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**Putinism beyond Putin: the political ideas of Nikolai Patrushev and Sergei Naryshkin in 2006–20**

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## ABSTRACT

*This essay adds to previous research of Putinism an investigation of the political thought and foreign outlooks of Russia's Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev and Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin, with a focus on their statements between 2006 to 2020. The paper outlines Patrushev's and Naryshkin's thoughts regarding the United States, Ukraine, and the idea of multipolarity/polycentrism. We then introduce Patrushev's critique of liberal values and color revolutions, and Naryshkin's statements on the memory of World War II and Western institutions. The salience of these altogether seven topics is interpreted with reference to three classical topoi in Russian political thought: the Slavophile vs. Westerners controversy, the single-stream theory, and the civilizational paradigm. Our conclusions inform the ongoing debate on whether to conceptualize Putinism as either an ideology or a mentality.*

## KEYWORDS

Russia

Putinism

Patrushev

Naryshkin

ideology

## Introduction

Why does Russia behave in international affairs the way it does? In an investigation into the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin, political scientist Snegovaya (2019, 97) restated a paradigm of Soviet and post-Soviet studies that “... in Russia's political setting ... politics is largely structured around a single individual and the main decisions in the field of international relations are made by the president only (or within a limited circle of his closest advisors).” In non-democratic political systems, the role of ideas within a small group of key decision makers holds particular significance. As noted by McFaul (2020, 102), “for a complete understanding of Russian foreign policy today, individuals, ideas, and institutions ... must be added to the analysis.” The Russian leadership, McFaul (2020) argues, may have a different assessment of the costs and benefits of their actions.

Previous research has focused primarily on Putin, or his system of power.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of our essay is to contribute to this literature with a qualitative analysis of the ideas of two key actors in Russia's political system. Our approach is simultaneously both more “idealistic” and more “realistic” than some previous research. On the one hand, we take the role of ideas in Russian high politics more seriously

than those who focus predominantly on the clientelist, patronal, and/or kleptocratic aspects of the Russian system and practice of rule. On the other, we attempt to be more “realistic” or cautious when claiming a direct influence of this or that political thinker on top-level decision making. Not all decision makers close to Putin and not all ideologists around the Kremlin are equal. One can distinguish strategically influential politicians from, on the one hand, politically relevant yet ideologically unambitious officials, and from, on the other, ideologically prolific yet politically secondary actors (Kroll 1999). As a result, our investigation focuses on the political thought of Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, as well as of Sergei Naryshkin, Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and a member of the Security Council (Galeotti 2019, 2020).

We limit our investigation to the period up to the year 2020. That year’s constitutional reform and assassination attempt on opposition leader Aleksei Navalny was followed, in 2021, by his imprisonment and the start of immediate preparation of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These trends indicate a new phase in the development of Putinism. Accordingly, Patrushev’s and Naryshkin’s rhetoric and positions also have since evolved and obtained new meanings – a transition not covered and interpreted within the analysis presented here (e.g. Fink 2022; Galeotti 2022).

We attempt to answer three interrelated questions related to the first two decades of Putin’s rule: What were the key ideas of Patrushev and Naryshkin until 2020? How did their views address larger recurring themes in Russian political discourse? How do Patrushev’s and Naryshkin’s statements relate to a claim that Putinism is a mere mentality rather than full-blown ideology (Taylor 2018)? The first section outlines sources and methodology. Our findings are described in the second section. The penultimate section interprets the statements by Naryshkin and Patrushev within three established topoi in modern Russian political thought, namely the Slavophile vs. Westernizers controversy, the single-stream theory, and the civilizational paradigm. The concluding remarks summarize our findings.

### **Literature, sources, methodology**

In this essay, we focus on the political thinking within the very top of Russia’s ruling elites. Previous related contributions focused on, among others:

1. The biography, texts, and rule of Putin (e.g. Baker and Glasser 2005; Åslund 2008; Bacon 2015; Hill and Gaddy 2015; Eltchaninoff 2016; Tsygankov 2016; Robinson 2017; Taylor 2018; Snegovaya 2019; Casula and Tipaldou 2019; Greene and Robertson 2019; McFaul 2020; Frye 2021; Petersson 2021)
2. The clientelist clans and patronage pyramids that compete for influence (e.g. Olga Kryshtanovskaya 2004; Olga Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005, 2009 2009; Ol’ga Kryshtanovskaya 2008; Fortescue 2010; Huskey 2010; Monaghan 2012; Schleiter 2013; Hale 2015; Baturo and Elkink 2016; Hale and Colton 2017; Rutland 2018)
3. Putin as the head of a kleptocratic or mafia state (e.g. Dawisha 2014; Browder 2015; Galeotti 2018; Åslund 2019; Belton 2020; Magyar and Madlovics 2021)
4. Russia’s security services and other power organs (e.g. Olga Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003; Bremmer and Charap 2006–07; Renz 2006; Werning Rivera and Rivera 2006, 2014; Rivera and Rivera 2018; Treisman 2007; Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky 2008; Illarionov 2009; Bateman 2014; Walther 2014; Soldatov 2017; Soldatov and Rochlitz 2018)
5. Elite attitudes (e.g. Petrov 2017; Buckley and Tucker 2019; Hale 2019; Kalinin 2019; Lussier 2019; Werning Rivera and Bryan 2019; Werning Rivera and Zimmermann 2019; Aliyev 2020; Kragh, Andermo, and Makashova 2020; Fomin 2022)

6. Anti-Western ideologues (e.g. Shekhovtsov 2008, 2014; Danlop [Dunlop] 2010; Umland 2010; Åslund 2013; Barbashin and Thoburn 2014, 2015; Bassin 2016; Snyder 2019; Gretskeyi 2020; Barkanov 2022)
7. The interplay between institutions, informal networks, and individual actors in the shaping of Russian politics (e.g. Ledeneva 2013; Blakkisrud 2015; Fortescue 2010, 2016; Remington 2014; Burkhardt 2017, 2020; Gel'man and Petrov 2019)
8. Ideological trends and propaganda strategies of quasi-parties, think-tanks, and intellectual circles (e.g. Laruelle 2008; 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2012, 2016; Casula and Perovic 2009; Umland 2009; Gorenburg, Pain, and Umland 2012a, 2012b; Laruelle 2012, 2012b; Horvath 2012; Østbø 2015, 2016; Bassin and Suslov 2016; Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2016, 2018; Clover 2016; Åsberg and Kragh 2017; Shekhovtsov 2017; Lewis 2020; Suslov 2020).

Our investigation makes sense insofar as previous research has found that even totalitarian regimes can exhibit a certain ideological pluralism within the leader's closest entourage. For example, in a study of Nazi Germany, Kroll (1999) documented that ideologists close to Hitler exhibited a variety of viewpoints and theories. His study is also methodologically suggestive for our investigation. Kroll's (1999) focus was neither only on Hitler's ideas, nor on all publicly prominent German fascist texts of the time. Instead, Kroll analyzed the ideas of those leaders who, as he established, were simultaneously *active publicists*, and *directly influencing* the Third Reich's policies. This excluded, on the one hand, those thinkers who were actively publishing and ideologically sophisticated, yet had only limited access to top-level decision making, and, on the other, certain Nazi leaders who had direct access to Hitler, but never developed sharp ideological profiles of their own.

We apply Kroll's selection strategy to Putin's entourage. Such reapplication of an approach from Nazism studies has motifs similar to those of Sakwa's (2011) conceptual transfer of the notion of "dual state"—once developed to describe the Third Reich— to Putinist Russia. It has cognitive rather than defamatory aims and does not mean to suggest that Putin's regime is equivalent to Hitler's. This caveat applies even though Putin's system of power has recently been described as "fascist" by some scholars (e.g. Motyl 2016; Snyder 2022).<sup>2</sup>

Kroll's method amounts to a "negative" selection mechanism. It aims at an exclusion, within bounds, of potential study objects. Instead of "positively" identifying some of Putin's assistants as being ideologically more relevant than others, we try to cut out as many as possible potential influencers using various excluding criteria. Like Kroll, we first zoom into the core circle of decision shapers under the supreme leader, and then identify those within this group who are ideologically prolific.

In 2020, Yushkin (2020) named Patrushev and Naryshkin together with Aleksandr Bortnikov, Director of the FSB, and Sergei Ivanov, former head of the Presidential Administration and now Special Representative of the President, as Putin's innermost circle where key political decisions are made. Two years later, the same slightly different quartet including Patrushev and Naryshkin was identified as critical by Gabuev (2022). These and similar analyses have narrowed down earlier sketches of circles of influential politicians sometimes labeled as "Politburo 2.0" (Kasčiūnas, Laurinavičius, and Keršanskas 2014; Gaaze 2017).

The other two members of the innermost circle identified by Yushkin (2020) and Gabuev (2022) were Bortnikov and Ivanov as well as Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. However, they have, unlike Patrushev and Naryshkin, not published a significant amount of extensively political – let alone geopolitical – texts. Thus, Bortnikov, Shoigu and Ivanov are irrelevant for our investigation. The same goes for other persons sometimes mentioned in analyses identifying Putin's innermost circle, e.g. Rosneft chief Igor Sechin or Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (Lieven 2022).

Relying on our other exclusion criterion, one can also dismiss prolific ideologues who are not part of the inner circle. This concerns, for example, Minister of Integration and Macroeconomics of the Eurasian Economic Commission Sergei Glazyev, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov, or Roskosmos Chairman Dmitrii Rogozin.<sup>3</sup> In turn, the ideologically prolific, yet more liberally inclined long-term friends of Putin, such as Igor Chubais and Aleksei Kudrin, can be dismissed here in view of

the increasing discrepancies between their public political statements and Russia's political development, during recent years.

Not only have Patrushev and Naryshkin voiced sufficiently manifest and publicly articulated hawkish political views over the last 15 years. Already by the year 2000, when Putin took over as president, they had certain biographical connections to the new president's pre-political professional background, in the Soviet and Russian security services (Albats 1994; Knight 1996). Their professional careers were also linked to Putin's hometown Leningrad/St. Petersburg. It is plausible to assume that Patrushev's and Naryshkin's acquaintance with Putin goes some time back, and that this has secured them continuous "body access" to the president since the 2000s. No surprise that, under Putin, they made impressive political careers.<sup>4</sup>

Before their current posts, Patrushev had been Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) in 1999–2008, while Naryshkin was Chief of the Presidential Administration of Russia in 2008–11, and Chairman of the Russian State Duma in 2011–16.<sup>5</sup> Patrushev and Naryshkin, during their professional careers, accumulated a useful combination of characteristics – a KGB and Leningrad past, biographical closeness to Putin, and formally high positions. As documented below, they had by 2000 each published several texts with elaborate political and historical statements. The concurrence of these traits makes them a class of their own within Russia's uppermost ruling elite.

Still, any discussion of the inner workings of Russian decision making involves a dose of guesswork.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it may be the case that Putin no longer relies on anyone but himself. Such a suspicion is suggested by the president's televised treatment of his own National Security Council, and Naryshkin in particular, regarding Putin's decision to recognize the independence of the so-called "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk, on 21 February 2022 (Walker 2022). If that is the case, our findings would have validity primarily regarding Putin's first two decades in power.

The modes of access to Putin by his various assistants, as well as their relative weight in decision making, are difficult to establish and may be fluctuating (Ledeneva 2013). Furthermore, our study assumes that the views expressed in the below interviews and articles by Patrushev and Naryshkin are reasonably genuine. This supposition seems to be borne out by their substantive consistency over time and congruence with Russia's policies during recent years.

Texts by Patrushev and Naryshkin are quoted as well as discussed by journalists, experts, and academics. They are not mere expressions of the writers' viewpoints. The texts start, in view of the high positions of their authors, to inform Russia's state bureaucracy, political parties, mass media, public discourse, and society at large. Interviews, and articles by Patrushev and Naryshkin are thus worth closer inspection even if we cannot know their exact salience in the Russian decision-making process.

We draw on 20 articles or longer interviews by each of the two politicians, published from 2006 to 2020 on websites of Russian state institutions or major mass media. These texts can be assumed to be fully approved, and to properly represent, the messages, ideas, and interpretations that Patrushev and Naryshkin wanted to circulate, at the time of their publication. From these 40 longer texts, we chose from each author those 14 that are, for our purposes, the most useful primary sources in that they disclose their author's political views. These 28 documents contain significant geostrategic, historical, philosophical or/and ideological statements.

In a further step, we excerpted and translated into English ca. 16,200 words of text from the 14 publications by Patrushev (2006, 2010b, 2010a, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a, 2020c, 2020b), and ca. 8,500 words from the 14 texts by Naryshkin (2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2017b, 2017a, 2018b, 2018a, 2019d, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e, 2020). We arrived at an overall verbal database of almost 24,700 English words in sentences about various international, political, and historical issues of larger importance. We then grouped these sentences under certain headings, excerpted the quotes below from this table, and presented them here along a thematic rather than chronological line.

The gist of Patrushev's and Naryshkin's statements below is about Russia as a traditionally non- or even anti-Western power that is a "besieged fortress" (Yablokov 2018; Borenstein 2019; Kragh, Andermo, and Makashova 2020; Gentile and Kragh 2022). Yet, as indicated below, they also see Russia as a modern nation and active player in international affairs. Within their discourse, one can distinguish between those topics that the two men both have repeatedly and similarly commented on, and other issues where they intersect less and have developed a certain specialization.

### **Salient common topics: the US, multipolarity, and Ukraine**

Three recurring themes in the texts by Naryshkin and Patrushev analyzed here are the United States, the multipolarity idea, and Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> These are issues on which they, for one reason or another, have felt a need to publicly speak out, in more detail.

#### **The United States**

The global reach of the US is a perennial topic in political discourse of Russia in general, and Putin's official statements in particular. "America" is a relevant topic in Patrushev's and Naryshkin's statements on international affairs as well. Of the respectively 14 texts from each one analyzed here, it appears in nine by Patrushev and three by Naryshkin.

Says Patrushev in October 2014, in an article titled "The Second Cold [War]," against the backdrop of the start of the Russian-Ukrainian War:

The only obstacle to the realization of American plans to take full control of the deposits and transport corridors [in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Caspian Sea regions] was Russia, which retained the military capacity to inflict unacceptable damage on the United States. American strategists saw the solution to this difficulty in a final collapse of the system of state power and subsequent dismemberment of our country. Special significance was attached to Chechnya, which had declared its independence and for a time was under effective control of the West. The extremists and their supporters in Russia were supported by the special services of Great Britain, the US, and their allies in Europe and the Islamic world. (Patrushev 2014)

In bureaucratic language, Patrushev summarized, five years later, the principal challenge that the United States poses to Russia, and humanity as a whole:

The military and political security of Russia, as well as of the rest of the world, is characterized today by increased risks and decreased predictability associated with the beginning of the collapse of the current strategic stability architecture and arms control system as a result of unilateral actions by the United States and its desire to get rid of the international legal framework that limits its military capabilities. (Patrushev 2019c)

In the same year, Naryshkin too sees the US as a problem not only for Russia, but for the entire world: ... Americans and their obedient allies have increasingly resorted to advancing their interests by force at the expense of multilateral negotiations. They are making blatant attempts to destabilize the situation in most regions of the world. And more and more often they act not only without regard to the norms of international law, but also in defiance of common sense. (Naryshkin 2019d)

In an October 2014 interview, Patrushev had already gone beyond mainstream anti-Americanism by legitimizing a notorious hoax about Madeleine Albright that had been circulating in Russian conspirological circles for years:

Many US experts, in particular former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, argue that Moscow "owns" such vast territories that it is unable to develop and thus "does not serve the interests of all mankind." They go on repeating claims about the "unfair" distribution of natural resources and the need to ensure so-called "free access" to them for other states. (Patrushev 2014)

Patrushev referred here to a legend circulating in Russian media for several years claiming that Albright allegedly thinks Siberia holds too many resources for Russia alone. "Boris Ratnikov, a retired major general who worked for the Federal Guard Service, said in a December 2006 interview that his colleagues, who worked for the service's secret mind-reading division, read Albright's subconscious a few weeks before the beginning of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999" (Smolchenko 2007). In early 2012, Russia's then newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Space Industry and veteran nationalist Dmitrii Rogozin was apparently the first high government

official who picked up the story alleging that Albright “dreams to rule over the riches of Siberia” (Rogozin 2012). Putin was asked about this allegation first in 2007, but then dismissed it (Smolchenko 2007).

Seven years later, however, and two months after Patrushev had affirmatively referred to the theory, the Russian President changed his line. In December 2014, Putin supported the allegation against Albright – though without mentioning her name (Mackey 2014). Whether Putin was re-alerted to the fantasy story by Patrushev or via another official is unknown. Yet, the 2014 repetition and sequence of this theory’s official affirmation first by Patrushev in October and then by Putin in December 2014 is indicative.

Subsequently, in Patrushev’s and Naryshkin’s statements on the US, the idea that “the Americans” are out to get Russia has appeared ever more frequently. Says Patrushev in 2019:

Overall, our analysis shows that the US military presence near our borders will increase. ... The military buildup is a military threat to our country, a clear element of destabilization in the world, which instead of a policy of partnership creates a policy of distrust. ... The US has now commissioned over 200 biological laboratories around the world, including in the CIS, Ukraine, Georgia, and Afghanistan. Their activities have little to do with peaceful science. The most alarming is the fact that experiments on human beings have been conducted there. (Patrushev 2019a)

The allegation that the US is operating laboratories for biological warfare would become a recurring theme in Russian comments in the context of the Ukraine invasion (Goncharenko 2022).

Apart from demonization of the United States, Patrushev’s anti-American rhetoric is meant to defend Russia’s record against US critique, to turn the tables on Washington, and to drive a wedge into the Western alliance. In 2017, Patrushev stated that the “United States portrays Russia as a major threat, but not just to increase military expenditures. In so doing, they are damaging Russian-European relations, which have always been on a much larger scale than US engagement with our country.” (Patrushev 2017) In 2019, he concluded: “Presenting Russia as the enemy today, Washington is trying to justify increased military spending and an expanded role for NATO in international politics to maintain its dominance in the world” (Patrushev 2019b).

Whereas the Security Council Secretary is obsessed with the United States’ nefarious plans in Russia, the SVR Head has a more nuanced approach to Washington’s role in world politics. In 2019, for instance, Naryshkin wrote that the West and the US “offer nothing but the fist of the goon [*derzhimorda*] or empty declarations about the strengthening of a supposedly universal liberal order, in the reality of which even their authors no longer believe” (Naryshkin 2019d). In another text from the same year, Naryshkin provides a reflection that plays on themes of generic international anti-Americanism:

The collective security system ... is not collapsing under its own weight. It is being dismantled on purpose, primarily by the United States, which ignores not only its own responsibility, but also all elementary decency. The specificity of the current moment is that Washington continues to act by the “right of the strongest,” although it is no longer the strongest *de facto*. (Naryshkin 2019c)

Naryshkin’s approach is, at least on the surface, less conspiracy laden than Patrushev’s. It instead uses narratives that can be also found in non-Russian mainstream US-skeptical comments around the world.

## **Ukraine**

After the start of the Russian-Ukrainian War in spring 2014, Ukraine’s deepening Western integration and concurrent conflict with Russia have become key topics in Russian public debate. Among the documents analyzed here, Patrushev commented on Ukraine in six texts published in 2014 to 2020. Apart from making numerous shorter statements related to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Naryshkin gave in 2015 a long interview under the heading “The State Coup in Kyiv in February 2014 and International Law.”<sup>8</sup>

Both men have condemned the changes in Ukrainian politics since 2014. Yet, Patrushev’s statements have been more frequent and overtly anti-Ukrainian than Naryshkin’s less dualistic discourse. Whereas Patrushev has repeatedly demonized Ukraine’s political development as fascistization,

Naryshkin has focused on the alleged illegitimacy of the leadership change in 2014, and on historical-legal arguments presumably justifying the annexation of Crimea. Patrushev's statements were more addressed to the general domestic audience, while Naryshkin has adapted his arguments to a readership familiar with mainstream Western discourses on the Russian-Ukrainian war.

A main theme in the Security Council Secretary's statements has been the allegedly central role of ultra-nationalists in the Euromaidan and its aftermath. In 2014, Patrushev characterized those events as a "seizure of power in Kyiv, supported by militant groups of outright Nazis" (Patrushev 2014). In 2017, Patrushev complained that "Europe is not just indifferent to the formation of nationalist groups in Ukraine, but also does not condemn the criminal offenses committed by Ukrainian neo-Nazis" (Patrushev 2017). In 2019, Patrushev asserted that, "[in] the southern and eastern regions, Kyiv's power is largely ensured by moral and physical oppression of the local population by national-radicals" (Patrushev 2019a). He also proposed that "[t]he people of Ukraine associate [then Ukrainian President Petro] Poroshenko's name with rampant national-extremist formations in the country, massive violations of human rights and freedom of religion ... (Patrushev 2019b) .

In 2020, Patrushev went into more detail:

[T]he leading roles in politics after the events of 2014 was taken over by ... neo-Nazi organizations ... Their leaders are in favor of building a "corporate-syndicalist," and in essence Nazi state. Russophobia, which these organizations inherited from the Ukrainian fascist accomplices in 1930s–1940s, is being imposed on the fraternal people. Inspired by the examples of Nazi Germany, Ukrainian neo-Nazis are smashing stores with signs in the Russian language, burn Russian-language books, and sometimes even people—as the activists of the "Anti-Maidan" at the Trade Union House in Odessa on May 2, 2014. (Patrushev 2020b)

Naryshkin is a well-published hobby historian, served as head of the governmental Commission for the Counteraction against Historical Falsification to the Detriment of Russia's Interests in 2009–2012, and has been, since 2012, chairing the Russian Historical Society. Nevertheless, the SVR director has less frequently commented on the topic of fascism than his senior in the Security Council. On the anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union, on 22 June 2014, Naryshkin said during a visit to Brest in Belarus:

We all remember where the Motherland begins: with a picture in your ABC book. If your homeland's primer is replaced by a nationalist surrogate, fascism once again, unfortunately, raises its head. Unfortunately, it is now happening very close to our borders, in a brotherly country to us [i.e., Ukraine]. And even today, in the twenty-first century, people are dying defending their towns and villages, dying with the words "Fascism will not pass!" (as quoted in Naviny 2014)

However, in a long 2015 interview on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Naryshkin does not elaborate on the popular Russian argument about allegedly genocidal Ukrainian ethno-nationalism representing a deadly threat to Russian-speakers in Ukraine. Instead, he focused on some contentious legal issues, emphasizing the supposedly unconstitutional dimensions of the 2014 Euromaidan revolution and the alleged complicity of Western governments (Naryshkin 2015a, 5). Regarding the recent history of Crimea too, Naryshkin develops the idea that Ukraine annexed Crimea in 1991, and Russia was implementing international law when grabbing the peninsula in 2014:

Historians and political scientists are well aware of the reasons for the rush to conclude treaties of that period [of the destruction of the USSR]. The "soft annexation" of Crimea in 1991 was carried out by default, although it was conditioned by the preservation of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea. At that time, the opinion of the people did not interest anyone. But the people of Crimea expressed it again and firmly in [the pseudo-referendum of March] 2014, implementing the basic principle of general international law—the principle of self-determination of peoples, stipulated by the UN Charter, which takes precedence over other international treaties. Including the 1991 treaties that Yeltsin and Kravchuk signed. (Naryshkin 2015a, 7)

While Naryshkin's pseudo-legalistic narrative is geared towards a high-brow audience, Patrushev has justified Moscow's actions in Ukraine in simpler and starker terms. Patrushev emphasizes well-known tropes such as the "genocide of the Russian-speaking population of Donbas," the need for "political guarantees preventing ethnic cleansing," and "a law on the separate status of Donbas" (Patrushev 2017). Whereas Patrushev portrays the international system as being fundamentally biased

against Russia, Naryshkin announces that Russia will seek justice in international organizations and courts regarding supposed Ukrainian human rights regressions since 2014. “Millions of people,” the SVR Head noted in a 2015 commentary, “are referred to as terrorists! And it is simply scary to look at the newsreel footage of civilians killed and maimed during the so-called ‘anti-terrorist’ operation.” Under such circumstances, “Russia cannot but care about its compatriots who are defending their inalienable rights – morally, legally and by other means permitted by international law” (Naryshkin 2015a).

In 2019, Patrushev previewed the forthcoming rise in Russian aggressiveness, and threatened Ukraine’s statehood:

As for the scenario of a sharp escalation of the armed conflict in Donbas, it is fraught with serious negative consequences for Ukraine and the West. At the same time, military action cannot be ruled out. ... The Kyiv authorities are doing everything to split Ukraine, practicing the Western scenario of tearing Ukraine away from Russia, while ignoring the interests of their own people. As a result, the country is de facto split. The population of the western regions is distrustful of natives of the southeast, considering them supporters of the “Russian world.” ... As a result, anti-government sentiments are growing in these regions. The social schism is exacerbated by inter-church confrontation. The continuation of such policies by the Kyiv authorities could contribute to the loss of Ukrainian statehood. (Patrushev 2019a)

Against the background of this and similar statements by Russia’s Security Council Secretary, some of the SVR Head’s statements appear dovish. Says Naryshkin, for instance, in 2015:

Let me stress: Russia has acted and will continue to act with respect to Ukraine within the framework of international law. And now the main task is to achieve a sustainable, complete ceasefire and respect for the will and rights of local residents. To do this, everyone (both in Kyiv and in the West) must recognize the new political and legal realities. And any problematic issues must be resolved not by force of arms, but through dialogue, based on the letter and spirit of international law. (Naryshkin 2015a, 10)

### **The idea of multipolarity**

A third topic extensively dealt with by both Patrushev and Naryshkin is the (in Russian foreign political discourse) popular interpretation of the post– Cold War world as being multipolar, or polycentric. The reason for the Russian interest in this issue is obvious. An understanding of current world politics as multipolar does not limit the circle of global centers of power to Washington, Beijing, and/or Brussels. The concept’s open-endedness allows for both an inclusion of Russia as a seemingly equal player of great power politics and a dilution of the key conflict in post-Cold War world affairs between authoritarian and democratic states (Brands 2018).

Naryshkin and Patrushev have extensively commented on Russia’s role in a multipolar world. Their comments are in correspondence with the above pattern of Naryshkin preferring a somewhat less Manichean discourse in contrast to the more dualistically inclined Patrushev – a feature illustrated more below. States Patrushev in 2019:

The Strategic Forecast of the Russian Federation for the period until 2035 identifies four scenarios for the development of the global situation. Namely, the first scenario is a transition to a polycentric world order. The second is a continuation of US attempts to preserve its dominance. The third is the formation of a bipolar world order model. And finally, the fourth scenario is the strengthening of regionalization processes. ... [I]n the modern world, undoubtedly, there are tendencies of formation of polycentric architecture. ... The role of the leading world power is now claimed by China, while India, Brazil and South Africa have firmly established themselves as leaders in their regions. ... The currently observed decline of the weight of the G7 against the background of increasing role and authority of the G20 is also a consequence of these processes. (Patrushev 2019c)

While Patrushev does not mention Russia in the entire passage, his choice of other actors is suggestive. First, he lists the four other countries of the BRICS group of which Russia is a constituent part. Second, he observes the decline of the G7 group after Russia was kicked out of the former G8 in 2014. Last, he conjures up the rise of the G20 where Russia is still a member. In another statement in 2019, Patrushev admits that things are complicated, arguing that the formation of a polycentric world order is actively



counteracted by “those [i.e. the West] who seek to maintain their dominance in the world. Various methods of pressure are being used – economic, informational-psychological, military-political” (Patrushev 2019a).

In his texts dealing extensively with multipolarity, Naryshkin seconds his colleague. In 2018, the SVR Head stated: “The era of unipolar, or rather American-centric, globalization is farther and farther in the past. The contours of a truly polycentric world order are becoming clearer on the international stage” (Naryshkin 2018b). In 2019, Naryshkin again juxtaposes the ideas of the world’s multipolarity, on the one side, and the dualism of the West versus the rest, on the other.

It is now essential not to play “hybrid” games competing [over] who succeeds more in this process, but to engage in a dialogue over the ways of jointly reforming the global world order. Only the final drawing-up of multipolar architecture, based on equitable cooperation among various loci of power and integration groupings, will provide prosperity and security for all people ... Russia is ready to take responsibility for this process (Naryshkin 2019a).

In another 2019 text, Naryshkin clarifies that Russia is herself a global hub of strength and norms attractive worldwide, and even to Western people:

[T]he basic Yalta-Potsdam principles are more relevant than ever in today’s multipolar world, in which Russia is again one of the leading centers of power. Today our country is distinguished by solid values that are enviable to many in the West, a powerful military potential, a firm political will, and a readiness to act decisively in the international arena. Once again, we are ready to stand up for ourselves and protect our allies and friends. (Naryshkin 2019e)

Referring to the results of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences of 1945, Naryshkin indicates an interpretation of multipolarity in dissonance with the aim of establishing more equitable mechanisms for the conduct of current and future world politics. As becomes clear, “multipolarity” does not mean, in the Russian leadership’s reading, more pluralism, equal voice, or multilateralism in international affairs. Rather, it implies a new division of spheres of influence among “great powers,” and reduced sovereignty for “smaller” nations. The key distinction between Cold War and post-Cold War international relations is not a more even spread of power across the world. The difference today is, instead, that there are no longer only two major centers of power and decision making, but several.

In a way, Patrushev’s terminology is more consistent than Naryshkin’s. The SVR Head uses the terms “multipolarity” or “multipolar” six times in the passages excerpted from the 14 texts analyzed here (Naryshkin 2018b, 2019d, 2019a, 2019e). Patrushev, in contrast, uses the term “polycentric” (Patrushev 2019a, 2019c). The notion of polycentrism may be seen as better than the term multipolarity reflecting the world view of the Russian leadership which thinks less in terms of gravitation poles than of power centers with neo-imperial realms around them. Eventually, however, the terminological difference between Patrushev and Naryshkin is only marginal. It reflects somewhat distinct approaches to, rather than different degrees of, great power politics. Says Naryshkin: “I am convinced that the future lies in multipolarity, in which a ‘united Eurasia’ plays the role of one of the most important centers of power” (Naryshkin 2018b).

### **Topics of distinct salience for Patrushev and Naryshkin**

In this section, we focus on four salient topics where Patrushev and Naryshkin have expressed specific personal opinions: liberal values and color revolutions, respectively, in the case of Patrushev; and history and Western institutions, respectively, in the case of Naryshkin.

#### **Patrushev and liberal values**

A topic that the Security Council Secretary has extensively commented on are the norms of Western liberalism, and their purported negative influence. While this is by itself hardly noteworthy, Patrushev thinks of these norms as not only being peculiar to the United States, or as merely having become a problem for Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union – allegations widely shared in the Russian ruling elite. His criticism is more fundamental in that he asserts that “the liberal values forced upon the European society did not prevent the slaughter of 1914–1918 and secured a normal life neither for the soldiers-victors nor, of course, for the defeated” (Patrushev 2020b). Patrushev’s anti-liberalism goes beyond the broader anti-Americanism permeating mainstream Russian debates (Shirayev and

Zubkov 2000). It leads him to question also the post-war European integration project. This is not a position entirely unusual in Russia. Yet, it is a less widely and vociferously pronounced view among Russian public figures.

Patrushev's anti-Europeanism is, to be sure, qualified. Neither does he see Russia as part of European civilization, nor does he altogether reject it. Patrushev joins a post-Soviet Russian conservative trend that conceptualizes Russia as an alternative or second and more genuinely European civilization. This form of coded Slavophilism does not reject Westernism per se. Instead, it asserts that modern Western societies are losing their European and Christian foundations.

Furthermore, they are forcefully spreading a militant anti-national and anti-religious form of universalism across the globe. Says the Security Council Secretary in 2020: "In the West, such basic concepts as family, mother and father, man and woman were deliberately diluted. The 'parent 1' and 'parent 2' norms that were artificially imposed instead formed the basis for a civilizational conflict in West European society because they were unnatural from a purely biological point of view" (Patrushev 2020c).

With statements like this, Patrushev positions himself close to the traditionalist and clericalist section of the Russian political spectrum. Rather than only focusing on the United States as Russia's prime geopolitical archenemy, Patrushev draws a deeper line of division between Russian traditional society and the modern West as a whole:

The entire structure of traditional Western values has been so thoroughly altered that the catalogue of its current "universal" norms has virtually nothing in common with the former, more familiar to us, value system of European civilization ... New Western values have turned into the imposition of an alien worldview on the world. Given the digitalization of modern society, against the background of the degradation of international relations and international security, the collective West seeks to introduce neoliberal dogmas into the minds of Russian citizens and our compatriots around the world, attacking not only traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, but also values truly common to humanity, thereby undermining the foundations of states. (Patrushev 2020c)

Such deep, almost ontological contradictions between Russia and the West are, moreover, not only sources of philosophical divergence. They are also at the root of international tensions today. In Patrushev's view, a new expansive universalism leads the West to conduct a worldwide campaign of subversion of traditional cultures. Western humanitarian interventions are not only instruments of an international contest for power and influence. They are expressions of a larger plan to undermine national societies – an agenda that, moreover, translates into active foreign interventions, including military ones. Says Patrushev in 2020:

The impact of these norms on the system of international security has been no less destructive. Substitution of international norms by the law of the strong, by fire and sword to impose "freedom and democracy" ... has already led to the tragedies of Iraq, Syria and Libya ... The offensive is carried out on "all fronts" of this "hybrid" war. The direction of the main blow is the dilution of the centuries-old traditions of different peoples, their language, faith, and historical memory of generations. (Patrushev 2020c)

A more conventional critique of Western interventionism would identify the pursuit of national or business interests at the root of supposedly humanitarian foreign interference. Patrushev, in contrast, accepts the official Western justification for intrusive foreign policies. He acknowledges that there is a normative and universalist motivation stemming from the liberal world view behind them. Yet, he sees such ideological rather than egotistic determinants as exactly the problem of the missionary and, in his view, destructive foreign affairs of Western states. The West uses both soft and hard power to undermine non-Western traditions and cultures.

### **Patrushev and color revolutions**

Patrushev's division of the world between liberal and anti-liberal states is reflected in his interpretation of regime change. Not only in Patrushev's views, but according to many Russians as well as some non-Russian observers, the so-called "color revolutions" in post-Soviet space during the twenty-first century are not domestically driven uprisings. They are key instruments of non-military Western intervention into non-Western states. Says Patrushev in 2017:

“Color revolutions” are already a traditional tool of certain countries aimed at the destruction of statehood and the loss of sovereignty under the pretext of democratization. In fact, a country where a “color revolution” takes place is almost always plunged into chaos and moves under foreign control. Western technologists have not abandoned the plans to implement “color scenarios” in our country as well. They do not shy away from using a variety of methods to whip up protest sentiments—from speculation on temporary difficulties of a socio-economic nature to outright lies. (Patrushev 2017)

Continuing this line of thought, the Security Council Secretary detects in the color revolutions not only a general Western foreign strategy, but also a very concrete risk for Russia:

As a rule, such a surge of opposition forces’ activity is observed on the eve of federal election campaigns. It is no coincidence that the West allocates financial and material resources to non-governmental organizations in Russia and creates so-called “independent” Russian-language media. At the same time, it is stepping up attempts at propaganda on Russian territory via the Internet. (Patrushev 2017)

In the following years, the prospect of color revolutions in post-Soviet space remained on the Security Council Secretary’s mind. In early June 2020, Patrushev outlined the West’s alleged strategy for color revolutions, thereby previewing Russian state media portrayals of the Belarus protests that began two months later:

The West has been using a broad toolkit to influence sovereign states for decades. First, they apply information, propaganda and political-diplomatic pressure. If they do not stimulate the leadership of this or that country to adjust the state line “in the right way,” scenarios of organizing a change of power by initiating allegedly spontaneous popular uprisings come into play. (Patrushev 2020a)

Furthermore, the “main objectives are to cause a rift in Russian society, to impose values and models of development that are advantageous to them, and to gain the ability to manipulate the public consciousness” (Patrushev 2020a). In the latter argument, Patrushev departs somewhat from his previously quoted interpretation of the Western motivation for the spread of liberal values. He singles out the Baltic states, certain American NGOs, multinational corporations and “military-political alliances” as particularly harmful. He returns here to the traditional Russian (Soviet) isolationist argument that Western actions are utilitarian and self-serving.

### **Naryshkin and the “rewriting of history”**

Although Naryshkin has no formal historical training, he has become a main curator of the Kremlin’s propaganda efforts concerning questions of national memory and took up several official functions in this regard. A principal focus of Naryshkin’s interventions in Russian public discourse on the past have become the pre-history and course of World War II. The years 1939–41 and the German-Soviet cooperation during this period are a touchy issue for the Kremlin. Warns Naryshkin in 2019: “Our country lost in that war no less than 26 million (!) people. And we won’t let anybody insult their memory” (Naryshkin 2019a). Naryshkin treats the Soviet Union and today’s Russian Federation as synonymous.

The paramount importance to the Putin regime of the allegedly “anti-fascist” motivation of Soviet and post-Soviet armed activities abroad has been documented by, among others, Laruelle (2021). Against this background, the preservation of an untainted image of the Soviet anti-fascist tradition has become a key goal of post-Soviet official Russian national memory affairs. Says Naryshkin in 2019: “Not only the present and the future, but also the past becomes the field of an increasingly severe fight for the minds. It is a matter of trying to erase or to substitute the historical memory of countries and peoples” (Naryshkin 2019a).

The public defense of the USSR’s ambivalent record before and during World War II against domestic and foreign critics has become a central feature of Putinist *Geschichtspolitik* (history policies). Naryshkin has, among other controversial topics, focused on justifying the Soviet leadership’s non-aggression pact and subsequent alliance with the Third Reich in 1939–1941. Writes the SVR Head in 2019:

Lately, Russia faces growing efforts to downgrade the role of our country in the victory over Nazism. Appeals that the USSR should share responsibility with Germany for the unleashing of the Second World War cannot but bewilder. Especially when they come from representatives of the countries who

were Nazi accomplices. And if someone is anxious about the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,” we shouldn’t forget about the treacherous division of Czechoslovakia, preceding the Pact. (Naryshkin 2019a)

In another text, Naryshkin specifies what exactly he had in mind with the above allusion to the infamous 1938 Munich Agreement. This pact as well as the USSR’s situation in the late 1930s allegedly justified its alliance with Nazi Germany:

It became [as a result of the 1938 Munich Agreement] obvious that such subtle matters as international law would no longer stop the fascist aggressors and their supporters. The Soviet Union, which found itself in a really difficult situation, was forced to urgently change its previous international priorities. I recall that from the moment the Nazis came to power, the USSR sought to pursue a policy of pan-European collective security. In 1934, the Soviet government responded to the proposal of French Foreign Minister Louis Barthes, who initiated the “Eastern Pact” with the participation of all the states of Eastern and Central Europe, including the USSR and Germany. For reasons that became apparent later, Hitler flatly refused to sign such an agreement. (Naryshkin 2019b)

With arguments like this, Naryshkin responds to the critique of Soviet policies just before and early in World War II, such as the August 1939 Non-Aggression Pact and September 1939 Border and Friendship Treaty between Moscow and Berlin, as well as to the critique of the post-war order established in 1945. Complains Naryshkin in 2019:

There is perhaps no better example of the European political elite’s willingness to engage in dangerous experiments to transform the minds of its own citizens than its insistence on changing the historical memory of World War II. And this violence against the past is carried out precisely when its lessons seem particularly relevant to Europe. ... [The Second World War’s] events and outcome are more desperately debated and argued today than during the Potsdam Peace Conference of July–August 1945, when former Allies, being torn apart by contradictions, were laying the foundations of a new world order. With geopolitical tensions growing everywhere in the world, one can only welcome a healthy desire to better understand the causes and preconditions of the 20th century’s major tragedy and to reassure ourselves against repeating the mistakes of the past. (Naryshkin 2019e)

In the last sentence, Naryshkin introduces either accidentally or purposefully a certain revision of a significant idea that Russia’s president had introduced 14 years before (Putin 2005). In his yearly address to Russia’s Federal Assembly on 25 April 2005, Putin pronounced that the 1991 break-up of the USSR “was the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century.” Naryshkin was in 2019 with his ranking of, in contrast to Putin, World War II as the “century’s major tragedy” closer than the Russian president had been in 2005 to Western perceptions of contemporary history.

In other regards, however, he is at odds with mainstream historical assessments of the war. Naryshkin not only rejects critical reassessments of the Soviet Union’s behavior before and in early World War II. He also speaks out against a revision of the results of the division of spheres of influence by the victorious powers after World War II:

I would like to believe that our opponents in the West, who openly seek to rewrite the history and results of World War II by denigrating the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, are well aware of the non-linear consequences of their own actions. The order established in Europe by the efforts of the Big Three after the capitulation of Nazi Germany and its accomplices has for a long time, including during the tensest moments of the Cold War, ensured peace and the inviolability of borders on the continent. Abandoning it without linking it to the formation of an equally satisfactory system of collective security is tantamount to opening a Pandora’s box. (Naryshkin 2019e)

For outside observers, statements like this may appear absurd against the background of Russia’s recent violation of state borders. As many other official spokespersons of Putin’s regime, Naryshkin ignores the irony of his statement, however. In another 2019 text, he formulates a more elaborate and peculiar historical lesson. This assessment too could be read, however, to suggest more active containment of current Russian expansionism:

It is no secret that the memory of World War II legitimizes a number of important political principles—from collective action to solve global problems to the rule of international law and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. But, unfortunately, not everyone is prepared to play by such rules. ... Eighty years ago, unfortunately, there was no appropriate response to the aggressor. A total lack of trust shackled the will of all participants in international relations. Everyone

sought only to protect themselves, including in the futile way of bargaining. The experience of World War II confirmed that international security can only be collective and in no other way. Acknowledging this obvious fact will enable mankind to finally learn from the mistakes of the past and ensure a lasting and secure peace in the world. (Naryshkin 2019c)

### **Naryshkin and Western institutions**

Statements such as the above by Naryshkin and other official spokespersons of Russia's authoritarian regime, including Putin himself, seem to indicate that they accept or even uphold significant parts of the liberal world order. However, there are manifest discrepancies between such verbal adherence to parts of standard Western post-war discourse, on the one hand, and the implicit or explicit rejection of these principles by deeds of the Kremlin, on the other. It is nevertheless noteworthy that, in Naryshkin's discourse, a certain respect for European and North American values and achievements as well as liberal democratic norms and institutions is a recurring issue. His otherwise defensive and anti-Western discourse on the interpretation of World War II includes the following acknowledgement:

Knowing firsthand the hardships of war, our people cherish the memory of everyone who fought our common enemy. We greatly appreciate the contributions of the Allies of the anti-Hitler coalition and certainly share their sorrow for the losses. I see no point in drawing boundaries here—the grateful memory of the victors' victory unites all civilized mankind today" (Naryshkin 2019c)

When serving as Chairman of the State Duma in 2011–16, Naryshkin regularly made affirmative references to Russia's pre- and post-Soviet proto-democratic experiences and traditions. For instance, he stated in 2012:

It is known that the new, sovereign Russia called itself the successor of the democratic values proclaimed not in October, but in February 1917. This means that, already at that far from us time, the main hopes of the people were pinned on a legally elected representative body, namely the Constituent Assembly. However, it also existed for a very short time, was labeled a "liberal scheme," and was forever dispersed under the infamous phrase "the guard is tired." (Naryshkin 2012)

Being, perhaps, less an expression of his core political beliefs than a result of his then position as parliamentary speaker, Naryshkin has at times extensively praised parliamentarism. As in the case of Russian officials' defense of international law and order, such statements sound, nevertheless, hollow against the background of everyday Russian political practice under Putin. In 2013, the then State Duma Chairman and later SVR Head argued in a lecture:

... I see how a lack of respect for the legislature reduces the overall credibility of the system of government ... . This is also clearly evidenced in history: in more than one country this has resulted in conflicts and a weakening of the state. Moreover, the underestimation by the ruling elites of the very significance of the representative body is a first "alarm signal." Subsequently, it comes back as accusations in their own address—accusations and reproaches of their undemocratic and sometimes illegitimacy. It would seem that I speak of the obvious things. But today, as it turns out, not everyone sees these things as obvious. Some even believe that, using only modern communication technologies, one can do without parliaments at all. Unfortunately, this is far from being a delusion. Sometimes it is a political provocation, analogies of which we can also find in the centuries-old history of parliamentarism development. (Naryshkin 2015b)

In the same 2013 lecture, Naryshkin is also concerned about the preservation of the rule of law and restraint for the ruling party:

[O]ur commitment to the values of the Constitution still allows United Russia to be at the center of political life. We must never forget this, even in the most heated discussions, when we are tempted to go over the edge. On the contrary—we must fight back against all those who, under "different suits," try to push our country off the path of building a state governed by the rule of law. And who try to use the law only as a restrictive and not creative tool. (Naryshkin 2015b)

It seems that Naryshkin's defense of Russian parliamentarism has little to do, however, with appreciation of Western institutions and popular representation. Rather, the really existing Russian parliament plays a critical role for the functioning of the Kremlin-orchestrated "virtual politics" designed to obfuscate the authoritarian nature of Putin's regime (Wilson 2005). In a lecture held in

2013, then State Duma Chairman Naryshkin criticized an action to collect signatures in support of the dissolution of the State Duma:

Maybe its organizers haven't read the Constitution? Or maybe they hope for the well-known formula: "If we do not catch them, at least we get warm." Maybe all these people don't know how dissolutions of parliaments ended in our, not too distant, history. I will remind you [that they ended with] nothing else but irreconcilable conflict between the branches of power, chaos, and such an impromptu phrase: "the guard is tired"... That is [it ended with] the last of the democratically elected organs—the Constituent Assembly—being dissolved. In fact, it was a complete departure from the country's democratic path of development. Despite knowing these lessons, we continue "experiments" with the liquidation of representative bodies. The history of the national parliamentarianism of the beginning of the last century gives us too many relevant lessons. The authorities' failure to take account of both the internal and external environment. The authorities' unwillingness to see the aspirations of broad segments of the population for greater freedom. Finally, about the inability to seize the initiative in time. Our own history teaches us that all this, coupled with the absence of a culture of political dialogue on all sides, can often lead to the emergence of an unpredictable "third force." (Naryshkin 2015b)

Naryshkin equates, in this passage, the 2013 action for a re-election of the State Duma with the Bolsheviks' January 1918 permanent dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by force. The bias in this equation of the 2013 and 1918 situations indicates that authoritarian utilitarianism rather than liberal democratism is behind Naryshkin's seeming defense of Russian parliamentarianism.

### **The evidence in light of Russian political thought**

As the above quotes indicate, Naryshkin and Patrushev are different in tone and style. The more dovish Naryshkin plays a kind of "good cop" role and copies the occasionally softer image of Putin. The more hawkish Patrushev plays the public "bad cop," and replicates the more aggressive incarnations of Putin (Zygar 2016, 342; Lewis 2020, 105). This is a distinction that also emerges from Ivan Fomin's recent quantitative study of texts from a larger group of members of Russia's top leadership (Fomin 2022, 326–329). Nevertheless, the two men still both belong to the same team and are fundamentally on the same ideological page – Russian imperial nationalism.

The statements by Patrushev and Naryshkin cluster around three large debates that are well known to students of Russian political thought. First, the *Slavophile vs. Westernizers Controversy* is conducted between those who think that Russia is or should be a part of the West (or at least Europe), and those who instead see Russia as belonging to a separate political-cultural realm (Walicki 1988). Second, the *Single-Stream Theory* asserts that, despite the enormous socio-political dislocations in twentieth-century Russian history, there is more continuity than discontinuity between the internal orders, political cultures, and international roles of pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Therefore, both the Tsarist Empire and USSR are equally legitimate points of reference for Russia's domestic and foreign conduct today (Walsh 1991). Third, the *Civilizational Paradigm* asserts that, despite Russia's moderate economic weight, largely European culture, and limited regional attractiveness, it constitutes the center of, or even embodies in itself, an empire and separate civilization, on a par with the West, China, and other great powers. Russia should thus be treated with particular respect by others, and should develop as well as behave accordingly (Tsygankov 2016; Duncan 2000; Mjør and Turoma 2020).

Like Putin himself, Patrushev and Naryshkin are on the isolationist, restorationist, and imperialist sides of these three issues. They see Russian national identity as apart from the West, Russian history as a single stream, and the Russian state as the core of a self-sustaining civilization in world history. Yet, the two men, like Putin himself, do not take an entirely clear-cut position on either of these three controversies.

Parroting Putin, Patrushev has acknowledged, for example, a partial congruence of interests with the North Atlantic alliance: "We and NATO have a number of common challenges and threats that we should focus on countering. The only way out is to move to systematic and consistent work based on considering each other's security concerns" (Patrushev 2017). In a lecture delivered in 2013, Naryshkin presented the American Constitution as an example to be emulated: "If you look at the Constitution

of the United States of America, it was adopted in the late eighteenth century ... . And there have been less than three dozen amendments to the US Constitution in that time ... . That's where we see stability" (Naryshkin 2015b). Altogether, however, sympathetic or conciliatory statements towards the West like these are, like Putin's utterances since approximately 2007 (i.e. the year of his infamous Munich Security Conference speech), the exception rather than rule.

While the early Slavophiles and various successor movements, such as the classical Eurasianists of the inter-war period, saw Western Europe as Russia's principal antipode, this role has since World War II been overtaken by the United States, as Patrushev's and Naryshkin's utterances illustrate. The idea of a multipolar world of which Moscow and its sphere of influence constitutes one pole is also closely related to the notion that Russia is not merely a nation-state. According to this view, it either constitutes by and in itself a civilization, or is the center of a Eurasian civilization (Luks 2005; Laruelle 2008). Color revolutions are, from this point of view, events that can only be inspired from outside, and instruments by the West to undermine the Russian civilization and independence of the Moscow pole in the multipolar world.

The peculiar salience of Ukraine's fate for Russian nationalist thinking, as became especially clear in Patrushev's above quotes, can be explained by the fact that it touches upon all three critical themes in Russia's modern political discourse. The Ukrainians' claim for independence and orientation towards the West are not only in conflict with the Slavophile paradigm and civilizational pretensions of Russia. They are also in violation of the single-stream theory. Ukrainians' anti-unionist leanings disrupt Russia's state tradition with both the Tsarist and Soviet period, during which Ukraine was a part of the Russian empire. No wonder that Ukraine was thus a salient topic for the Security Council Secretary and SVR Head, even before the escalation of 2022.

As illustrated in Naryshkin's historical discourse, within its single-stream approach to the past, the current Russian regime sees itself as a successor to those aspects of Soviet rule that can be portrayed as positive. This includes the militarist tradition of the USSR as well as its wars between 1922 and 1991. It especially concerns the role of the Soviet Union's political and military leadership from 1941 to 1945. Affirmative references to this period have become central to the Putin regime's public self-image as well as to the justification of Russian interventionist policies in post-Soviet space.

## **Conclusions**

In this essay, we have sought to identify ideational and rhetorical continuities and differences in the political discourses of Patrushev and Naryshkin. We looked for political concepts and stylistic traits that made each appear peculiar or perhaps even dissimilar from the other and from Putin. To some degree, we were successful in detecting characteristics particular to each of them.

We found a certain thematic specialization of the two former KGB officers. Patrushev has commented extensively on liberal values and color revolutions – topics that Naryshkin has commented on less intensely. The SVR Head has instead developed a certain specialization on issues of national memory and historical politics. We also illustrated that Patrushev's public discourse is overall more jingoistic than Naryshkin's (see also Fomin 2022). The latter even had to say some positive things about the West and Western institutions. We have provided, in addition to the quotes, some contextualization of Patrushev's and Naryshkin's world views.

All this will hardly be surprising for readers familiar with the ambivalence, evolution, and multifariousness of Putin's own discourse since he first became prime minister in summer 1999. The total result of this study can thus be seen as being doubly "negative" (Matosin and Engel 2014): our investigation revealed, unlike Kroll's of the Nazi leadership (1999), neither truly noteworthy differences between the discourses and ideas of Patrushev and Naryshkin, nor any remarkable aberrations of their views from the gist of Putin's statements, as analyzed in several papers listed in the bibliography. The Security Council Secretary and SVR Head follow the Soviet tradition of ideological adherence to the country's ultimate leader. The peculiar inconclusiveness of our study may, for the following reasons, still be suggestive for the conceptualization of Putinism – a term introduced by, among others, Gudkov (2011), Fish (2017), and Brian Taylor (2018).

The above quotes indicate that:

1. Patrushev and Naryshkin diverge somewhat from each other and from Putin, yet their discourses are largely congruent and differ only in their emphases, styles and formulations;
2. Patrushev is more hawkish than the slightly younger and informally junior Naryshkin, yet both of them voice discourses that are largely similar to each other and to Putin's;
3. Patrushev's and Naryshkin's above statements, like Putin's, lie squarely within the anti-Western camp of three classic Russian nationalist discourses: Slavophilism vs. Westernism, the single-stream theory, and Russia as a civilization;
4. Patrushev and Naryshkin have both commented on aspects of these three themes through their elaborate comments on the United States, Ukraine, and multipolarity/polycentrism, and also touched upon them within their individual "specializations" on liberalism, color revolutions, historical memory, and Western institutions; and
5. Patrushev's as well as Naryshkin's foreign political discourses are characterized by a high degree of historical rootedness and ideational cohesiveness common to both of them and to Putin.

Our investigation is, at this stage, already sufficient to provide support for the above-quoted claim made by McFaul (2020) that understanding the ideas of Putin & Co. is crucial to comprehending their foreign policies. The commonalities in the discourses of the current Russian regime's ideologically prolific highest powerholders and the consistency of their joint discourse are high. They can be taken to suggest that Putin's regime had, by 2020, become less logocratic and more ideocratic, i.e. less determined by the latest utterances of the leader than by a stable worldview uniting the leadership. There is growing congruence and consistency of the outlook presented in the publications by Patrushev and Naryshkin analyzed here, on the one hand, and Putin's ideas, investigated by other researchers, on the other. This indicates that, in recent years, the so-called "code of Putinism" has developed (Taylor 2018). There has been a marked increase in the viscosity and veracity of political statements by Patrushev and Naryshkin. Over time, their rhetoric – like Putin's – has become more Manichean.

This development had, already before the start of Russia's second invasion of post-Soviet Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, gone far enough to modify earlier findings of researchers such as Brian Taylor who, in 2018, spoke of Putinism as a "mentality." Our findings suggest that Putinism should, in view of the growing coherence of the discourse of the regime's ideologically ambitious leaders, be understood as moving closer to an ideology. Although we offer no firm opinion on this debate, the various quotes from Patrushev and Naryshkin indicate in which direction Putinism had been evolving already before the escalation of 2022. These and Putin's utterances of the previous 10 years had, already by 2020, been making up a body of thought that could be seen to constitute a rather consistent agenda – and not a mere mentality. Moreover, this agenda is rooted in three classical discursive topoi of modern Russian imperial nationalism, namely in the Slavophilism vs. Westernism controversy, the single-stream theory, and the interpretation of Russia as being either itself, or the core of, a civilization.

Putinism, if one accepts the term, is anti-Western not in a geographical, but normative sense. Unlike pan-Slavism and Eurasianism, Putinism does not – as illustrated in some of the quotes above – discard West European and American ideas per se. Instead, Putinism rejects their cosmopolitan as well as anthropocentric permutations, and approves of civilizational as well as ethnocentric interpretations of Western ideas, as illustrated by Patrushev's attacks on universalism. Such an interpretation of Putinism shifts the emphasis away from its classification as a new Eurasianist doctrine. At least, for Patrushev's and Naryshkin's texts analyzed here, neither classical Eurasianism of the inter-war period nor Aleksandr Dugin's so-called neo-Eurasianism of the post-Cold War period appear as major reference points.

To be sure, Patrushev and Naryshkin may be familiar with this or that variety of Eurasianism (Luks 2005; Laruelle 2008; Shekhovtsov 2008; Umland 2009). Naryshkin has repeatedly and affirmatively used the word "Eurasian" (e.g. 2012, 2013). In a 2009 interview, Patrushev mentioned one of Dugin's main Western inspirators, the British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder. He may have



learnt about Mackinder's heartland theory from or via Dugin's fascist writings (Clover 2016, 295–296). Nevertheless, the world view that emerges from the above statements by Patrushev and Naryshkin should be classified neither as a version of Russian Eurasianism (Laruelle 2008), nor as a permutation of East European fascism (Griffin 1993). Such a conclusion is in line with Shekhovtsov's (2014) and Kalinin's (2019) earlier rejections of assertions that Dugin is a main inspirator of Putinism (e.g. Barbashin and Thoburn 2014).

What categorization of Putinism with a broader taxon would be appropriate for Putin's, Patrushev's and Naryshkin's ideas – apart of from Laruelle's (2021) catch-all label “illiberalism”—could be a topic for additional research. Such an exploration would be a more theoretical discussion involving concept analysis. Future empirical investigations may, moreover, provide additional findings based on different substantive foci, time periods, and research methods in relation to the political thinking of Putin and his entourage. Such projects could, for instance, include texts from other politicians, and/or follow the evolution of their thinking over time. The contents, dynamics, and tone of Putin's statements might be compared with those of his close associates and could establish parallels or disparities allowing further inferences. The sum of such textual research and conceptual discussion could then perhaps provide an answer to the question of whether Putinism has evolved from a mere mentality into a full-blown ideology, or not.

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### Notes

1.

In terms of both substance and goals, our paper parallels most closely Fomin's (2022) recent investigation into the ideas of several leading members of the Russian elite. Fomin uses formal methods of textual exploration to locate a number of Russian decision makers on a liberalism-conservatism scale. While Fomin's study (Fomin 2022) is inclusive, analytical, and quantitative, the below investigation is selective, hermeneutic, and qualitative. Although we completed the draft of our essay before becoming aware of Fomin's study, his and our studies complement one another.

2.

For a comprehensive review of the debate on whether Putin's regime is fascist, see Laruelle (2021).

3.

Various journalistic accounts also have depicted similar inner circles around Putin, typically including Patrushev and Naryshkin as well as several ideologically unpretentious politicians with "body access" (e.g. Kirby 2022; Langton 2022; Sherwin 2022).

4.

This makes them similar to former President Dmitrii Medvedev, who has also known Putin for a long time. Medvedev has, however, no professional background in the KGB or another "power organ." He has thus insufficient home power to be considered here.

5.

Moreover, Patrushev was apparently deeply involved in the September 1999 framing of the false-flag terror attacks of that month – a crucial episode in the rise of Putin (Clover 2016, 251).

6.

It should be noted, however, that some commentators, such as Galeotti (2022), have recently excluded Naryshkin from Putin's innermost circle.

7.

Naryshkin (2015a) gave a long interview to the *Moscow Journal of International Law* in 2015 from which all text passages making up the 765 words on Ukraine entering this count are taken.

8.

On the Euromaidan Revolution and after, see, among others, Bertelsen (2016) and Wynnyckyj (2019).