

Rebuilding the Mriya in Ukraine: Nationalism's Prevalence in the War

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The damaged Mriya

Morgan Aikele— Rebuilding Ukraine is sure to be a monumental undertaking, even when the war comes to an end. Hospitals, schools, homes, key infrastructure, and entire cities have been ravaged by the lengthy fighting and numerous bombings. Ukrainian officials, however, have pinpointed one place to start— the giant Mriya cargo plane. Though the choice to rebuild one cargo plane seems illogical to many, others contend that its effect on nationalism will make it well worth the effort.

Each person has a [national identity](#)— that is, they tend to feel more strongly attached to one nation over any other. This attachment is strengthened by one's participation in their nation, like attending sports matches, paying taxes, or participating in the armed forces. [Nationalism](#), then, refers to when a peoples' shared attachment to a nation is mobilized in order to justify geopolitical actions or pursue an agenda. Ukraine needs a strong mobilization of its people to preserve its territorial integrity, which it does by resisting Russian invasion. But how is that support spurred and mobilization affected? Often, it is through the proliferation of national identity and pride, which can be made manifest in symbols of national success and/or military prowess. In this context, Ukraine's motivation to undertake an enormously expensive (\$500 million) [rebuilding operation](#) of a cargo plane becomes easier to understand. The plane, damaged in the very first days following the Russian invasion, has been a long-standing symbol of Ukrainian might. Officials have referred to it as a "priceless symbol of Ukraine," and that its reconstruction would signify that if something as "complex and gargantuan" as the Mriya can be rebuilt, then so can the rest of the country. The rebuilding effort is not without its heavy share of criticism, however. Others point to the millions of Ukrainian citizens without

electricity, running water, or who are otherwise completely displaced. Ultimately, the Mriya does seem to pull on the heartstrings of many Ukrainians— apparently, even a "two-year-old (Ukrainian) child will tell you to rebuild the Mriya," according to one technician who worked on the aircraft when it was first built.

Understanding [material power](#) is also important to this story. Material power refers to the raw, material things that a country possesses, like a large military, economy, etc. Ukraine's choice to rebuild the Mriya comes at a sizable material cost, which could be otherwise used for humanitarian or military aid for the country's citizens. While the Mriya's benefit to nationalism may win the day for now, growing and maintaining military power has also been a key objective for Ukraine throughout the war's duration. Thus, the Mriya may prove an exception rather than the rule when it comes to financing symbols over other material priorities.

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