

A b s t r a c t s

Russia's Orbit Repression, Murder, War

Yurii Andrukhovych
“Great Russian Culture”

Russia's Comfort Zone for Murder and Robbery

Unlike other empires, Russia has not learned the historical lesson of why robbery and murder are bad. To this day, it remains convinced of its right to conquer, subjugate, and annex other territories. Russia has never asked forgiveness for any genocide it committed or for the destruction of another polity's language, culture, or statehood. Russia's historical memory is not based on a sense of guilt towards others. The representatives of the “Great Russian Culture” are also responsible for this: from Alexander Pushkin to Joseph Brodsky, almost every Russian writer and artist sang the praises of the empire and had nothing but contempt for the cultures of other peoples.

Ruprecht Polenz
Imperialism and Colonialism
Considerations from a Political Perspective

Russian President Putin reinforces the countries of the global south in their historical role as victims of imperialism and colonialism. At the same time, he demands that these formerly colonized peoples support him in asserting his imperial claims in the war against Ukraine. The fact that this political charade seems to be working has to do with the different ways in which imperialism and colonialism are treated as forms of political rule.

Zaal Andronikashvili
Georgian Nightmare, 2nd Act
The Protests in Tbilisi

Georgia stands at a crossroad. The increasingly authoritarian regime supported by billionaire politician Bidzina Ivanishvili wants to return the country to Moscow's orbit at the very moment when, after years of effort, it has achieved the status of a candidate country for accession to the European Union. Tens of thousands have taken to the streets in many of the country's cities to protest legislation modelled on Russia's law on foreign agents. The aim of this legislation is to break the backbone of independent civil society. The situation is very reminiscent of Ukraine in 2013. All signs point to confrontation, and the outcome is uncertain: Euromaidan, Belarus 2020, or a withdrawal of the law after all.

Nikolay Mitrokhin
Russia's War against Ukraine
Weekly Reports, Spring 2024

Russia is continuing its war of attrition against Ukraine. Ukraine lacks artillery shells, anti-aircraft missiles, and soldiers. Western aid is arriving too slowly, and the new mobilization law is late. After months of costly attacks without significant territorial gains, the occupying army first captured the city of Avdiivka and then broke through the Ukrainian lines of defence to the west. On the ground, the use of more and more drones has significantly changed warfare. The air war is also being waged with undiminished severity. Both sides are attacking strategic targets deep in their adversary's hinterland. Almost every day, Russia is launching heavy glide bombs aimed at the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

Natal'ia Morozova
Expanding the Zone of Repression
Political Justice in Russia in 2023

The Moscow regime further intensified its policy of repression in 2023. Most of the laws establishing a military dictatorship were already passed in 2022. In 2023, the offenses defined there were punished with higher penalties and the paragraphs were applied even more arbitrarily. This was not without effect. There is hardly any public protest against the war. In the second half of 2023, the number of new criminal proceedings and convictions fell slightly. However, the sentences handed down were demonstratively harsh. The transfer of misdemeanour proceedings to criminal proceedings also serves the goal of deterrence. It must be expected that in 2024 the authorities will attempt to cut off people in Russia even more from access to the websites and channels of journalists, politicians, and other well-known individuals who have emigrated.

Alena Epifanova
Block, Monitor, Punish
Internet control in Russia

Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has introduced comprehensive internet censorship. The legal and technical foundations have been put in place since 2012 and applied to a lesser extent. Today, the state blocks access to websites and social media on a large scale. It is possible to circumvent such hurdles, but the regime is also trying to prevent this. At the same time, comprehensive monitoring of digital communication takes place. Any statement, even in private emails and chats, can lead to political criminal proceedings. But that's not all: The regime also actively controls the digital dissemination of desirable news. And it is working on creating a super app based on the Chinese model. By means of this app, the transparent subject will handle all of his or her private communications and exchanges with the authorities and banks.

Ol'ga Romanova
Total Anomie
Russia: Convicts as Front-Line Soldiers

Russia is using convicts as soldiers on a large scale in the war against Ukraine. The regime first permitted this illegal practice of the allegedly private army Group Wagner to recruit mercenaries. Then the Law of Conscription and finally even the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure were amended. Now, the Ministry of Defence itself is contracting people who have only been charged but not convicted. The consequences are devastating. Serious criminals are amnestied after six months and return to society. The state is no longer fulfilling its elementary obligation to protect its citizens. Russia is on the way to total anomie.

Otto Luchterhandt
Chronicle of an Announced Death
The Putin Regime and the Murder of Aleksei Naval'nyi

His political instincts, rhetorical brilliance, and ability to mobilize protest even under conditions of authoritarian rule made Aleksei Naval'nyi Putin's most prominent adversary. Early on, he drew the attention of those organs tasked by the Kremlin with combating and eliminating opponents of the regime. In August 2020, a commando from the FSB secret service attempted to assassinate Naval'nyi with the nerve agent Novichok. The attempt failed. On 16 February 2023, Naval'nyi died in the penal colony "Polar Wolf". Analysis of the institutions, the competencies of the people involved, decision-making processes, and a reconstruction of events surrounding Naval'nyi's death produce a chain of evidence that only allows one conclusion: Aleksei Naval'nyi was murdered by the FSB on the orders of Vladimir Putin.

Kirill Rogov
Pre-History of a Murder
Aleksei Naval'nyi and Protest Politics in Russia

Aleksei Naval'nyi stood like no other for Russian society's resistance to Putin's authoritarianism. With his heroic fearlessness, he won tens of thousands of followers and created the ethics of a new resistance. For more than ten years, he formulated and coordinated the politics of protest. His popularity over the past 15 years can be explained primarily by the hopes and expectations that he bundled and embodied. These hopes and expectations are an expression of a social capital that parts of the post-Soviet generations in Russia had at their disposal. The war against Ukraine launched by Putin is intended to destroy this social capital. Russia is to be transformed into a haven of conservatism and militaristic obscurantism.

Ol'ga Irisova
Deadly Neutrality
Russian Society and Aleksei Naval'nyi's Death

News of Aleksei Naval'nyi's death sent a shock wave through Russian society. However, opinion polls show that most people have been insulating themselves from this shock. It is the same pattern that can be observed amid all terrible news stories, such as those about the Russian Army's crimes against Ukrainian civilians. The news is disturbing, and the reaction is aggressive denial. Anyone who accepts the news as true must stand up the regime. However, many people are not willing to do this. Therefore, they do not want to believe in the obvious and readily accept interpretations that relieve them of the obligation to act. Only at a moment when the population can no longer avoid confrontation with the regime could the power emanating from the man Aleksei Naval'nyi and his fight against the tyrant drive the people to overthrow the regime.

Wolfgang Stephan Kissel
Aleksej Naval'nyj's Burial
A Cultural and Historical Interpretation

The funeral mass for Aleksej Naval'nyj and his burial on 1 March 2024 will go down in Russian cultural history. With the participation of tens of thousands of mourners, Navalny's funeral took on the character of a public demonstration. It joins the long line of Russian "public funerals", from national poet Aleksandr Pushkin to actor and singer Vladimir Vysotskii to human rights activist Andrei Sakharov, which were not only a religious mourning ritual, but also an expression of social and political protest. Naval'nyi is the first Russian cultural hero of the 21st century.

Ulrich Menzel
A Reversal of Status
75 Years of Russia-China Relations

China follows the logic of profit, Russia the logic of rent. The logic of profit demands competitiveness. This is achieved through innovation, a willingness to take risks, and investments that increase productivity. Apart from the defence and nuclear sectors, Russia's industry is not competitive on the world market. The country resembles a raw material export economy, as the dependency theory diagnosed for Third World countries in the 1970s. Russia's war against Ukraine acts as an accelerant for the development of a new global constellation. At the centre of this constellation is the hegemonic conflict between the old power, the United States, and the new power, China. They are the leading powers of a liberal and an authoritarian camp. In this respect, the Ukraine war, like the Korean War, is a proxy war between East and West, except that China and Russia have swapped roles. Russia has found itself in indirect opposition to the United States, because the latter is Ukraine's biggest supporter. At the same time, Russia has become completely dependent on China.