

More Observations on Russia Today

Description

by [Gilbert Doctorow](#)

Excerpt

In this installment I offer both an observation that may be characterized as totally relevant to the ongoing war and an observation that is timeless and relates to what Russian society and behavior is all about. What these have in common is that they are firsthand observations, based on what I see and hear from real people in St Petersburg during this visit.

The first item comes from a 20-minute chat with a fellow who has been one of my best sources of information on the war thanks to his personal relations with *siloviki*, meaning in this case military intelligence officers, that go back to his college days and to his initial service as an administrator in the penitentiary system.

As many readers are aware, my *pied à terre* is a one bedroom apartment in the outlying Petersburg borough of Pushkin, which in pre-Revolutionary times was known as Tsarskoye Selo, literally, the tsar's hamlet. Just 200 meters from our apartment complex is the Catherine the Great summer palace and park, which is a major attraction for both domestic and foreign tourists.

This area today is also home to an important military school which has students from Africa and other developing world regions enrolled alongside native Russians. There is a training base for helicopter pilots nearby. And there is a military hospital of national importance. It is from the latter that today's news comes.

My acquaintance tells me that the hospital is now filled with wounded Russian soldiers from the Ukraine campaign, and in particular with maimed POWs who were released by the Ukrainian authorities in prisoner exchanges. **The hospitalized include a good many traumatized soldiers who were savagely castrated or otherwise disabled by their Ukrainian captors.**

If publicized, these cases would be far more inflammatory in broad Russian society than the horrendous video which circulated in social media a week ago showing the brutal execution of a dozen disarmed Russian POWs by jubilant Ukrainian soldiers. Clearly, the Kremlin is holding this back, lest detailed knowledge of the Ukrainian brutality unleash violent emotions in the Russian public.

In these circumstances, I call attention to the very difficult balancing act required of the Russian President. The man has nerves of steel. He is surely under great pressure from the patriotic hard-liners in the Kremlin who are *au courant* about the castrations and other evidence of Ukrainian depravity. One nod from Vladimir Vladimirovich and Kiev would be leveled to the ground in a matter of hours. It is tragic that Washington and Brussels confuse this restraint with incompetence, fear and other nonsense.