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► **To cite this version:**

| Erik C. Piccoli. Carl Schmitt and the Putin Regime. 2024. hal-04671857

HAL Id: hal-04671857

<https://hal.science/hal-04671857v1>

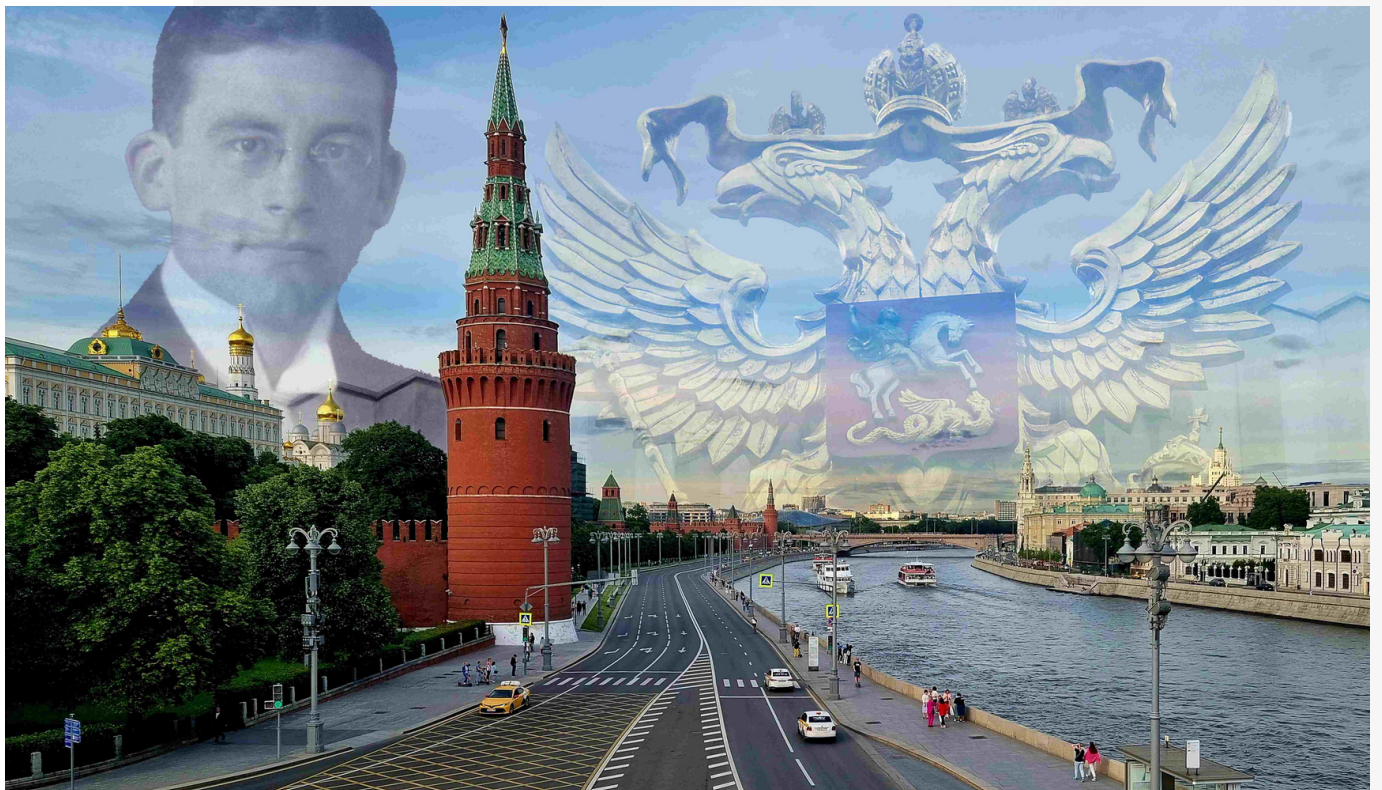
Preprint submitted on 16 Aug 2024

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JANUARY 2024

CARL SCHMITT AND THE PUTIN REGIME



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illiberalism
Studies Program

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Illiberalism Studies Program Working Papers
Student Papers Subseries no. 7
January 2024

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Describing the Russian regime under President Vladimir Putin is no simple task. Those who seek to define it encounter a plethora of competing terms. Some, such as Brian Taylor, have sought to call it *Putinist* in that it is an electoral authoritarian regime, which most closely fits under the category of “personalist dictatorship,” with Putin at its epicenter.¹ Within Russia, certain politicians have used Vladislav Surkov’s term *sovereign democracy*, which he describes as a “way of political life” in which the authorities are “chosen, formed and directed exclusively by the Russian nation.”² However, following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, this task became increasingly difficult, with certain scholars going as far as to argue that the Russian federation is a fascist state.³

While there is no general consensus on how to frame the regime, various characteristics emerge in its domestic, international, and ideological framework which evoke the thought of certain thinkers. One of these is the 20th-century German jurist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), who served as a prominent writer and professor during the Third Reich while continuing to contribute to the fields of political philosophy and international relations after the Second World War. While certain Schmittians have sought to present him as an academic devoid of Nazi sentiments, Schmitt’s philosophies and legal thought, even prior to Adolf Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933, were anti-Semitic and blatantly pro-Nazi.⁴ However, many of his concepts, such as the “friend-enemy” distinction and the “state of exception,” are still relevant in the fields of political science and international relations, receiving considerable attention from scholars.⁵

Since Schmitt is arguably one of the more important anti-liberal legal philosophers of the 20th century, certain scholars argue that his political theory can serve as a useful framework of analysis to better understand political processes and decisions.⁶ The politicians or movements in question might not even have to have read Schmitt, mention him, or even have heard of him since all that matters is that they act in a Schmittian way.⁷ For example, former US President Donald Trump and Chinese

¹ PONARS, “Understanding Putinism,” YouTube, 9:00, November 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOjt3tjOCco>.

² Vladislav Surkov, “Natsionalizatsiya budushego” *Expert*, November 20, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061205211300/http://www.expert.ru/printissues/expert/2006/43/nacion-alizaciya-budushego>.

³ Timothy Snyder, “Opinion: We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html>.

⁴ Bill Scheuerman, “Carl Schmitt and the Nazis,” *German Politics & Society*, no. 23 (Summer 1991), 76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23735189>.

⁵ What Schmitt means by “state of exception” is essentially the sovereign’s ability to act independently of the law in emergency situations. The term is similar to the state of emergency or martial law concepts, but is concerned specifically with the sovereign’s role in ensuring stability.

⁶ Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski et al., “Carl Schmitt and Democratic Backsliding,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 22, no. 3 (March 2023), 406, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-023-00625-5>.

⁷ Karolewski et al., “Carl Schmitt and Democratic Backsliding,” 406.

President Xi Jinping have found themselves the subject of such analysis. With regard to Russia under Putin, Schmitt became the subject of interest due to the regime's exhibiting characteristics similar to his thought. In particular, following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the subsequent full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, these parallels have become increasingly common, as seen in Stefan Auer's 2015 article wherein he frames Russia as Schmittian.⁸ Additionally, David Lewis, in his book *Russia's New Authoritarianism: Putin and the Politics of Order*, argues that Schmitt's theories on how to build an illiberal political framework have resonated with Russian thinkers and even emerged in the form of certain constitutional amendments.⁹ But to what extent is this the case, and are scholars crafting theoretical links that do not actually exist? What really is Schmittian thought, and can Russia be considered a proponent of it in the 21st century? This paper will seek to answer these questions by looking at three key areas of Schmitt's thought: on geopolitics, governance, and ideology.

Carl Schmitt: The Crown Jurist of the Third Reich

Schmitt had served as a constitutional lawyer during the Weimar period in Bonn and later Berlin, where he would write some of his more important works such as *Political Theology*, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, and *The Concept of the Political*, the last of which being his most famous work.¹⁰ Schmitt joined the Nazi Party in 1933, the same year it came to power. Soon thereafter, he became a staunch supporter of the regime in his writings by defending Hitler's extrajudicial killings and the purging of German jurisprudence of Jewish influence.¹¹ However, Schmitt would find himself the target of the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service: the intelligence arm of the SS) and was accused of being a neo-Hegelian (in that Schmitt "viewed the state as the sole authority to whom one had a political obligation") and proponent of political Catholicism, resulting in him falling out of favor with the regime.¹²

With the end of the Second World War, Schmitt was acquitted in the Nuremberg Trials yet ended up as an intellectual pariah. During the postwar period, he would attempt to distance himself from the legacy of the Nazi regime by seeking to promote his works written during the Weimar Republic.¹³ Schmitt's works continue to be read primarily due to his unique critique of liberalism. According to him, liberalism seeks to eliminate the political¹⁴ through ideas such as universal human rights, parliamentarism, and free trade.¹⁵ For Schmitt, such ideas displace the state from its rightful position

⁸ Stefan Auer, "Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: The Ukraine Crisis and the Return of Geopolitics," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 91, no. 5, (September 2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24539013>.

⁹ David Lewis, "David Lewis on Carl Schmitt and Russian Conservatism," interview by Marlene Laruelle, Illiberalism Studies Program, The George Washington University (November 2020), 13, <https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Laruelle-Conversations-on-Illiberalism-50-Scholars.pdf>.

¹⁰ Lars Vinx, "Carl Schmitt," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, August 7, 2010, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt>.

¹¹ Vinx, "Carl Schmitt."

¹² Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 222, 235, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvq6g.15>.

¹³ Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt*, 278.

¹⁴ For Schmitt, "the political" refers to the constant inclination of groups of people to identify others as "different" or "enemies," with whom war is possible. For more, see Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Carl Schmitt," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carl-Schmitt>.

¹⁵ Kevin Elliot, "Carl Schmitt: The Core Curriculum," Columbia College, <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/carl-schmitt>.

at the center of society turning it into a superficial and regularized administration.¹⁶ These critiques, along with the legalistic concepts he conjured up during the interwar period and his postwar geopolitical theories, constitute the core aspects of Schmittian thought through which the present Russian regime will be analyzed.

21st-Century Russian Geopolitics: Multipolarity, *Großraum*, and Anti-Atlanticism

A multipolar world order

One of the central elements of Russian geopolitical thought espoused by the intelligentsia, and by Putin himself, is that there is a need for the global order to shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, allowing each nation to choose its own political system. Putin has made it no secret that, according to him, the post-Cold War order has been detrimental.¹⁷ After his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, he expanded on this belief, concluding that the ability for a given civilization to follow its own path and organize its own socio-political system is what constitutes real democracy.¹⁸ The specific form of unipolarity which Russia purports to combat is characterized by the belief in a universal liberal hegemonic order. In essence, it posits that all other forms of government pale in comparison to the liberal system defined by the free market and natural rights, which means that the global order, therefore, will naturally adopt these values. This assertion was popularized during the dawn of the post-Cold War period, notably by Francis Fukuyama with his end of history thesis.¹⁹ Since then, this has served as a foil to the Russian vision of multiple civilizations coexisting.²⁰ Thus, Russia appears as the primary opponent to the “globalist system.”²¹

How this geopolitical structure would appear in actuality was illustrated by Alexey Drobinin, Director of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Foreign Policy Planning Department, who writes that each civilization will have a core, consisting of one or more leader states, surrounded by “peripheral belts” along with “capable loners,” which are nations lacking the sufficient resources “to form a civilizational commonwealth, although they may attempt to do it.”²² Drobinin utilizes Russian scholar Vitaly

¹⁶ Elliot, “Carl Schmitt.”

¹⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 12, 2007, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

¹⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Valdai International Discussion Club Meeting,” Kremlin website, President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69695>.

¹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16, (Summer 1989), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>.

²⁰ Aleksandr Dugin, “Eschatologies of the Multipolar World,” *Geopolitika.ru*, August 29, 2023, <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/article/eschatologies-multipolar-world>.

²¹ Those who read Fukuyama with more caution will recall how he argued that, while “particular regimes in the real world might not implement these [liberal] ideals fully, their theoretical truth is absolute and could not be improved upon.” Fukuyama, “The End of History?” 8. Thus, he did not rule out the possibility of alternative political systems arising in the future. However, building on his understanding of Hegel, history had already ended in the philosophical sphere. This assertion was echoed by Charles Krauthammer in his piece “The Unipolar Moment,” in which he stated that, “in perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States ... but we are not there. Now is the unipolar moment.” The possibility of rival systems emerging still existed in practice; however, the debate in the realm of ideas had ended. Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no.1 (1990/1991), <https://doi.org/10.2307/20044692>.

²² Alexey Drobinin, “The Vision of a Multipolar World,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, February 20, 2023, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/the-vision-of-a-multipolar-world/>

Naumkin's definition of a civilization as a "special category of states" characterized by "uninterrupted history, a pronounced authenticity, with citizens and leaders who are prepared to resolutely uphold their cultural identity."²³ With regard to the liberal rules-based international order, Drobinin confines it to the "dustbin of history," arguing that it serves as "a cover for [the West's] hegemonic aspirations."²⁴

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov has echoed similar statements, posing in an op-ed sent to Latin American print media that the liberal international order exists to "counteract the natural processes of forming and strengthening new independent centers of development."²⁵ This notion, that the liberal international order threatens state sovereignty, has existed ever since the EU started integrating Eastern European states into what in Russian debate circles was deemed a "value empire," whose ultimate goal was to replace their governments with leadership obedient to the EU.²⁶ In short, Russia, in its bid to legitimize its illegal invasion of Ukraine, presents itself as a global paladin leading the world into a new multipolar age wherein all nations can govern themselves independently, free from the oppressiveness of liberal tyranny (this, of course, is to say: all nations that endorse the Russian narrative rather than that of the West).

One need to look no further than the statements made by the Russian leadership to witness this strategy in action. Putin's statement during the second Russia-Africa Summit, held in July 2023, is indicative of his belief that aspirations for autonomy entail contributing to the emergence of a multipolar order.²⁷ Furthermore, Lavrov's article regarding the opportunities multipolarity presents Latin America builds on this concept.²⁸ Therefore, according to Russian officials and intellectuals, multipolarity serves as the guiding principle of Russia's contemporary geopolitical thought.

It is at this point where Schmitt comes onto the scene. In 1952, during the early stages of the Cold War, he published an article entitled "Die Einheit der Welt" (The Unity of the World), wherein he examined how the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union did not necessarily have to result in the victory of one over the other, but rather, as Chantal Mouffe explains, evolve into a "new global order based on the existence of several autonomous regional blocs."²⁹ Since he believed that the dualist Cold War system was unsustainable, Schmitt argued in favor of a truly pluralist order, similar to that of the old *jus publicum Europaeum*, the post-Westphalian international legal order (that is to the say, the mutual recognition of states as sovereign entities) that existed in Europe until the First World War, yet this time global rather than Eurocentric, so as to "avoid the negative

²³ Drobinin, "The Vision of a Multipolar World."

²⁴ Drobinin.

²⁵ Sergey Lavrov, "Article by Sergey Lavrov for Print Media in the Latin American Countries," Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, April 13, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1863443/. This piece was published in *Panorámica* (La Molina, Peru, <https://www.panoramical.eu/america-latina-y-caribe/75893>) and cited by others, such as *Resumen Latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires, Argentina, <https://www.resumenlatinoamericano.org/2023/04/16/rusia-el-canciller-lavrov-visitara-brasil-venezuela-cuba-y-nicaragua>).

²⁶ Sabine Fischer, "The European Union and the Insiders/Outsiders of Europe: Russia and the Post-Soviet Space," *Review of European Studies* 4, no. 3, (July 2012), 39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/res.v4n3p32>.

²⁷ Vladimir Putin, "Russia-Africa Summit," Kremlin website, President of Russia, (July, 2023), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71826>.

²⁸ Sergey Lavrov, "Article by Sergey Lavrov for Print Media in the Latin American Countries," Russian Foreign Ministry website, April 13, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1863443/.

²⁹ Chantal Mouffe, "Schmitt's Vision of a Multipolar World Order," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 2 (April 2005), 249, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-104-2-245>.

consequences of pseudouniversalism” by providing the “institutions necessary to manage conflicts.”³⁰ In 1991, following the collapse of Communism in Europe, this reality had still never materialized, and resulted instead in what Schmitt feared the most: a “unipolar moment.”³¹

That is not to say that the triumph of liberal democracy at the end of the Cold War has negated the possibility of multipolarity eventually resurging, as Charles Krauthammer predicted.³² In fact, the early signs of a multipolar world appear to be emerging.³³ The re-emergence of the former Cold War-era Sino-Russian bloc, which is now kept together by shared anti-American sentiment, presents itself as an alternative to the Atlanticist order. As Joshua Kurlantzick states, the two powers, by directly promoting remilitarization around the world, indicate their “desire to create an alternative and autocratic global order.”³⁴ However, this geopolitical realignment is not necessarily defined by anti-Western (or, on the other side, anti-Russian, or anti-Chinese) sentiments. In fact, a bloc of non-aligned nations—composed primarily of states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean—is emerging.³⁵ Consequently, this has resulted in diplomatic competition between Russia and the West in the Global South.³⁶

With regard to Russia, the Schmittian understanding of multipolarity is distinctly similar to that proselytized by the Russian Federation’s thinkers and politicians. The framing which Russian leaders and scholars have chosen when presenting this new order is unmistakably international in its scope. By focusing on culture and identity, Russia seeks to characterize the Western “rules-based international order” as a neocolonial force, evoking Schmitt’s notion of a truly global pluralist order serving as the barrier which prevents universalism from actualizing itself.³⁷ Additionally, the idea of autonomous regional blocs plays into Drobinin’s vision of multiple independent civilizations. However, there is more to the Russian view of multipolar order than cultural and political independence.

Großraum in the modern era

Schmitt, in believing that the Anglo-American-backed theory of spatial universalism (that is to say, an order not defined by distinct cultural-political blocs but rather a universal order based on Western liberal values), was not a sustainable geopolitical strategy, sought to propose an alternative system.

³⁰ Mouffe, “Schmitt’s Vision of a Multipolar World Order,” 250.

³¹ Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment.”

³² Krauthammer.

³³ Some, such as Fareed Zakaria in *The Post-American World, Release 2.0: Updated and Expanded edition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), had highlighted how already back the early 2000s, due to the “rise of rest” (that is to say, the developing world), the hegemonic nature of the United States was in jeopardy, leading to what would turn into a “post-American world.”

³⁴ Joshua Kurlantzick, “Responding to China and Russia’s Influence on the Militarization of Global Politics,” *Council on Foreign Relations blog*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/responding-china-and-russias-influence-militarization-global-politics>.

³⁵ Here it is important to highlight how this “bloc” is not referring to the Non-Aligned Movement, but rather to a phenomenon wherein nations, regardless of their ideological, economic, or electoral characteristics, seek to define their geopolitical framework outside of a strategic alliance.

³⁶ Marie Sandnes, “Are We Seeing a Global Geopolitical Realignment? Statements, UN Votes, and Diplomatic Interactions after the Invasion of Ukraine,” *PRIO Policy Brief* 16 (2022): 4, <https://www.prio.org/publications/13275>.

³⁷ Putin, “Russia–Africa Summit.”

What ultimately emerged was his understating of *Großraum* (great space).³⁸ Schmitt presents his understanding of this strategy in his 1939 work *International Law of Großraum-Ordering with a Prohibition on Intervention for Extra-Regional Powers: A Contribution to the Concept of Reich in International Law*, published two weeks prior to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia (March 1939).³⁹ This multipolar order was not characterized exclusively by multiple autonomous blocs but also by distinct *Großräume* (great spaces) of “politically awakened nation[s]” at the core along with a lack of “spatially alien powers.”⁴⁰ These nations then exert their influence over their respective areas of influence but never go on to formally incorporate them into their territory.⁴¹ Furthermore, it stipulates that the people from the core area are “linked to a broader territorial area and capable of excluding other powers from the relevant space.”⁴² Schmitt’s concept was not entirely unique, as it appears as an elaboration of the notion of a sphere of influence. In fact, he argues that it was built on the model of the Monroe Doctrine, which he argued had served as the “archetypal form” (though he argued that it had lost this quality once it had evolved from a doctrine for the Western Hemisphere to an imperialist one).⁴³

This theory is expanded on further by Schmitt through the notion of *nomos*. As David Lewis explains, this new international order has been “designed to manage the interactions of *Großräume* in a manner that maintained international order, not through international cooperation, but through clear lines of division, and mutually understood political antagonisms; in short, it ensures the existence of ‘the political,’ the division of the world into operational binaries of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy,’ at an international scale.”⁴⁴ In essence, this system would result in “endless competition and boundary-drawing between coherent, homogenous *Großräume*,” allowing for a more sustainable global order that avoids the potential for a totalizing war.⁴⁵

In Russia, both the notions of the nation’s historical regional primacy, and of its asserting itself in its regional space, run deep. This understanding flourished following the tumultuous era of the ‘90s wherein, after realizing that the United States had no intention to curb the expansion of its influence in the world, the Russian ruling elite fractured into different camps, with balancers (who believed in stabilizing relations between the East and West), and great-power normalizers (who insisted that

³⁸ Here it is imperative to note that *Großraum* and *Lebensraum*, the Nazi expansionist doctrine, are two different concepts. As Schmitt asserted at Nuremberg, his was an internationally recognized social science concept, while the latter was racist language promoted by the SS. Additionally, Schmitt argued that Hitler had not pursued a policy of *Großraum* during the Second World War stating that Hitler’s was a politics of conquest. See Matthew Specter, “Grossraum and Geopolitics: Resituating Schmitt in an Atlantic Context,” *History and Theory* 56, no. 3 (September 2017), 401, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48583744>.

³⁹ Stuart Elden, “Reading Schmitt Geopolitically: Nomos, Territory and Großraum,” *Radical Philosophy* 161, (May 2010), 19, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/reading-schmitt-geopolitically>.

⁴⁰ David Lewis, “Carl Schmitt in Moscow: Counter-Revolutionary Ideology and the Putinist State,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 211 (December 2017), 15, <http://hdl.handle.net/10871/32583>.

⁴¹ Stuart Elden, “Reading Schmitt Geopolitically: Nomos, Territory and Großraum,” *Radical Philosophy* 161, (May 2010): 23, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/reading-schmitt-geopolitically>.

⁴² Achilles Kordas, “Russia’s Eurasian Großraum and its Consequences.” *VerfBlog*, March 31, 2022, <https://verfassungsblog.de/russias-eurasian-groraum-and-its-consequences/>.

⁴³ Kordas, “Russia’s Eurasian Großraum and its Consequences.” What Schmitt finds “archetypal” about the Monroe Doctrine is its clear demarcation of what territory falls within the United States’ sphere of influence and how no spatially alien power, such as those of Europe, can intervene within these confines.

⁴⁴ David Lewis, “Eurasian Spaces in a New World Order: *Großraum* Thinking in Russian Foreign Policy” (poster presented at the International Studies Association Conference, San Francisco, April 2018), https://www.academia.edu/36441262/Eurasian_Spaces_in_a_New_World_Order_Gro%C3%9Fraum_Thinking_in_Russian_Foreign_Policy.

⁴⁵ Lewis, “Eurasian Spaces in a New World Order.”

Moscow's foreign policy must remain essentially nonconfrontational, as being anti-Western was not necessary to being a great power).⁴⁶ While the great-power normalizers had initially defined the Russian geopolitical doctrine, since the second Putin administration a distinctly anti-Western and revanchist approach has come to characterize Russia's international policy.

While Russia believed in its legitimacy as a great regional power, it also believed it needed to assert itself as such. Here, David Lewis highlights that Russia's modern *Großraum* strategy came on the scene as the country sought to bolster its spatial supremacy via two approaches: (1) the Eurasian turn, and (2) the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World).⁴⁷ The former characterizes Eurasia as a geopolitical space dominated by a hegemonic Russia and has evolved into a "Greater Eurasia" vision characterized by an "imagined space premised on a strong axis between Moscow and Beijing," a vision endorsed by Putin in 2017.⁴⁸ Eurasianism has become virtually synonymous with the politics of right-wing polemicist and geostrategist Aleksandr Dugin.⁴⁹ While Schmitt's thought tends to appear as an indirect influence within the Russian intelligentsia, Dugin directly endorses many of Schmitt's theories, as will be discussed later. For Dugin, *Großraum* provides Russia with a pretext to restore the former Soviet "Great Space ... [by seizing] ... those additional territories which are rapidly losing their ethno-state identities" in the post-Cold War era.⁵⁰ Therefore, for Dugin, Russia's geopolitical doctrine can be nothing other than neo-Eurasianist, as it is responsible for restoring Russia's great-power status.⁵¹

With regard to the *Russkii Mir*, this has taken on the form a public diplomacy tool, with platforms such as the Russian World Foundation supporting Russian communities and promoting Russian culture and history all over the world.⁵² Additionally, the *Russkii Mir* notion became somewhat officialized when Putin mentioned it to justify the annexation of Crimea by stating that Germany, as a once divided nation, would hopefully "understand the aspiration of the Russian World, of Russian History, to reestablish unity."⁵³ Kremlin Press Secretary Dimitry Peskov would reiterate this belief, stating that "Russia is the country that underlies the Russian World."⁵⁴ This last postulation is distinctly Schmittian in asserting Russia as the core linked to its broader territorial area.

⁴⁶ Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 34.

⁴⁷ David Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 172. The concept of *Russkii Mir* (the Russian World) is evocative of Schmitt's *Großraum* in that it delineates a Russian zone of cultural-political influence wherein spatially alien powers (such as the United States) are not allowed to intervene.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism*, 174.

⁴⁹ For more on this, see Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ Aleksander Dugin, "Carl Schmitt's 5 Lessons for Russia," *Eurasianist Internet Archive*, October 12, 2016, <https://eurasianist-archive.com/2016/10/12/carl-schmitts-5-lessons-for-russia>.

⁵¹ Marlene Laruelle, "Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?" *Kenan Institute Occasional Papers*, no. 294 (June 28, 2001): 8, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/OP294_aleksandr_dugin_laruelle_2006.pdf. Neo-Eurasianism here refers the conservative ideology that emerged in Russia during the 1990s which rejects Russia's European identity. For more on this, see Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*.

⁵² Marlene Laruelle, "The 'Russian World': Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination," *Center for Global Interests Papers* (May 2015), 11, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-russian-world-russia-s-soft-power-and-geopolitical-imagination>.

⁵³ Laruelle, "The 'Russian World,'" 14.

⁵⁴ Laruelle, 14.

With the full-scale invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022, Russia has sought to reassert itself within its perceived region of influence. In fact, in Putin's speech "On Conducting a Special Military Operation" when launching the war, he argued that the perceived threat of NATO encroachment eastwards was "a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation."⁵⁵ Additionally, on March 31, 2023, Putin approved the nation's latest foreign-policy concept in a document that stipulates how Russia is in a special position as a "unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power that brings together the Russian people and other peoples belonging to the cultural and civilizational community of the Russian world."⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Russian Federation, building on its national interests, will seek to create a "favorable external environment for [the] sustainable development of Russia" and "consolidate Russia's position as one of the responsible, powerful and independent centers of the modern world."⁵⁷

As Andrew Michta writes, "this shift in Russian culture may be seen as the "de-Westernization" and reconceptualization of Russia as a Eurasian state par excellence, with 'Eurasia' understood in modern Russian history as an entity separate from the West—and not only separate from the West, but in a dichotomy of the West vs. Eurasia as well."⁵⁸ The hostile relationship here between Russia and NATO is deeply evocative of Schmitt's notion of *Großraum*, as the NATO encroachment excuse highlights the idea of a spatially alien power intruding into the Russian core's space. Finally, the latest foreign policy concept's stated belief that Russia carries on the Eurasian civilizational legacy is indicative of Schmitt's belief in the "great political ideal," which is defined as a "set of values that unite peoples across the wider region in ways that transcend ethnicity."⁵⁹ Thus, in light of the 2022 invasion and its surrounding rhetoric, the Russian state has seemingly made Schmittian *Großraum* its doctrinal theory for the 21st century.

Operating an Autocracy: Setting the Exception and Distinguishing the Enemy

Putin and the state of exception

Schmitt defines the sovereign as "he who decides the exception."⁶⁰ This is because the "decision on the exception is a decision in the true sense of the word," as it operates out of the realm of norms and, therefore, the exception "makes relevant the subject of sovereignty, that is, the whole question of sovereignty."⁶¹ This is what he outlined in his 1922 book, *Political Theology*, delineating how the

⁵⁵ Vladimir Putin, "Full Text of Vladimir Putin's Speech Announcing 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine," *The Print*, February 24, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/full-text-of-vladimir-putins-speech-announcing-special-military-operation-in-ukraine/845714>.

⁵⁶ "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation," Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, Foreign Policy, March 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586.

⁵⁷ "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation."

⁵⁸ Andrew Michta, "Putin's 'Eurasian' Fixation Reveals Ambitions beyond Ukraine," *New Atlanticist* (blog), Atlantic Council, May 4, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/putins-urasian-fixation-reveals-ambitions-beyond-ukraine>.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism*, 179.

⁶⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1922] 2005), 5.

⁶¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 6.

problem with constitutionalism is that it fails to account for the exception since, “for a legal order to make sense a normal situation must exist.”⁶² As Schmitt writes:

All law is “situational law.” The sovereign produces and guarantees the situation in its totality. He has the monopoly over this last decision. Therein resides the essence of the state’s sovereignty, which must be juristically defined correctly, not as the monopoly to coerce or to rule, but as the monopoly to decide. The exception reveals most clearly the essence of the state’s authority.⁶³

Thus, liberal democracy, for Schmitt, is not capable of confronting the dilemmas that arise from the exception, since the specifics that define it are not codified. It is, therefore, the sovereign’s duty to define the exception, which Schmitt generalizes as a “case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like,” with guidance as to how to manage it.

On February 24, 2022, Putin ordered the Russian Armed Forces to invade Ukraine. The rationale attributed to the “special military operation” varies, yet during his televised address that day, the Russian president clearly stated that as NATO continued to expand eastwards, “the situation of the country is getting worse and more dangerous.”⁶⁴ Therefore, as the sovereign, he acted outside of the realm of legality, since he perceived the existence of his state to be in jeopardy.⁶⁵ In believing that the situational law had failed, Putin, in a Schmittian fashion, defined the current situation as a state of exception and acted accordingly.⁶⁶

The invasion is just the latest example of Putin acting as the sovereign in what he perceives as the exception. During the wars in Chechnya, Jeffrey Kahn notes how the region became a “legal blackhole” within the country.⁶⁷ As David Lewis states, the demarcation of Chechnya as both exceptional and Russian “reflects the constitutive contradictions of the state of exception.”⁶⁸ In Ukraine, it was Putin’s sole decision to have the Crimean Peninsula annexed. While the rationale remains ambiguous, it was Putin, once again as the sovereign, defining the exception and suspending the situational law.⁶⁹ As the

⁶² Schmitt, 13.

⁶³ Schmitt, 13.

⁶⁴ Vladimir Putin, “Rasshifrovka rechi Putina o nachale voennoy operatsii,” *Bumaga*, February 24, 2022, <https://paperpaper.io/putin-obyavil-o-nachale-voennoj-operac>.

⁶⁵ Lise Morjé Howard, “A Look at the Laws of War and How Russia Is Violating Them,” United States Institute of Peace, Analysis and Commentary (blog), September 29, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/look-laws-war-and-how-russia-violating-them>.

⁶⁶ While it is not entirely clear for what specific reason, or reasons, Putin actually decided to order the invasion Ukraine (as multiple narratives have been deployed), the invasion was both illegal, as it violated the Budapest Memorandum and UN Article 2(4), and it occurred at the behest of the sovereign. Ultimately, according to Putin, international laws had to be ignored regardless of his true intentions behind the invasion.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Kahn, “Vladimir Putin and the Rule of Law in Russia,” *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 36, no. 3, (January 2008): 527, <https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/gjicl/vol36/iss3/2>.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *Russia’s New Authoritarianism*, 63.

⁶⁹ For more on the various perspectives on the invasion of Crimea, see John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, August 18, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>; Carl Schreck, “From ‘Not Us’ to ‘Why Hide It?’: How Russia Denied Its Crimea Invasion, then Admitted It,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/from-not-us-to-why-hide-it-how-russia-denied-its-crimea-invasion-then-admitted-it/29791806.html>; Daniel Treisman, “Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3, (May/June, 2016): 47–54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43946857>; Michael McFaul, “Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?,”

then Deputy Minister of Finance Tatyana Nesterenko stated, the decision “was taken by Putin personally” and, since he “possess full information and full responsibility for this,” the decision can only be made by one person.⁷⁰ Furthermore, with regard to the Russian justice system, what emerges is a dualistic system characterized by both normal situations and by a set of exceptions.⁷¹

Ultimately, Russians have become capable of “recognizing the exceptional case ‘from below,’ and where possible avoiding any involvement in such cases.”⁷² As Richard Sakwa writes, the exception “coexists with the routine exercise of law,” and thus Russia remains a flawed democracy “trapped in the stalemated grey area between an administrative and genuine constitutional state.”⁷³ However, for the sovereign to set the exception, there must be an underlying cause, whether it be as a response to outside influence or domestic upheaval. As will be explored in the next section, framing Russia’s political struggles within the binary “friend-enemy” distinction has helped distinguish the enemy and the friend within the Federation.

Friends and Enemies

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government reiterated its claim that a “fifth column” was destabilizing the Federation and, in response, the state carried out large-scale crackdowns on those who protested against the war.⁷⁴ Putin has clearly endorsed this rhetoric by warning that the West “will try to bet on the so-called fifth column, on traitors—on those who earn their money here, but live over there. Live, not in the geographical sense, but in the sense of their thoughts, their slavish thinking.”⁷⁵ The claim made regarding the presence of destabilizing fifth columns in Russia is nothing new, with Putin critics following the 2014 annexation of Crimea having also been branded as “national traitors” and “fifth columnists.”⁷⁶ According to Scott Radnitz, claims about fifth columns tend to “spike during particular destabilizing events (and wane during others),” suggesting that “they are selectively invoked, and reactive rather than strategic.”⁷⁷ Additionally, Radnitz highlights how these claims reference not only Russia, but also strategically important areas such as Ukraine and Georgia.⁷⁸

While this phenomenon has already manifested itself in Russia, its current iteration is considerably more dualistic in its juxtaposition of the state, both domestically and internationally, against the allegedly totalizing forces of the West. The “systemic opposition parties,” which have served as token foils to Putin’s United Russia party and constitute the regime’s “loyal opposition,” have all touted the

Foreign Affairs, October 17, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2014-10-17/faulty-powers>.

⁷⁰ “Decision to Annex Crimea ‘Taken by Putin Personally,’” *Unian*, May 3, 2015, <https://www.unian.info/politics/1052109-decision-to-annex-crimea-taken-by-putin-personally.html>.

⁷¹ Lewis, *Russia’s New Authoritarianism*, 137.

⁷² Lewis 137.

⁷³ Lewis, 78.

⁷⁴ Harris Mylonas and Scott Radnitz, “The Disturbing Return of the Fifth Column,” *Foreign Affairs* (blog), August 26, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/disturbing-return-fifth-column>.

⁷⁵ Mylonas and Radnitz, “The Disturbing Return of the Fifth Column.”

⁷⁶ Chris Miller, “What Putin Really Feared in Ukraine,” - Foreign Policy Research Institute, E-notes, September 17, 2014, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2014/09/what-putin-really-feared-in-ukraine>.

⁷⁷ Scott Radnitz, “The Real or Imagined Infiltration of Fifth Columns in the Post-Soviet Region,” *PONARS Eurasia*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-real-or-imagined-infiltration-of-fifth-columns-in-the-post-soviet-region>.

⁷⁸ Radnitz, “The Real or Imagined Infiltration of Fifth Columns in the Post-Soviet Region.”

regime's rhetoric regarding the war.⁷⁹ The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) has expelled antiwar deputies, and party leader Gennady Zyuganov has assured the leaders of the Luhansk and Donetsk Republics that they have his party's support.⁸⁰ The centrist party Novyye Lyudi (New People) has backed the invasion, arguing that Russia had "exhausted its options to ensure its security through peaceful means."⁸¹ However, it was the comments made by Leonid Slutsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), following the death of Dugin's daughter, Darya, which underscore the nature of contemporary Russian society: "regardless of our affiliations with political parties, there can be only one approach. One nation. One president. One victory."⁸² There is only space for friends, and all others are counted as enemies.

For Carl Schmitt, all political actions and motives can ultimately be reduced to the distinction between friend and enemy.⁸³ In his seminal text, *The Concept of the Political* (pub. 1932), he highlights how this distinction represents the highest degree of "a union or separation, of an association or dissociation," as the enemy, regardless of its esthetic or moral qualities, constitutes "the other" and "it is sufficient for his nature that he is ... existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible."⁸⁴ As Schmitt explains:

The morally evil, aesthetically ugly, or economically damaging need not necessarily be the enemy; the morally good, aesthetically beautiful, and economically profitable need not necessarily become the friend in the specifically political sense of the word. Thereby the inherently objective nature and autonomy of the political becomes evident by virtue of its being able to treat, distinguish, and comprehend the friend-enemy antithesis independently of other antithesis.⁸⁵

Schmitt goes on to explain how, in a pluralist system of the liberal kind, the state is threatened, since it "ignores the central concept of every theory of state, the political, and does not even mention the possibility that the pluralism of association could lead to a federally constructed political entity."⁸⁶ This system is characterized by liberal individualism, wherein subjects themselves decide how to manage all conflicts and questions, thus eliminating the political entity.⁸⁷ To combat the depoliticization of politics which liberalism preforms by pivoting to individualism, Schmitt suggests that "the boundaries of the political nation and the boundaries of citizenship coincide," which he implies a sovereign dictator can accomplish through homogenization of the community by way of an

⁷⁹ Richard Sakwa, "Whatever Happened to the Russian Opposition?," Chatham House, May 23, 2014, p. 9, [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20140523SakwaFinal.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20140523SakwaFinal.pdf).

⁸⁰ Simon Pirani, "How Russia's 'Opposition' Parties Back the War on Ukraine," Open Democracy (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-opposition-communist-just-russia-support-ukraine-war>), November 17, 2022.

⁸¹ Tat'yana Zamakhina, "Novye liudi" soglasny, chto mirom 12problem s Ukrainoy ne reshit," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 24, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/02/24/novye-liudi-soglasny-chto-mirom-problemu-s-ukrainoj-ne-reshit.html>.

⁸² "One Nation, One President, One Victory": Politicians and Propagandists Turn Dugina's Memorial Service into a Pro-War Rally," *The Insider*, August 23, 2022, <https://theins.ru/en/news/254332>.

⁸³ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago, University Of Chicago Press, 1999), 26.

⁸⁴ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27.

⁸⁵ Schmitt, 27.

⁸⁶ Schmitt, 45.

⁸⁷ Schmitt, 45.

“appeal to a clear friend-enemy distinction.”⁸⁸ This includes the state’s ability as a political entity, in its effort towards securing internal peace during critical situations, to “decide also upon the domestic enemy.”⁸⁹ Therefore, for Schmitt, the friend- enemy distinction is *the ultimate category*, as “the nonpolitical antithesis in the same moment in which it leads to this grouping (of friend and enemy) casts off its former criteria and subjects itself to the completely new conditions and consequences of the political.”⁹⁰

While the Putin regime has deployed the friend-enemy distinction for some time, the form it has evolved into during the war in Ukraine is notably more repressive.⁹¹ The war, and one’s support for it, has become the defining factor, as those who oppose it are framed as fifth-columnists who oppose the interests of Russia. The regime’s crackdown on protestors and presenting them as traitors underscores the binary thinking that permeates the regime’s perspective on the war: those who oppose it are anti-Russian and ideologically Western. To garner the support of the citizenry, the regime has presented the war as a quest to restore Russian greatness.

As Vera Tolz and Stephen Hutchings state, “Russian media actors embed them within familiar historical and cultural discourses and populate them with floating signifiers filled with meanings expected to resonate with segments of the public by addressing their current concerns and exploiting identitarian needs shaped by nostalgia for Russia’s former “great power” status.”⁹² Therefore, those who oppose the war stand against the idea of Russia returning to its old superpower status and ridding itself of Western oppression. This anti-pluralistic nature of Russia is further emphasized by the ‘loyal-oppositions’ decision to submit to the Kremlin’s stance on the war. Therefore, Russians have no outlet to express their anti-war sentiment that isn’t presented as an anti-Russian group.

This framing is not limited to domestic politics but also pertains to Russian geopolitics. In July of 2021, Vladimir Putin published an essay entitled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” wherein he detailed his historical understanding of Russia and Ukraine by stating that “Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus...bound together by one language... economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty, and – after the baptism of Rus – the Orthodox faith”⁹³ With regard to the current Ukrainian state and its borders, Putin wrote that it’s “entirely the product of the Soviet era” as Russia was chopped up and robbed.⁹⁴ In essence, he argues that the nation, in its current state, is forcing Russian and Ukrainians to “deny their roots” and have Ukrainians “believe that Russia is their enemy.”⁹⁵ Therefore, for Putin, with regard to the status of Ukraine, there are two camps: (1) those who are pro-Russian, who subscribe to his vision of history; and (2) those who support the anti-Russian regime under the direct control of NATO.⁹⁶ With this kind

⁸⁸ Lars Vinx, “Carl Schmitt,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated August 29, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt>.

⁸⁹ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 46.

⁹⁰ Charles E. Frye, “Carl Schmitt’s Concept of the Political,” *Journal of Politics* 28, no. 4, (November, 1966): 818–830, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2127676>.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive analysis of the friend/enemy distinction in Russia, see ch. 7, “Defining the Enemy,” in Lewis, *Russia’s New Authoritarianism*.

⁹² Vera Tolz and Stephen Hutchings, “Truth with a Z: Disinformation, War in Ukraine, and Russia’s Contradictory Discourse of Imperial Identity,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39, no. 5, (April 2023), 360, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2023.2202581>.

⁹³ Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” Kremlin website, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

⁹⁴ Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

⁹⁵ Putin.

⁹⁶ Putin.

of historical reasoning, Putin has presented the war as a means to topple the anti-Russian government in Kyiv that has “taken Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and our people.”⁹⁷ As such, the question concerning Ukraine serves as the main factor in distinguishing between friend and enemy. Thus, Russians have no choice other than to, at least tacitly, support the regime’s invasion or else be labeled as anti-Russian and pro-NATO. There is no space for any nuanced or pluralistic viewpoints on the question of Ukrainian politics and sovereignty.

Russia contra Liberalism: Overcoming the Tyranny of Values

It is common knowledge that Vladimir Putin is a staunch critic of liberalism. In 2019, on the eve of the G20 Summit in Osaka, he stated that “the liberal idea” had “outlived its purpose.”⁹⁸ For the Russian president, liberals “cannot simply dictate anything to anyone just like they have been attempting to do over the recent decades.”⁹⁹ Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, Putin has doubled down on these statements. No longer is liberalism obsolete, but it has degenerated into a form of totalitarianism. In the first months of the war, the Russian president had met with members of the State Duma and, ironically, stated that the West “is degenerating ... into totalitarianism,” characterized by “censorship, closure of media outlets, arbitrariness against journalists and public figures.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Putin has drawn parallels between the liberal international order and the colonial legacy of the West. In fact, during his speech at the Valdai Club (an influential Russian think tank and discussion forum that holds an annual summit bringing together members of the government and intelligentsia) in October of 2023, he stated that the rules-based international order is “rubbish,” and imposing it on the global community is a “manifestation of colonial mentality.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, Putin’s Russia presents itself as the *other* Europe, devoid of Western liberalism.¹⁰² Putin’s understanding of the West is that of a defunct system that seeks to “zombify” its citizens.¹⁰³

This antipathy towards liberalism is not unique to Putin. In fact, multiple thinkers in the regime share this understanding of liberalism as a totalitarian and imposing ideology. The political scientist and representative of the hawkish foreign-policy expert community, Sergey Karaganov, argues that Western elites, as they lose their dominant position on the global stage, have begun “weeding out those who resist” by turning them into slaves “deprived of reason and sense of history,” so as to “reduce their ability to resist modern ‘globalist’ capitalism, [which is] increasingly unfair and counterproductive for humans and humanity as a whole.”¹⁰⁴ For Karaganov, “The vector of

⁹⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” Kremlin website, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

⁹⁸ Alex Barker et al., “Vladimir Putin Says Liberalism Has ‘Become Obsolete,’ ” *Financial Times*, June 28, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>.

⁹⁹ Barker et al., “Vladimir Putin Says Liberalism Has ‘Become Obsolete.’ ”

¹⁰⁰ Vladimir Putin, “Vstrecha s rukovodstvom Gosdumy i glavami fraktsiy,” Kremlin website, July 7, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68836>.

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club: Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 20th Annual Meeting,” Valdai Club website, October 5, 2023, <https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-club-transcript-2023>.

¹⁰² Marlene Laruelle, “Russia as an Anti-Liberal European Civilisation,” in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016): 295, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bh2kk5.17>.

¹⁰³ Michel Eltchaninoff, “Vladimir Putin’s Quest to Build an Anti-Liberal Empire,” *New Statesman*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/07/vladimir-putins-quest-to-build-an-anti-liberal-empire-2>.

¹⁰⁴ Sergey Karaganov, “A Difficult but Necessary Decision,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, June 13, 2023, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-difficult-but-necessary-decision>.

development in most Western countries clearly indicates their movement towards a new fascism and (so far) 'liberal' totalitarianism."¹⁰⁵

Dugin, arguably the most famous contemporary intellectual Russian critic of liberalism, has echoed this sentiment. In his book, *The Fourth Political Theory* (2012), he states that liberalism is an "outdated, cruel, misanthropic ideology" akin to Communism and fascism, in that it is equally responsible for historic crimes.¹⁰⁶ Dugin has described liberalism as a "third totalitarianism," since it imposes an inevitable single set of values on humanity, which he sees being driven by the United States.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the general consensus amongst Russian anti-liberals is that modern Western liberalism presents itself as an oppressive force.

This understanding is similar to that put forth by Schmitt in his text, *The Tyranny of Values*, in which he criticizes the liberal values system. Essentially, for Schmitt, if one holds certain values they, by default, consider conflictual ones inferior.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, when values clash, the so called superior value must subdue the lesser value.¹⁰⁹ Since the "non-value has no right with respect to the value," the supreme value is obligated to impose itself regardless of the cost.¹¹⁰ This framing of liberalism as a force that subdues opposing "non-values" harkens to the Kremlin's understanding of liberalism as an oppressive force. Furthermore, as Bohdana Kurylo writes, "Schmitt's critique resembles the 'value empire' narrative, which has been a prevailing critique of the EU among the Russian elites in the last two decades," in that the union is trying "to overtake Russia's sphere of influence through entrenching liberal values."¹¹¹ Therefore, the oppressive values that Schmitt criticizes are, in a similar fashion, denounced by Russian thinkers and ministers who see their values in opposition to those of the West. As Lavrov stated during his speech at the 78th UN General Assembly, in September 2023, the West "still believes that it is superior to everybody else," while it engages in "forms of intolerance towards the traditional values of most world religions."¹¹²

Russia under Putin: A "Schmittian" State?

As noted at the start of this essay, no single term has emerged which can accurately describe the Putin regime. While the previous sections have sought to understand the regime's actions, both with regard to domestic and international politics, through the lens of Carl Schmitt's various legalistic and geopolitical theories, the Russian state cannot simply be labeled as Schmittian. However, what can be said is that many of its actions are evocative of Schmitt's philosophy, and that certain thinkers affiliated with the Kremlin are indebted to, and at times directly elaborate upon, his theories.

¹⁰⁵ Karaganov, "A Difficult but Necessary Decision."

¹⁰⁶ Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (Budapest: Arktos, 2012), 65.

¹⁰⁷ The Nexus Institute, "Aleksandr Dugin on Freedom beyond Liberalism." YouTube, 12:01, November 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk52o-khc-E>.

¹⁰⁸ Bohdana Kurylo, "Russia and Carl Schmitt: The Hybridity of Resistance in the Globalised World," *Palgrave Communications* 2 (December 2016), 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.96>.

¹⁰⁹ Carl Schmitt, *La Tirannia Dei Valori*, trans. Giovanni Gurisatti from the German *Die Tyrannei der Werte* (Milan: Adelphi, 2008): 60.

¹¹⁰ Schmitt, *La Tirannia Dei Valori*, 65.

¹¹¹ Kurylo, "Russia and Carl Schmitt." For more information on the genealogy of the "value empire" term, see Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815*, series: The Oxford History of the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹² Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Statement at the General Debate at the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 23, 2023—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation," Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, September 23, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1905973.

The reason Russia cannot be called a Schmittian state is due to the fact that the regime goes against Schmitt's thought on multiple other points. Take, for example, Schmitt's *Großraum* theory: he explicitly stipulates that the dominant states will seek to exercise their influence over the peripheral nations rather than invading and occupying them, much like the Monroe Doctrine had sought to accomplish before becoming a means to promote universalist capitalism.¹¹³ Yet, with the occupation of Crimea and later the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia went against this principle.

Additionally, the extent of a given nation's "greater space" is never made explicitly clear by Schmitt. The spatial aspect of his theory changed many times, with him mentioning an "East European space," a "Central and Eastern European space," and a "Middle and Eastern European space."¹¹⁴ This makes it impossible for scholars to apply his theories in a modern setting since, with regard to the contemporary Russian regime, it is not clear if the Russian intervention in Syria (2015-today) works within Schmitt's philosophy. Furthermore, there is no singular Schmittian formulation of politics, foreign affairs, and law.¹¹⁵

Applying the Schmittian label to the actions undertaken by Russian officials who do not explicitly state their connection to him would be purely speculative. The relationship between their actions and Schmitt's philosophy could be merely coincidental and not at all inspired by Schmitt. Links that might not exist are being drawn. Thus, while Russia today parallels some of Carl Schmitt's principal beliefs and several prominent Russian thinkers have been influenced by his theories, to say that the regime is Schmittian would not only be false but potentially misleading.

¹¹³ Stuart Elden, "Reading Schmitt Geopolitically: Nomos, Territory and Großraum," *Radical Philosophy* 161, (May 2010), 23, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/reading-schmitt-geopolitically>.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Specter, "Grossraum and Geopolitics: Resituating Schmitt in an Atlantic Context," *History and Theory* 56, no. 3 (September 2017), 399, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48583744>.

¹¹⁵ One need look no further than the difference between his views on value-neutrality during the interwar and postwar years. His thoughts on this topic are wildly different in *Legality and Legitimacy* and in *The Tyranny of Values*. Therefore, the notion that Schmitt has had a consistent framework that can be applied in the modern age as a means to interpret the actions of various regimes is implausible.