

The Russian Way of War
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Russia carries its history on its back. From the beginnings of the country identifiable as Russia, it has endured trauma. The jockeying for power among powerful barons was the norm. It is understood that civil conflict continues until one baron prevails and becomes chief leader: king, king of kings (Persia), and emperor in China, after a century of wars among chiefs, eliminating all but one.

Russia also had that experience, barons jockeying for power. But one other problem particularly damaged them: conquest by the Mongols (the Golden Horde).

The Mongol invasions and conquests during the 13th and 14th centuries created history's largest contiguous empire: the Mongol Empire, which by 1300 covered Asia, the Persian Empire all the way to Baghdad, and eastern Europe (the former eastern Roman Empire). They would have gone further had Genghis Khan not died and had to be taken back to Mongolia for burial.

According to Wikipedia, historians regard the Mongol devastation as one of the deadliest episodes in history. In addition, Mongol expeditions may have spread the bubonic plague across much of Eurasia, helping to spark the Black Death of the 14th century.

Mongols conquered a Muslim city, now part of Russia, by throwing Black Plague corpses over the fortified walls. The consequences were horrific. This was the first germ warfare campaign in history.

Genghis Khan's war policy was to use speed (on horseback), the predecessor of the Nazi idea of blitzkrieg (lightning war) and scorched earth. As the Mongols raced across central Asia (Chinese and Persian colonies), they offered towns and villages an option: surrender or be totally destroyed and the land sown with salt.

Many did not surrender, and the Mongols left piles of bodies, destroyed water systems, and leveled all buildings. (To this day, there is a swath of deserted villages in Iran, remnant of the Mongols.)

Russia never forgot this. To this day, ordinary Russians are ferociously hostile toward Asians, even living here in the US.

The 1812 War. Napoleon conquered his way across Europe, with little effective opposition, until he took on Russia. The Russians used scorched earth, not only depriving Napoleon's army of food, but the Russian peasants too. The peasants greeted the French army with pitchforks and Russia's freezing winter did the rest. Napoleon fled.

World War I. The Russian conscript army was ill fed, ill clothed, and led by aristocratic, often selfish leaders. Revolts simmered among the soldiers and sailors, which ultimately led to a revolution.

In the meantime, however, the Russians fought the Germans (who were having their own problems). When the Russian soldiers invaded German border towns, they were awed by the difference of German life from Russian life. The soldiers encountered flush toilets, running water, modern plumbing, and a standard of living among ordinary Germans that made them realize the backwardness of their own country.

Russians began looting, carrying toilets and tubs with them as they deserted their posts. The Germans were afraid of them and the Russian officers lost all control. World War II. Stalin, as a total dictator, listened to nobody. As the Nazi armies rushed into Russia, they almost made it to Moscow. If it hadn't been for Russia's Mongolian troops, rushing 2,000 miles to save Moscow, Russia would have fallen.

The worst punishment a German officer could face was to be sent to the Russian front. Neither country recognized the Geneva Accords with each other, resulting in terrible abuses of captured prisoners of war.

The German army expected a fast war and they were unprepared for fierce resistance and the encroaching Russian winter. German civilians sent fur coats, cloaks, scarves, and hats to the embattled recruited Nazi army.

Putin's Army in Ukraine. Putin follows the Russian playbook: uses terror; violates rules of war; tortures and murders villagers; besieges towns to starve them out.

Drunken soldiers rape and loot, attack hospitals, schools, and train stations.

These behaviors appear to be Russian policy. Young soldiers call home on open lines to report these offenses and complain about inadequate food and clothing. Those whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad. Putin is increasingly unhinged as NATO expands.

686 words

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