European Forum of Psychohistorians

Event hosted by IPhA - Under the aegis of the International Psychohistorical Association

Second European Forum Event - One day Conference - ***22 November 2026***

Name of the event : "Psychohistorical Perspectives on War: Is Peace Possible?"

Understanding and Overcoming War: Psychological and Structural Factors

Abstract - The European Forum of Psychohistorians, under the aegis of the International Psychohistorical Association, presents its second European Forum event on **22 November 2026**.

Following the first of its kind groundbreaking gathering, which brought together European and American psychohistorians in a dialogue between theoretical and practical approaches, this second gathering turns to one of the most urgent and enduring questions of human history: **war**.

War cannot be understood solely through political decisions, military strategies or structural conditions. A psychohistorical perspective asks how psychological processes, individual and collective fantasies, historical experience, trauma, identity, fear, aggression and the organisation of societies interact with political and structural forces to make violence possible—and, at times, to make it appear inevitable.

Our purpose is not to offer definitive solutions to war, nor to propose a single psychohistorical explanation of its causes. Rather, the Forum seeks to create a **space for dialogue and coming together**—a space in which scholars from different psychohistorical traditions can think alongside one another, question assumptions, listen to different perspectives and explore the psychological and structural dimensions of war.

The event will explore the **causes and persistence of war**, with particular attention to the relationship between psychological and structural factors. Among the questions to be considered are the ways in which leaders and groups respond to real or imagined threats; the role of collective fantasies in the construction of enemies; the emergence and resurgence of militarism; the phenomenon of aggression, including aggression that cannot be understood simply as a response to an external threat; and the historical processes through which societies become organised around fear, defence and conflict.

At the same time, the Forum will ask what psychohistory can contribute to thinking about **peace**—not simply as the absence of war, but as a psychological, relational and structural possibility.

The three presentations will approach these questions from different but complementary perspectives. **Brian D'Agostino** will examine the psychology of militarism, with special attention to the role of NATO expansion in the etiology of the Ukraine war. **Peter Petschauer** will explore questions of peace in relation to Russia and the historical and psychological conditions that shape possibilities for conflict and cooperation. **Juhani Ihanus** will focus on the Russian–Ukrainian war, as a reenactment of large-group trauma shaped by leadership psychology, child-rearing legacies, and collective identity defenses by using psychohistorical and psychodynamic frameworks also proposing a

psychodynamically informed peacebuilding model based on containment, dialogical narrative exchange, and de-splitting enemy images

Underlying these different approaches is a further question: **where does war begin?** Psychohistory encourages us to look not only at states, armies and political leaders, but also at the psychological processes through which human beings experience threat, difference, belonging and otherness. In this sense, understanding war also requires attention to the less visible forms of violence that may be reproduced in families, relationships, institutions and everyday social life.

The European perspective is equally important. As Ludwig Janus has reminded us, **"the Europeans are part of the game."** Europe is not simply an observer of contemporary conflicts but is historically and presently implicated in the political, cultural and psychological processes through which war and peace are constructed.

Through dialogue among different psychohistorical perspectives, the Forum seeks to raise awareness of war as both a historical and psychological phenomenon, to examine the conditions that sustain it, and to consider whether understanding its deeper roots can open space for forms of thought and action oriented towards peace.

The question **"Is peace possible?"** therefore remains open—not as a conclusion to be predetermined, but as a question to be explored collectively through psychohistory.

The meeting will be moderated by Olga Gouni and Bettina Duesmann

Brian D'Agostino (1st speaker)

Title :"Europe at a Crossroads:Demilitarization or War with Russia?"

Dr. D'Agostino will draw upon lessons from the psychology and political economy of American militarism to explore the stark choice currently facing Europe: demilitarization or war with Russia.

ABSTRACT: European leaders currently promote group fantasies demonizing Putin and construing Russia as an incorrigible aggressor. This ideological agenda profits weapons manufacturers but undermines the people's security and prosperity. In this presentation, I draw lessons from the psychology and

political economy of American militarism to sketch a stark choice for Europe: the path of negotiated, verifiable, mutual threat reduction and prosperity, or continuation of the failed, dangerous and costly American and NATO policy of military confrontation. Topics include the Ukraine war, personality correlates of militarism (machismo and authoritarianism), and large-scale structures (military bureaucracies and permanent war economies).

BIO: Brian D'Agostino, Ph.D. is a former president of the International Psychohistorical Association, and current co-editor of *Disarmament Times*. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University. Dr. D'Agostino is the author of peer reviewed research in political psychology, numerous articles on psychohistory and public affairs, and *The Middle-Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America*. Visit his website at https://bdagostino.com/

Peter Petschauer (2nd speaker)

Dr. Petschauer sustains the idea that the war in Ukraine is not much different from the ones that preceded it … from Ebla to Kiev, Except we, the citizens, want to have a word about war or not.

Title :"If you want to make peace, better understand war"

Abstract: The tablets of Ebla tell us that the city was conquered most likely by Sagon sometime between 2367 and 2293 BCE. That means one of the most sophisticated cultures of the ancient world of which we knew nothing until the 1970s (and whose tablets are now available digitally), shows that war was made by men in power and involved the destruction of a city state and most likely its inhabitants. We have similar stories of other cities in the Middle East and people began to think seriously only in the 18th and 19th centuries that one can separate the battlefield and the civilian population. They looked at the past and shuttered.
Indeed, think of the Greeks before Troy, the Huns and the Vandals who ran over parts of the Roman Empire, and demolished every city they came across, and now we had Putin's wars in Chechnya and then Ukraine.

What is different from previous times is that, with the beginning of the Enlightenment and then the American and French revolutions, ordinary people, civilians, began to debate about how one could avoid being a victim of the perpetrators of war. The economist, the mathematician, the political scientist, the military people and of course psychologists tried to figure out what it is that makes us so warlike, but it's not really "us" who are so warlike as a species, it's individuals within our civilizations who are the perpetrators. Most of the time they were and are men who have the idea that war will make them more appealing and more powerful, and of course, give them more territory, more money, nicer palaces, and more women who bow to their demands. In many cases, it gave some ancient men the assurance that they were gods and would have access to heaven after death. More recent ones thought that they were in conversation with God/s. Most rulers, whatever their titles, behaved like their parents and were often treated poorly as children.

But let us not despair, there were rulers in the past and leaders more recently who understood/stand the plight of civilians in war. In the past, most people did not know that war was going on somewhere on the planet; today we know about every war, every attack, across the planet and try to ignore the information as much as we can. Although there is a war going on somewhere else and we try to ignore it, deep inside, we are afraid that we will become part of it; if you're lucky only our property will suffer, and if not, the lives of our friends, children and ourselves will end. Look no further than Gaza, the West Bank and Ukraine.

So, ignoring war is really not an option. And yet all of our efforts so far to explain how to restrain leaders from making war have failed and all of our official efforts, at least since the first world war, to protect civilians from war have also failed.

Which doesn't mean we should give up. Having studied world history for the last 50 years both as a researcher and as a university professor, the only approach that may work is to try to improve the childhood of all of our children and grandchildren. Because children who are treated well in their families from before birth through birth, and after birth, do not make war. The tragedy is that we as societies have tried to improve child rearing, but whenever we make considerable progress, as we did in Russia and the United States, someone comes along and undermines the very effort. Men who persuade or force millions into war.

We have no choice: we must explain to our publics that we have to improve child rearing in all levels of society if we want to prevent war. The reason that this is so important is that, however sophisticated a society may be, Ebla for example was extremely sophisticated, as was Germany in the early 20th century, or Russia and the US most recently, the treatment of mothers during pregnancy and birth, and mothers of young children has consistently lagged behind.

And we do have a long tradition of favoring girls and women because they bear the burden of pregnancy and birth and taking care of an infant. It started this early as the records of Catal Hüyük indicate, continued all the way through the wise women and grandmothers to professional midwives who helped young mothers in these difficult times.

BIO : Peter W. Petschauer, PhD, New York University, taught at Appalachian State University, 1968-2006. (Today he is a writer and a poet.), He Initially gave courses in European and Russian History, later on women and children. Now he part of two arts-related boards at ASU and on two boards of psychohistorical journals. His book Faustina, 2025 and over 250 articles in journals and collections, several hundred presentations/lectures. Prove his academic activity as an important scholar of psychohistory He serves at the moment as the International Vice President of IPhA petschauerpw@appstate.edu; peterpetschauer.com.

Juhani Ihanus (3rd speaker)

Title*"The Psychodynamics of the Russia–Ukraine War"*

Abstract: This presentation uses psychohistorical and psychodynamic frameworks to examine the war between Russia and Ukraine as a reenactment of large-group trauma shaped by leadership psychology, child-rearing legacies, and collective identity defenses. It also generates hypotheses about the Putin–Zelenskyy relationship and why the conflict has been so prolonged.
The war has generally been interpreted through geopolitical, military, economic, and strategic frameworks. Such explanations are indispensable. However, wars are never solely contests over territory, security, or resources. They are also struggles over identity, recognition, memory, humiliation, and historical meaning.
Psychohistorical approaches do not replace geopolitical analysis. Rather, they shed light on aspects of conflict that are often overlooked by conventional strategic theories: collective emotions, symbolic representations, historical narratives, leadership psychology, and relational attachments.
Psychodynamic theories emphasize the importance of unconscious processes, identity threats, and defense mechanisms. Several of these themes are relevant to the Russia–Ukraine war. These themes include regressive tendencies, such as the splitting between idealized self-images and demonized enemies, as well as the projection of feared qualities onto adversaries.
I also propose a psychodynamically informed peacebuilding model based on containment, dialogical narrative exchange, and de-splitting enemy images. This peace process explicitly addresses intersubjective motivations and relationships. Durable peace requires psychological transformation, including the restoration of ambivalence, the rehumanization of others, and decoupling national identity from the repetition of trauma.

BIO : Juhani Ihanus, PhD, is Associate Professor of Psychology and Cultural Psychology at the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Medicine, and Associate Professor of the History of Science and Ideas at the University of Oulu. He is also a poet-writer, essayist, and translator. As a pioneer of European biblio/poetry therapy, Ihanus co-founded the Finnish Association for Biblio/Poetry Therapy in 1981, the first organization of its kind in Europe. He is a member of the Leadership Committee of the Psychohistory Forum and part of the editorial boards of several academic journals. He has authored approximately 550 publications, including books, articles, reviews, and essays, spanning various fields such as psychology, psychohistory, psychoanalytic theory, the history of the human sciences, cultural studies, biblio/poetry therapy, literature, and the arts. Dr. Ihanus can be reached at juhani.ihanus@helsinki.fi

Information and registration: Gabrieala Gusita gabriela.gusita@gmail.com
The event is free of charge.
The ZOOM-Link will be send from Gabrieala Gusita