2f.html>

“...Today we solemnly transfer the Main Icon of the Holy Mandylion of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Cathedral to the Southern Military District command and the Crimean clergy,” said Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov, chief of Armed Forces Main Military-Political Directorate, at the solemn ceremony for transferring the Icon in the Vladimir Cathedral Church in Sevastopol.

...He pointed out that the Icon will be taken through military units and cathedrals throughout the country. “During the year it will be taken through many formations and military units of the Russian Army and through cathedrals of the Russian Orthodox Church so that not only thousands of servicemen, but also the Orthodox faithful in various corners of our Motherland can bow to the sacred object. The sacred object will cover more than 57,000 kilometers by air, water, and land. It will be in more than 120 cities, over 150 cathedrals, and more than 300 formations and military units,” Kartapolov emphasized.

He noted that the Icon is beginning its path in the City-Hero of Sevastopol, “on the land of Chersonesos,” where Prince Vladimir was baptized, and will end it in Moscow in the Armed Forces Main Cathedral on the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory...”

...President of Russia Vladimir Putin donated funds for creating the Icon. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill consecrated the Icon at Easter services on 28 April....

Source: Alexei Polubota, “С Богом в душе и с «калашом» в руках (With God in the soul and “Kalash” in your hands),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 28 April 2019. <https://svpressa.ru/society/article/231540/>

...The theme of defending Orthodoxy in connection with the events in Novorossiia is weakly marked in the public consciousness. Yes, in 2014, people of various convictions traveled from Russia to the Donbass. Supporters of the left, nationalist ideas... But the dominant, in my opinion, was still the Orthodox component. This was already noticeable on the barricades in Donetsk and Lugansk in March and April 2014, where Orthodox icons could be seen next to the patriotic posters. Later, at almost all the checkpoints there were also icons. In the days of the fiercest battles in the summer of 2014, a banner with the face of Jesus Christ was raised in the half-encircled Luhansk city by punishers of Lugansk....

My comrade, “Black Sea” considered himself a warrior of Christ. He insisted that Orthodoxy is not a religion of the weak and submissive. On the contrary, he argued, the Orthodox should defend their faith, including with a weapon in their hands, and not be in a hurry to expose their cheeks to their enemies....

...In such conditions, it is the unified Orthodox faith that remains one of the few brackets that unites them with the Orthodox residents of Russia. If we take it broader, then Orthodoxy is perhaps the main thing in the near historical perspective, which allows us to speak of the unity of Great Russians and Little Russians, as constituent parts of the Russian super-ethnos.