

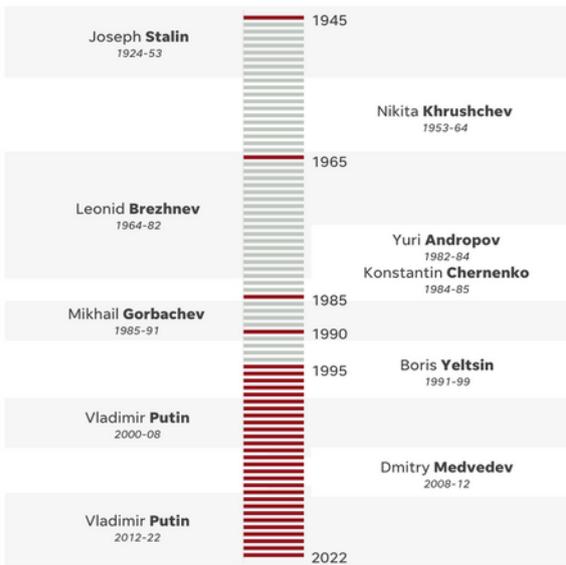
# The Kremlin's manipulation of remembrance



## THE CHANGING NATURE OF "VICTORY DAY"

- In the postwar decades, Victory Day was a quieter event often celebrated in small communities, it only became a public holiday with parades after 1965, under Leonid Brezhnev, in which the focus was on vindicating the Soviet system rather than sacrifice.
- After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the May 9 parade was rehabilitated in 1995, as politicians sought tools to inspire unity, and made the parades an annual fixture.
- Under Putin, the holiday became increasingly state orientated, with changes often coinciding with foreign policy adventures; in 2008, processions of tanks and missiles were reintroduced just as the Kremlin increased support for Georgian separatists, culminating in an invasion in August. After the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the day focused on "the importance for standing for the Motherland's interests" and "the invincible power of patriotism" before Putin headed to Crimea for similar celebrations.
- Meanwhile, any attempts to set up independent remembrance groups (like the immortal brigades) were infiltrated, copied and subverted. The day has now become a tool for the Kremlin to reinforce its narratives of glorious authoritarianism and grievance against a fascist world set on subjugating Russia.

## WHITEWASHING SOVIET CRIMES, JUSTIFYING CURRENT ONES



Victory Day Parades in Russia by year and leader.  
Source: [USAToday](#).

- While the Kremlin uses victory day to extoll the virtues and sacrifices of the Soviet Union in its battle against Nazi Germany, it actively ignores the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and the role of the leadership's callousness, incompetence and inflexibility in contributing to the death toll (3x as many officers died in Stalin's purges than were killed in action).
- The Kremlin also ignores the large numbers of innocent service men and POWs who were tortured and executed by the Soviet Security Services during and immediately after the war. Instead, the Security Services have been rehabilitated to depict their activities, and Stalin's purges, as necessary to win the war. The counterintelligence group SMERSH (SMERt SHpionam: death to spies) has had a tv series made glorifying its operations, despite its role in the mass murder of Soviet Soldiers. While the Perm-36 Gulag Museum has reorientated to focusing on its "contribution" to the war effort.
- Victory Day is only one part of a multi-faceted campaign to whitewash the Soviet era and the many crimes committed during its existence. The campaign has included distribution of "patriotic films" (and banning of those critical of the period), the discrediting of NGOs and researchers documenting crimes by labelling them "foreign agents", and disputing the Soviet Union's role in war crimes. As of May 2014, this has become law, but has been pushed for by the Kremlin since 2009.

- The aim of this whitewashing and glorification of the Soviet Union is to reinforce the Kremlin's legitimacy as a return Russia's glorious past while justifying authoritarianism and repression as part of what makes Russia secure, while the rehabilitation of its security services and their role in the Soviet Union's victory reflects the Kremlin's escalating hybrid warfare campaign.

## THE NEVER ENDING WAR AGAINST "FASCISM"

- The core theme of the parade is Russia's victory over fascism through strength and sacrifice, but also how close the motherland (Rodinah) came to being destroyed by a monstrous enemy. The Kremlin has now continually uses the term fascist to describe its enemies in order to evoke powerful emotional feelings and frame its policies as part of a life or death struggle.
- Over time, Putin has reframed the Second World War as a uniquely Russian victory; emphasising Russia as a stand-alone bulwark against fascism in the past that he connects to its modern day isolation: Russia is not challenging the international order, it is protecting it (and its "traditional values") from a fascist conspiracy that hides behind progressive campaigns.
- The themes of battling fascism are already in the Kremlin's propaganda surrounding its invasion of Ukraine, and is increasingly being tied to the Second World War. When interviewed by the Economist, one young Russian remarked: "I am a glorious successor to this tradition. Now my time has come and I will not disgrace my great-grandfather-and I will go all the way", while the ubiquitous "Z" symbol is now in the colours of the St George's Ribbon, an award for those who fought fascism. It is more than likely this theme will be stronger than ever in the 2022 parade.