

## INTERREGNUM: RUSSIA BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

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After briefly waking up in 2011 and 2012, Russian society is now facing an authoritarian backlash. The pressure from below proved too weak to force the ruling elite to transform Russia. Trying to save the personalized power system, the authorities have turned to repression and expansionism while invoking the doctrine of containment of the West. The Russian incursion into Ukraine has brought about the unraveling of the post-Cold War settlement, which will have unpredictable consequences for global security and the rules of the game.

### The Struggle Between Old and New

- Liberal democracies have been slow to recognize new challenges. The crisis of the liberal-democratic model and the retrenching of the United States and the European Union from active engagement in international politics create a vacuum that authoritarian states are eager to fill.
- The Kremlin tries to counterbalance the West and to present Russia as the “unique civilization,” ready to fight for the traditional values that are an alternative to liberal-democratic norms.
- The key instrument for the Russian system’s survival is foreign policy. The Kremlin is seeking to strengthen its great-power status; to build the Eurasian Union, which will put Moscow at the center of a galaxy of dependent states; and to pursue the idea of the “Russian world” and defend the interests of Russian-speaking populations in other countries.
- Ukraine is the site of the battle between the authoritarian past and the democratic future; Ukrainians’ readiness to move toward the rule of law and the West’s ability to restore its global leadership will be tested.

### What the West Can Do

**Focus on understanding the new Russian and Eurasian reality and the true nature of Putin’s authoritarian revival.** Western politicians need to better comprehend the substance of the Russian regime and its international agenda.

**Create a benevolent international environment for Ukraine’s transformation and guarantee its territorial integrity and sovereignty.** Ukraine should be a model for Eurasia of how to build a state based on the rule of law.

**Coordinate a norms-based policy toward Russia.** Russian society must transform the Russian system on its own. But Russian society views the West’s relationship with the Kremlin as evidence of Western double standards and hypocrisy. The West has to prove that it cares about liberal-democratic values. Western powers should think not only about practicing what they preach in their countries and about new ways to promote liberal principles globally but also about dismantling money-laundering machines that allow corrupt regimes to survive and co-opt representatives of Western establishments.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lilia Shevtsova is the author of *Yeltsin’s Russia: Myths and Reality*, *Putin’s Russia, Russia—Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies*, and *Lonely Power: Why Russia Has Failed to Become the West and Why the West Is Weary of Russia*.

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