

Peace, Special Military Operation and the Generations

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The familiar Russian question “Who is to blame?” suddenly has a new answer. We are told that we should not think that Putin’s political elite is to blame for what is happening. That those of us who try to identify those people and groups who directly benefit (or mistakenly hope to benefit) from the unfolding armed conflict are on the wrong track. No need to look for the roots of what is happening in the system of oligarchic peripheral capitalism that has developed in Russia.

At the instigation of my colleague Ekaterina Shulman, the emphasis is now on blaming the older generation, whose support seems to ensure the continuation of the current course.

Let us, however, take a closer look at the sociology. I have in front of me data from a recent poll in the Moscow region published by another colleague of mine, Boris Nadezhdin. This poll allows us to compare the level of formal support for the SMO by the older generation, who are not at all used to openly expressing any opposition views, with their responses to the specifically meaningful questions about mobilisation and the need for an end to hostilities.

Among representatives of the 55+ generation 63.44% expressed full and 14.6% partial support for the SMO, which seems to confirm the conviction and is certainly significantly above average. But when respondents were asked whether they supported the partial mobilisation, the number of supporters was much lower in all age groups (49.1% and 21.6% respectively). The decisive question, of course, was the third, controlling question: do you think it is necessary to continue military operations? Here it unexpectedly became clear that supporters of continuation of SMO are in the minority in all age groups, including the above-55s. Only 33.5% were in favour of unconditional continuation of military operations in this group and 6.9% were in favour with reservations.

True, we cannot speak of a consolidated majority of opposition to the SMO either. But if one corrects for reluctance of people to answer the questions via telephone or generally for the mass refusal to participate, which had already become a curse for organizers of public opinion polling, then one may draw a conclusion that shifts are taking place in all the age groups

Thus Nadezhdin’s research has shown that the dynamics of public opinion, although not uniform, are more or less the same, with a natural adjustment for the greater conservatism of the older generations, which in principle is characteristic of all countries at all times. Comparing support for the SMO in Russia and the Vietnam War in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, we see the same dynamics. Negative assessments increase in all age groups in strict proportion to the scale of mobilisation, the rise in casualties and the news of setbacks, while the younger generation reacts faster but pulls in the other age groups. The Russian version of the generation gap is not qualitatively different from the US version.

If we return to Nadezhdin’s poll, it reveals that while anti-war sentiments prevail among youth on

the whole, the greatest aspiration toward peace is to be found not in the youngest group of respondents (aged 18 to 24), but in the people of younger middle age (25 to 39). This also makes sense, as the younger respondents, like the older ones, are more dependent on propaganda, whereas the middle-aged groups have more personal experience and are accordingly more inclined to draw conclusions from it.

And by the way, one last thing. How do zombified old people sitting in front of their TV sets reinforce the current regime when both its problems and its support depend on completely different people, social groups and generations?

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