Heterarchy: Russian Politics between Chaos and Control

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Abstract:

Russian governance is a dynamic combination of horizontal and vertical factors. Heterarchy suggests that elements of an organisation are not necessarily hierarchical (not ranked), and that they have the potential to be ranked in a number of different ways. Three levels to the system are identified: the macro (where the four major ideological-interest groups of Russian modernity are located); the meso (encompassing the various corporate, regional and institutional actors as well as social organisations); and the micro (the personalities and networks in the current constellation of power). Vladimir Putin's statecraft is a specific and distinctive response to the problem of heterarchy in Russian politics. It has traditionally focused on managing and balancing these forces, at each level, and between the levels. It has thus gained a degree of autonomy, but Putin's control mechanisms (applying the power *vertikal'* while managing horizontal forces) have reproduced features of the late Soviet "stability system", which in the end proved far from stable. The regime-state is designed to constrain the socio-political reality of heterarchy, but "Hobbesian" mechanical stability impedes the development of more organic and adaptive "Lockean" forms of political integration and societal management. The contradiction between chaos and control is not resolved and has become constitutive of the post-communist Russian polity.

Keywords: Heterarchy, chaos, Putin, factions, stability, regime-state, control

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The tension between chaos and control defines the post-communist Russian polity and informs much analysis of the system (indicatively, Hale 2015; Taylor 2018; Zygar' 2016).[1] Exaggerated control is the response to an underlying condition of anarchy in the political sphere. The failure to create self-sustaining mechanisms of organic political coordination through the institutions of the constitutional state (the Lockean approach) intensifies the elements of directed management to achieve mechanical stability through the administrative regime (the Hobbesian response to political disaggregation). The dual state model identifies the tension between the two principles of order-making, the constitutional state and the administrative regime (Sakwa 2010), but this article goes further to identify the constellation of forces shaping the contemporary Russian polity, and offers an original conceptualisation of the dynamics of interaction. The model of heterarchy helps explain why decision-making in a system that prides itself on restoring the managerial capacity of the state finds itself unable to overcome inertia and remains prey to the power of societal interests, the problem that Carl Schmitt confronted in Weimar Germany. The heterarchical approach gives greater conceptual depth to the problem of "chaos", while allowing a more complex analysis of mechanisms of "control".

The essay begins by contrasting the two predominant paradigms in which contemporary Russian politics is interpreted, one focused on control and the other on chaos. It then examines the concept of heterarchy, a non-hierarchical understanding of social affairs – or rather, a model in which complex hierarchies interact and thus reinforce, paradoxically, competing horizontal corporate and other projects. The concept is then applied to the dynamics of post-communist Russian politics, outlining how the combination of chaos and control is in fact the defining characteristic of the polity as it has evolved over the last three decades. Three levels are identified: the macro-level comprising the great ideological-interest groups (*epistemes*) of post-communist Russian modernity; the meso-level made up of

[1] The author is grateful for the exceptionally helpful comments of the anonymous reviewers.

institutions and corporations, including the industrial lobby, the energy sector, regional actors, the military-industrial complex, security forces, banking and other sectors; and the micro-level, focusing on elite configurations, and ultimately neo-Kremlinological processes concerning who is in and who is out. The enduring tension between the two wings of the dual state – the constitutional state and the administrative regime – at various inflexion points exposes the underlying networks of power. Fear of rampant heterarchy reinforces the systemic reinforcement of hierarchy (colloquially known as the power *vertikal'*), and reflects the failure of post-communist democratic institutions to become the agency of political integration, and instead accentuates the role of an actor standing outside of these constitutional instruments. The heterarchy-hierarchy relationship provides insights into how Russia is governed and helps explain why such a system emerged in the first place.

Between chaos and control

Two contrasting paradigms of Russian politics have predominated since the early years of the reborn state in the 1990s. The first stresses the establishment and maintenance of elements of statism, centralisation and ultimately the creation of a power "vertikal" (Monaghan 2012). This "control" model describes how an authoritative system based in the Kremlin ultimately controls and manages the vast country (Tsygankov 2014). This model encompasses the "sovereign democracy" idea advanced by Vladislav Surkov when he was deputy head of the Presidential Administration (PA) responsible for the management of political affairs between 1999 and December 2011, and thus in a position to know (Surkov 2010; for exposition, see Garadzha (ed.) 2006 and Polyakov (ed.) 2007). From a rational choice perspective, Gel'man (eg 2015, 2016) outlines how the authorities maximise their power and maintain their pre-eminence by undermining the opposition and alternatives. Henry Hale's single-pyramid model, in which he argues that a multitude of private patronal networks have merged into a single common one, develops the argument (Hale 2015), as do various neo-patrimonial approaches (Robinson 2017). Most analysis within this paradigm is careful to stress that centralisation is far from absolute, and that the Kremlin power system is divided and struggles to exercise its authority (Mendras 2012). Nevertheless, the control model stresses that under Vladimir Putin alternatives have been closed down, autonomous centres of power restricted, and the communicative sphere shaped to ensure that official representations of Putinite policy become the common-sense of the day (Treisman (ed.) 2017).

The second paradigm takes the opposite tack, and highlights the elements of chaos in the system. This approach naturally predominated in the 1990s, at a time of real disarray, although even then analysts described how the power system drove through a reform programme with remarkable Bolshevik-style single-mindedness and ruthlessness (Cohen 2009; Reddaway and Glinski 2001). Historians note that the roots of this chaos reach back into the Soviet years, and argue that under the carapace of stability and "mono-organisational" Communist Party rule, there were roiling national, institutional, regional, corporate and factional conflicts (Bialer 1989; Cohen 1986; Breslauer 1985; Rigby 1990; Whitefield 1993). In the Putin years this "chaos" model has been adapted to understand how an ostensibly centralised power system actually often works in a chaotic and ineffective manner (Zygar' 2016). This is why the vertical needed to be "defibrillated" (Monaghan 2014). This approach stresses "the Kremlin's many towers", intersecting with the various local Kremlins in the regions, complicating the policy process and inhibiting the consistent application of laws and decisions (Petrov and Olcott 2006; Petrov 2011). While the towers and regional Kremlins in recent years have become less prominent, they have not disappeared. The most obvious "corporatism" of the Yeltsin years has declined, yet it remains a fundamental building block of the current polity and arguably extends no less to foreign

policy (Wilson 2019). The absence of long-term strategic coherence is evident in the reactive and tactical character of Putinite statecraft. Galeotti (2019) describes Russia as an "ad hocracy", an ugly term that nevertheless captures the way that policy appears to be made on the hoof and the contingent character of much of what passes for public life in the late Putin era.

Most observers, rightly, include elements of both paradigms in their studies. Monaghan (2014), for example, stresses that the power "*vertikal'*" is beset by problems, and others stress the powerful horizontal forces that stymie initiatives from above (Sakwa 2020). Although the formal aspects of federalism have been eroded, elements of bargaining between Moscow and the regions remain, especially but not only with the ethno-federal entities (eg Graney 2009). The dynamic of relations between Moscow and two neighbouring regions such as Perm and Yekaterinburg can differ greatly, reflecting the phenomenon of the "vertical of verticals". Various corporate and political strands of the relationship are woven differently, depending on the precise power constellation in each region and their relationship with central actors (Bondarenko, in progress). Rather than the binary of dictatorship and democracy, David Lewis argues that the operative contrast is between chaos and order, and the emergence of a force outside but not necessarily opposed to constitutional stipulations is a response to the endemic threat of disorder. He draws on the thinking of the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt to conceptualise the emergence of a decisional centre that opposes the societal invasion of the state and acts as the *katechon* to keep chaos at bay (Lewis 2020).

In sum, there is constant tension between chaos and control in the way that the country has been governed in the post-communist era, and indeed earlier. Those who stress the chaotic elements are surprised that anything gets done at all. They are hard pressed to explain how Russia has not only managed to survive repeated global economic and financial crises but has also applied macroeconomic orthodoxy with consistency while enduring bouts of domestic political turbulence and external pressure. Exponents of the control view precisely point to these moments as demonstrating not only the viability of the post-communist Russian state but also its managerial capacity. The August 1998 partial default set the country on the path of restored economic growth by devaluing the currency, and the steep rise in commodity prices in the 2000s was managed remarkably effectively (Appel 2008). Having built up reserves in a classical counter-cyclical manner, Russia weathered the 2008-09 global financial crisis reasonably well, although unresolved structural issues meant that high growth rates were not restored (Miller 2018). With foreign currency and gold reserves regularly exceeding half a trillion dollars, a "fiscal rule" diverting energy revenues into the National Welfare Fund, an exceptionally low foreign debt, budget surpluses and balanced budgets, this would not appear to be a "kleptocracy" (*pace* Dawisha 2010, 2014; and see also Belton 2020). However, the tension between the constitutional state and administrative regime, and the associated stresses associated with mechanical and organic stability strategies, means that "bad governance" remains an enduring problem (Gel'man 2017).

Exogenous shocks are compounded by endogenous political inflexion points associated with succession issues. The first major crisis was provoked by the transition from a basically parliamentary republic towards a presidential one, provoking the bloodshed of October 1993. The second turning point was the establishment of the principle that political succession in Russia would be a managed rather than a competitive process, and was implemented in a controlled way in 1999-2000. The third moment came towards the end of Putin's first two constitutionally-sanctioned terms in office and provoked the "silovik wars" of 2007-08 (Reddaway 2018; Sakwa 2011). The fourth moment was the most challenging of all; the clumsy *rokirovka* (castling move) as Putin reclaimed the presidency from Dmitry Medvedev in 2011-12. For the first time in the Putin era, the mass demonstrations following

the flawed State Duma election of 4 December saw "the people" claim the sovereignty that had been promised in the 1993 constitution. The opposition mobilised in a coherent manner and challenged the dominance of the manipulative power system (Greene 2014; Robertson 2011). For a time it looked as if the "white ribbon" revolution represented a classic democratization scenario in which mass pressure from below forces political concessions from above, but in the end the regime-state reasserted its managerial control. With the constitution allowing only two "consecutive" terms, Putin's fourth presidency was due to end in 2024. This rendered his putatively final presidency an extended moment of crisis (the fifth inflexion point), but the constitutional amendments of 2020, which reset the clock to allow Putin to run again for two more terms, was explicitly intended to defuse the potential crisis. As Putin argued, "In a couple of years, as I know from experience, instead of normal work routine, people at many levels of authority will start looking around in search of possible successors" (quoted by Stanovaya 2020). As in the succession crisis of 2007-08, Putin feared that intra-elite and factional conflict would destroy the political balance and control that he so assiduously maintained.

The inflexion points outlined here all represent a struggle between control and chaos, but above all demonstrate that the two are intrinsically connected to the way that Russia has been governed in the post-communist era. In other words, chaos and control are not so much competing principles of governance as constitutive of post-communist government in its entirety. In performative terms, fear of chaos and warnings against the dire implications of alternatives became part of the rhetorical armoury of post-communist statecraft. Yeltsin's reliance on *silovik* forces, rather than the democratic movement that propelled him to power, led him to launch the first Chechen war in December 1994. His tough struggle for re-election in 1996 allowed the so-called reformers to restore their pre-eminence for a time, notably with Boris Nemtsov as a deputy prime minster and Anatoly Chubais in the PA. Various scandals, real and imagined, brought them down. The 1996 campaign also brought the newly-empowered economic magnates (customarily known as "oligarchs") into political prominence, and despite the attempt of Yevgeny Primakov's government to impose constraints during his brief time as prime minister (September 1998-May 2000), they shaped the succession that brought Putin to the presidency. For the managers of the 1996 election and the 1999 transition, chaos was defined as an uncontrolled struggle between political forces and leaders, conventionally called democracy. Democracy, it appeared, was too fragile to be left to the uncontrolled passions of electoral contestation – the democracy paradox at the heart of Putinite governance (Sakwa 2020).

In systemic terms, already under Yeltsin there was a divergence between the administrative regime's culture of power based on manual interventions and the rules-based constitutional state. Instead of consolidating the rule of law and the authority of constitutional institutions such as parliament and the formal procedures of modern governance, "regime" practices predominated, characterised by arbitrary interventions, the management of elections (notably Yeltsin's re-election campaign in 1996), and in his later years by the direct influence of oligarchs, who had made their billions through the "political capitalism" that endures in new forms to this day (Frye 2010, 2017). The presidency emerged to dominate all other institutions, and gained unprecedented authority to intervene and manage political processes. This is what gave rise to the dual state (Sakwa 2010, 2011). Walter Bagehot, the mid-nineteenth century commentator on the British constitution, distinguished between "efficient" institutions, those which actually run a country, and "dignified" institutions, which are largely decorative when it comes to making the hard choices. This model of "double government" has been applied convincingly to the United States (Glennon 2016), but the theory of dual institutions applies with particular force to contemporary Russia.

Russia once again, as in the late Soviet years, became a "stabilocracy" (*stabilokratiya*): a system designed to maintain stability by manual or mechanical means. This inhibited the development of more organic forms of stability in which a political equilibrium emerges from the balance of political forces expressed through competitive politics and the relatively free exercise of the institutions of representative democracy. Late Soviet patterns were reproduced as the polity was once again shaped by the performative and systemic exploitation of the tension between chaos and control. The enduring juxtaposition of the two is a symptom of an underlying condition, which we will now proceed to examine.

The concept of heterarchy

A heterarchy is a system of organisation where the elements of organisation are unranked (non-hierarchical) or where they possess the potential to be ranked in a number of different ways (Crumley 1995). The concept is applied disparately by scholarly disciplines, with the social sciences stressing that heterarchies are networks in which elements share the same "horizontal" position of power and authority, with each hypothetically playing an equal role. The existence of heterarchy is not incompatible with the existence of hierarchy; and indeed, hierarchies are usually composed of heterarchical sub-units, and vice versa – and this is the paradigm applied in this article. A heterarchical approach has both ontological and epistemological implications. In terms of ontology, the idea that any pair of items can be related in two or more ways means that the inherent pluralism of any given social system is accentuated. Instead of reducing a state or social system to certain predominant features, including a taxonomy of characteristics or a linear developmental pattern, the social subject become multivalent and complex. In epistemological terms, the hierarchical approach sorts the material in terms of the greater (more powerful) at the top reducing to something smaller (less powerful) at the bottom, whereas heterarchy assesses multiple factors and concerns, and thus gives greater valence to the subjectivity of elements whose actorness may strengthen or diminish as the dynamics of interaction change. The heterarchical model thus rejects totalising and teleological approaches and instead emphasises the partiality of any particular viewpoint, and thus privileges complexity and contradiction.

The paradigm already has a respectable social science pedigree. Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" project (1972-80) employed notions of deterritorialisation and rhizome. A rhizome in biology is a continuously growing horizontal underground root that puts out shoots and stems at intervals. Deleuze and Guattari applied the term to mean an image of thought that apprehends multiplicities, repudiating the classic tree model of rooted thought. They applied the rhizome as an assemblage comprising multiple elements yet creating some sort of non-totalised whole. To centred systems, the authors contrast non-centred "finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbour to any other … unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point" (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2013, 17, 21). Their "thousand plateaus" can be connected in endlessly creative ways. Particularly interesting from our perspective is their argument that if an element of the rhizome is disrupted, it will resurrect itself – a feature that the political culture approaches as well as proponents of path dependency have long argued is characteristic of Russia (eg Hedlund 2005). The approach has been particularly strong in international studies (reviewed by Lenco 2014) in which the non-binary post-structural methodology has been fruitfully applied. Belmonte and Cerny (2021, 1) argue that heterarchism represents a paradigm shift in world politics, stressing that it represents "the coexistence and conflict between differently structured micro and meso quasi-hierarchies that compete and overlap not only across borders but also across economic-financial sectors and social groupings, leading to a process of restructuration that empowers strategically situated

agents in multimodal competing institutions with overlapping jurisdictions". They repudiate the traditional state-centrism in international relations and stress the dialectics of fragmentation and multiple actors.

Heterarchism is a paradoxical approach because of the complex interaction between convergence and diversity. When applied to Russia it means that the evident elements of statist centralisation belie the persistence of rhizomatic horizontal structures. Despite disruptions, they remain latent where they have not reproduced. Indeed, the tension between these two principles of social organisation, both of which take evident forms, is why the struggle between chaos and control has for so long been the defining feature of Russian politics. In such a system the traditional levers of power cannot operate in the anticipated manner, and this is what renders constitutional institutions relatively powerless. The elements of vertical control, and the associated regime manipulations and short-term stratagems, reduce the autonomy and efficacy of the institutions of the constitutional state. However, the problem lies deeper and cannot be reduced to the hyper-development of regime management. In fact, under both Yeltsin and Putin, the regime's claims to managerial autonomy were driven not only by short-term concerns of power maximisation and retention, but also more fundamentally by the rhizomatic resurrection of resistance. Informal practices are deeply embedded in what has been called a network state (Kononenko and Moshes (eds) 2010), while the *sistema* is a network state that subverts or bypasses laws to achieve its goals (Ledeneva 2013). This is only one aspect of the persistence of heterarchy.

The traditional institutions of the nation state are no longer the site of political actions as they once were, changing the character of agency as a whole (Brennner, Jessop, Jones and Macleod, 2003). For Deleuze and Guattari power is deterritorialised, with weakened links between territory and power, but it is always accompanied by reterritorialisation, the displacement of what would traditionally be termed power to other locations. One symptom of this is the idea of neo-medievalism, where sovereignty becomes fragmented and prerogatives shared between overlapping institutions (for the European Union as an example, see Zielonka 2007). The archaic, if not medieval, features of the post-communist Russian polity have long been noted. While the Russian state enjoys the overwhelming preponderance of coercive power, it does not have the classic Weberian monopoly of force. For example, two wars have been fought since 1991 to deny Chechnya"s independence, yet in a rhizomatic manner the republic remains an extra-constitutional enclave, enjoying the power to strike within Russia proper and even to conduct elements of a separate foreign policy. While a power hierarchy certainly exists in Russia, it is better theorised as part of a conglomeration of power systems. The classic Weberian conception of the modern state may always have been an ideal type, but the study of contemporary Russia requires some innovative political conceptualisation.

Rhizomes of Russia

The tension between Hobbesian and Lockean approaches to Russian politics has long been noted (Shlapentokh 2007). The Lockean understanding suggests that the pluralistic elements in society can come into some sort of this organic equilibrium (although the role of some hegemonic class formation is usually implied although seldom articulated by classical liberals). By contrast, the Hobbesian approach, repulsed by the perceived anarchy of the English Civil War, assumes the need for some sort of force standing outside of society, denoted as the Leviathan, to impose order through the "social contract". Lockeans embrace heterarchy, whereas Hobbesians fear it. Putin's rule is a specific form of Hobbesian statecraft, standing at the origins of liberalism but fearing to embrace its heterarchic elements (cf.

Medvedev 2019). Putin's leadership represents a distinctive response to managing heterarchy, but ultimately has not transcended the formulation of the dual state devised in the 1990s.

Yeltsin grappled with the issue by essentially capitulating to the demands of dominant groups. By allying with them he maintained his "monarchical" pre-eminence in form, although in practice allowed the substantive devolution of authority. This encouraged segmentation in the sphere of federalism, and allowed interest groups free access to the central state. There were countervailing forces even then, notably the legatees of the democratic revolution such as Nemtsov and even Primakov. Putin achieved desegmentation in federal relations and imposed a new social contract on "oligarchs" and other special interests, but this did not mean the end of the 'paradigmatic pluralism' of the Russian political sphere (Chebankova 2017, 2020). This pluralism is derived from the persistence of rhizomatic heterarchy, in which none can achieve hegemonic predominance – that is, impose hierarchy. The Putinite power system tried to restore hierarchy through the power vertical, but the rhizomatic power of horizontalism was thereby only constrained and not eliminated.

How is Russian heterarchy constructed? Three levels can be identified: the macro, comprising the four major ideological-interest groups of Russian modernity; the meso, encompassing institutional actors and social organisations and, no less significantly, the "third state" of organised crime and corrupt networks; and the micro, the personalities and networks in the current constellation of power. These forces are cross-cutting and individuals can be located simultaneously in more than one and are not limited to a single vertical matrix. In fact, it is precisely this interlocking co-location that endows the Russian polity with its extraordinary stability, although by the same token renders the system vulnerable to inflexion point shocks. Those who talk of a "Russian system" (*sistema*) stress the way that the operational codes of the culture of power arising from this constellation endure, despite leadership and even systemic changes (Pivovarov 2006; Pivovarov and Furman, 1999; see Pavlovsky 2015 for an insider's view; for a modern take on the culture of power, see Urban 2010). This stability, as the collapse of previous regimes attests, is fragile, and reflects the fundamental problem that endures to this day: the absence of a historical bloc that can become hegemonic to ensure that its world view becomes the common sense of the epoch (Sakwa 2020). Of course, for Deleuze and Guattari such integration is neither desirable nor emancipatory, but in terms of classic state building, it is essential and liberating.

The macro-level: the ideational-factional blocs of Russian modernity

The absence of what Antonio Gramsci would call the hegemony of a "historical bloc" allows the administrative regime to rise above a divided society and a fragmented party-representative system. Four major ideational-factional blocs shape Russian political society, each with its perspective on how Russia should be governed. Michel Foucault called such paradigms *epistemes*, arguing that several such power-knowledge complexes can co-exist, although in his view only one shapes the non-temporal historical conditions of possibility for an era (Foucault [1966] 2001). In the contemporary Russian case, our four power-knowledge complexes are internally divided, but they share interests, ideological perspectives and in some cases a professional commonality that render them distinctive and coherent. Together they comprise the four pillars of contemporary Russian modernity, creating an "alternative modernity" based not on a single ideological perspective, as in the Soviet era, but representing a specific permutation of societal responses to "the labyrinth of modernity" (Arnason 2020). The entirety of these responses is what gives the Russian civilisational state its unique character (cf. Coker 2019).

First, the views of the liberal bloc are far more influential than the paltry proportion of votes won in recent elections. The bloc is divided between economic liberals, focusing on

macroeconomic stability; legal constitutionalists, the inheritors of Boris Chicherin's statism; and radicals, who look to the West for inspiration. They are challenged by the second group, the *okhraniteli-siloviki* (those working in or affiliated with the security apparatus). They consider themselves responsible for "guarding" Russia from domestic and foreign enemies, part of Russia's long "guardianship" (*okhranitel'*) tradition (Ivanov 2007). They view Russia as a besieged fortress, and it is their sacred duty to defend the country from internal and external enemies (Cherkesov 2004, 6). Pursuing a sacred duty to defend "fortress Russia", they have also claimed certain privileges, including personal enrichment (Yablokov 2018). The group is deeply factionalised, between and within its constituent institutions, generating complex mechanisms of internal control (Petrov 2019a). Some have used their powers for personal enrichment and at the margins merge with the criminal world (Galeotti 2018) to create a "third state" distinct from the regime and the constitutional state. The military is naturally part of this bloc, but their commitment is to defending the country whereas the *okhraniteli-siloviki* focus on defending the regime. In his third term, particularly in his Crimea unification speech of 18 March 2014, Putin (2014) adopted some of the language of this faction.

Third, the diverse bloc of neo-traditionalists ranges from monarchists, neo-imperialists, neo-Stalinists to Russian nationalists to moderate conservatives (cf. Robinson 2019). The use of the term "traditionalist" highlights the backward-looking character of this group, seeking the model of Russia's future in representations of the past, while the "neo" prefix means that the traditionalism is adapted to present-day concerns – although the strain represented by Alexander Dugin taps into a deeper well of traditionalism (Teitelbaum 2020). Neo-traditionalists defend Russian exceptionalism (hence become nationalists, even when they reject the concept) and assert statism at home and great power concerns abroad. The main platform for the bloc since 2012 has been the Izborsky Club, founded to preserve Russia"s "national and spiritual identity" and to provide an intellectual alternative to liberalism (https://izborsk-club.ru/; Laruelle, 2016). With the onset of the so-called "Russian Spring" in early 2014 some even dreamed of bringing the Donbass insurgency to Moscow to sweep out the liberals and even the endlessly temporising Putin (Kolstø 2016). It is not for nothing that Putin has survived in power for over two decades, and he soon cut them back to size and squeezed the genie of Russian neo-nationalism back into the bottle. The neo-traditionalist bid for hegemony was thwarted, and they are now once again just one among the four factions.

Eurasianists comprise the fourth category, in part overlapping in personnel and views with the neo-traditionalists, and many of them participate in the work of the Izborsky Club. However, there is an important distinction. Neo-traditionalists are critical of the West, but the reference point for their modernisation agenda and cultural matrix remains essentially European. They wish to overcome the stigma of backwardness to make Russia a great power, but within the framework of a Western hierarchy of power and values (Zarakol 2011; and cf. Morozov 2015). By contrast, the ontology of the Eurasianists is rooted in a foundational anti-Westernism (Bassin and Pozo (eds) 2016). They have devised a whole ideology explaining why Russia and what they call "Romano-Germanic" civilisation are incompatible. Although rent by divisions, they are united in the view that there is a cardinal incompatibility between Russia and the West (Bassin 2016). Thinkers such as Dugin maintain the earlier uncompromising hostility accompanied by much speculation on geopolitics, the coming apocalypse and Heideggerian notions of the existential exhaustion of Western civilisation (Clover 2016). Dugin has never been an advisor to the Kremlin and he can only dream of the success of the Bannonite alt-right in Trumpian America.

None of these four paradigms has become hegemonic and together they represent the heterarchical character of contemporary Russian society. Like the four plinths at each corner

of Trafalgar Square in London, they anchor and shape the terrain of Russian modernity today. The Putin leadership draws strength from all of the blocs but is dependent on none. This also applies to the *siloviki*, despite his background in the security services, and thus refutes the view of him as an instrument of *silovik* revenge (Felshtinsky with Pribylovsky 2012). Competing groups and ideas are kept in permanent balance. The regime draws on them all but is not dominated by any. Putin acts as the arbiter between the macro-factions, which involves mediating between elite groups and institutions. Each contributes to policy making and the political process in general, but none can capture the state or impose its own line as that of the regime. The macro-factional balancing system ensures that they cannot turn on each other, and coercion is kept to a minimum. Intra-elite splits have emerged at the inflexion points identified earlier, but in each case they have been brought under control. However, as the 2024 inflexion point approached, fear that the trusted methods of Putinite elite management would spiral out of control prompted the 2020 constitutional reform and the zero option on presidential term limits that was thereby smuggled in. Balancing requires a central position, but the factional model helps explain the shifting centre towards more conservative positions as the pull of neo-traditionalist macro-faction increased. The regime closely monitors public opinion, and Putin's policy is built jointly – co-constructed – with the mass of Russian citizens (Greene and Robertson 2019). The liberal faction is ensconced in the management of macroeconomic affairs, but elsewhere its influence has waned as other groups gained the initiative. The Putin system ensures a relative balance between leadership and elite interests. This mutually-restraining model prevents radical policy initiatives such as structural economic reform, but it also impedes an excess of hard authoritarianism.

The meso-level: institutions and corporations

This has important implications when it comes to the meso-level, although the idea of "levels" needs to be applied with care. Social relationships are always constituted with multiple layers, with the horizontal and vertical planes intersecting in often unpredictable ways. Despite this caveat, it does help analytically to identify the dynamics of each level, and especially the crucial intermediary meso-level where interest groups and institutions compete. This is the sphere where elite analysis, governance studies and the patronal model come into their own (Colton and Holmes (eds); Hale 2015). Competing economic interests and patron-client relations fight to impose their preferences, while the regime-state struggles to maintain its autonomy, with Putin the supreme arbiter. Informal networks and the regime-state interact but the power of decision remains with the Kremlin.

The meso-level is where the paradoxes of Putinite rule are seen at their starkest. A system whose legitimacy is based on the restoration of the state in fact governs through the mechanical management of regime relations. Institutionalised governance and informal network regime relations not only coexist but are dependent on each other. Governance continues to work through state institutions, whose authority is derived from the constitution. Often derided as corrupt and inefficient, in fact their authority is an essential pillar of the dual state. Under Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin the cabinet appointed in January 2020 increased in status and authority. However, it shares power with the parallel managerial system centred on the PA and numerous security agencies. Regime power is buttressed by network relations with corporations, which include law enforcement agencies and the regions. More specifically, there is the network of state-owned companies such as Gazprom, Rostec, Rosneft, Roskosmos, Russian Post, Rostelekom and Russian Railways, as well as some 1,000 state-owned joint stock companies and over 17,000 unitary enterprises. When combined with government employees in the health, education, security and other sectors, this complex adds up to some 24 million people, or 30 per cent of employees, who are

employed directly or indirectly by the state. The total is swelled if those employed by politically dependent corporations (such as AFK Sistema, Lukoil, Metalloinvest, Novolipetsk Steel (NLMK), Norilsk Nickel, Sibur, Surgutneftegaz, Trasnmasholding and the Urals Mining Metallurgical Company (UMMC) are added. These companies exercise direct power in the regions, potentially turning Russia into a "federation of corporations" (Luzin 2019). The idea of such a federation is probably exaggerated, yet it highlights the multiplicity of "verticals". It underscores the importance of meso-level analysis to understand the dynamics of Russian politics and to locate that level in relation to others.

In his early years Putin applied certain neo-corporatist practices, encouraging the formation or reformation of peak organisations such as the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE), and equivalent organisations for small and medium businesses, and maintained the privileges of the successor Soviet trade union organisation, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FITUR, FNPR in Russian). However, in each case, the elevation of formal status was accompanied by the diminution in real powers and independence. The same applies to the creation of a range of para-constitutional bodies, institutions that are not mentioned in the 1993 constitution but which do not contravene constitutional stipulations. These include the eight federal plenipotentiaries (*polpredy*), and the Council of Legislators, as well as the Civic Chamber. The State Council, revived in 2000, was converted into a constitutional body by the 2020 amendments. Para-constitutional entities overlap with constitutional bodies, but they act as supernumerary agencies of the regime and inevitably detract from their constitutional equivalents. In the sphere of party building, parastatal organizations provide simulacra of competition to stabilize the managed polity (March 2009). The Kremlin laboured long and hard to establish United Russia as the regime's pedestal party, but having become predominant in the Federal Assembly and regions, Putin in 2011 created a competing source of social mobilisation and accountability, the Russian People's Front (ONF in Russian). The duplication of bodies was a tradition begun by Yeltsin (Huskey 1995), but it was taken to new heights by Putin. Each institution in other words becomes part of a cluster in which constitutional bodies jostle for influence with the para-constitutional ones, and in which not only are lines of authority blurred but so are the principles of legitimacy. Those derived from the constitutional state are based on law and regularity and compete with those whose authority is obtained from the regime, where informality, expedience and immediate results predominate. The institutions of the constitutional state are thereby weakened, reinforcing reliance on large corporations and other meso-level institutions (Luzin 2019). Para-constitutional proliferation exposes the rhizomatic quality of Russian institutional development.

This places an even greater onus on associations and bodies operating not within the framework of the formal neo-corporatism regulated by the constitutional state but on the terrain of informality and regime relations (Becker and Oxenstierna (eds) 2018; Fortescue 1997, 2006). Typically, a single "peak lobby" dominates a particular sector. In their absence the field becomes the scene of intense and enduring business conflicts accompanied by the mobilisation of politicians, the judiciary, the media and security forces – in a word, the pervasive phenomenon of *reiderstvo* (raiding) (Firestone 2008; Hanson 2014; Kazun 2015; Lain 2017). This has long been the case in the chemical industry, with the Togliattiazot (Toaz) plant the object of a sustained raid as major players sought to dominate the sector (Sakwa 2013). The metal and mining industries remain fairly open, since they are populated by some relatively equal sized companies, enjoying the support of the regions in which they are located. The shipping industry was consolidated with Putin's support through the merger in 2007 of the Novorossiisk Shipping Company with Sovcomflot. Aircraft and shipbuilding have seen significant consolidation in the Putin years, while Gazprom retains its leading status and monopoly on gas export pipelines. Above all, the Putin years saw the emergence of

Rosneft to become a global oil major. The influence of its head, Igor Sechin, stretches far beyond his energy empire.

The manufacturing sector is now dominated by the state conglomerate Rostec (formerly Rostekhnologii, established in 2007). Its head, Sergei Chemezov, became friends with Putin in Dresden in the late 1980s, when they lived in the same KGB building, and he then followed Putin into the Kremlin in the late 1990s. Chemezov is one of the most influential figures in Russia today, and his power base is growing. By 2018 Rostec encompassed more than 700 subsidiaries, ranging from arms manufacturers to motor plants. Chemezov is reputed to have been behind the appointment of Denis Manturov, the minister of industry and trade, as well as a new generation of "young technocrats" to replace the older, more "political", regional governors, including Dmitry Azarov in Samara, the home of the giant Avtovaz car plant where Eduard Vaino (the father of Anton Vaino, head of the PA) is one of the deputy directors (Vardanyan 2018). At the time of the protests against the exclusion of some opposition candidates from the 8 September 2019 Moscow Duma election Chemezov dismissed the view that the protests had been instigated from abroad, and argued that the authorities had used excessive violence against some of the marches. He went so far as to argue that "the presence of a moderate opposition benefits any authority, representative assembly, and ultimately the state. There should be some kind of alternative that makes suggestions and signals toward one way or another … If everything is always good, then we may enter a period of stagnation. And we've been there before" (Kolesnikov, 2019). His concerns were echoed by the so-called "system liberal" Alexei Kudrin (since May 2018 the head of the Audit Chamber) as well as by Sergei Karaganov, the influential foreign policy scholar (Bershidsky 2019). These hinted at a new wave of intra-elite splits as the new inflexion point arrived, allowing heterarchical divisions to be articulated.

The Chemezov industrial lobby is balanced by the financial interests represented by the Kovalchuk brothers. Yuri and Mikhail were old friends of Putin's from his St Petersburg days, and in recent years have increased their political influence. Yuri Kovalchuk, the chair and leading shareholder of Rossiya Bank, is often referred to as "Putin's personal banker", and in that capacity has been placed on various US sanctions lists. The brothers are thought to have come into conflict with the deputy head of the PA, Vyacheslav Volodin, who after the September 2016 parliamentary election was moved to become Duma speaker. In that post he revived the Ruslan Khasbulatov tradition of making parliament an institutional peer to others. Volodin launched an "empire-building drive to create his own power *vertikal'"* (Noble 2019). In the Kremlin, he was replaced by Sergei Kirienko, who is considered close to the financial group. Since 2005 Mikhail Kovalchuk has been head of the Kurchatov nuclear research institute, while Kirienko was appointed to head Rosatom in the same year and remained in this post until he became deputy head of the PA in October 2016. The Kovalchuks are reputed to influence the Russian media through the VGTRK state holding company and the National Media Group (Vardanyan 2018). As for Kirienko, he is the epitome of corporate managerialism using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the like, compared to the more politicised approaches practiced by his predecessors, Surkov and Volodin, and was apparently responding to Putin's demand for an end to "political" activity (Stanovaya 2019). The overwhelmingly technocratic character of the Mishustin government reflects this trend. However, in one elite study interlocutors were unanimous in declaring that "changes for the better are impossible", since they would be blocked by the *siloviki* (Volkov and Kolesnikov 2019). Heterarchy enhances pluralism but in the absence of a consensus for "reform" based on some hegemonic formation, late Soviet-style stasis is reproduced.

The micro-level: elite contestation and control

In a heterarchical system factionalism and group dynamics work at various cross-cutting levels. Beneath the veneer of monolithic unity, the system is highly personalised and torn by factional conflict, especially among the security services. No sooner is one group disbanded than another rhizomatically takes its place, but the central goal throughout is to constrain intra-elite conflict. The Putin phenomenon is a sophisticated mechanism to manage complex relationships, and one should be less surprised when it sometimes fails but that it works at all. At the micro-level Putin achieved an extraordinary level of elite coherence, even (mostly) during the inflexion periods mentioned earlier. Putin positioned himself as the arbiter of elite and corporate disputes, with connections to all the major elite factions who trust him to respect their interests. No faction gets all that it wants, but all get something from remaining loyal to the system. However, the enduring fear of defection during an inflexion point reinforces attempts to reinforce hierarchy.

The mechanisms have evolved over time, including the "nationalisation of the elites" after the near-defections of 2011-12. The "deoffshorisation" campaign imposed much tougher regulations on foreign asset holdings for politicians and other office holders. Harsh methods of administrative management raises the question whether the ruling group in Russia can be called an elite in the traditional sense, denoting some sort of stable and self-reproducing ruling class. According to this view, large-scale purges and repression against the elite, typically conducted in the guise of anti-corruption campaigns, have turned it into a neo-nomenklatura (Petrov 2019b). Leadership turnover was especially marked in the regions after 2018, and then in government in January 2020. In the Putin years the basic drive was "the centre's struggle to restore control over the regional elites and systematic work to weaken them and fit them into a single party of the federal and regional bureaucracy" (Kynev 2019). This was achieved, but Putin still had to struggle to convert policy statements into action, as reflected in his regular complaints in his annual address (*poslanie*) to the Federal Assembly. For example, he repeatedly complained about the unjustified imprisonment of businesspeople in economic disputes (Putin 2015, 2019), noting in 2019 that "unfortunately, the situation has not improved much".

Elite studies have become a major industry, with former insiders casting an especially interesting light on the disposition of personnel. Gleb Pavlovsky was long an influential advisor until he threw in his lot with the Medvedev second term project in 2011. He is the leading advocate of the "collective Putin" thesis, the view that a "palace oligarchy" rules, and that the "successor" problem is imaginary and "conceals the inevitability of collective leadership" (Pavlovsky 2015, 2019). Academic research in the field is conducted at many institutions, notably studies conducted by Olga Kryshtanovskaya at the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Sociology and several groups at the Higher School of Economics, joined by consulting companies. The Minchenko analytical agency tracks changes in the elite through the use of the "Politburo 2.0" metaphor. It rejects the "collective Putin" model in favour of the old Soviet Politburo paradigm of delegated power. The 2012 report argued that the Russian power system comprised a network of delegated authority reminiscent of the Soviet Politburo (Minchenko 2012). The Politburo 2.0 is not a formal institution and unlike the original version does not meet regularly and has no formal procedures. Nevertheless, the top government officials and business interests aligned with the Kremlin are included, reinforcing the argument that the "power vertical" is tempered by the "power horizontal". The Minchenko group later argued that the Russian governance model had changed from a binary or "bipolar model", in which two micro-factions broadly balanced each other, towards a sectoral approach, the view adopted in this article. Putin's power rests on his ability to adjudicate the allocation of resources to key sectors, including the defence industrial complex, the energy sector (notably Sechin), industrialists and manufacturers (Chemezov),

the financial sector and the security apparatus (Minchenko 2014). This is the meso-level identified in the previous section.

There have been notable shifts in the composition of the Putin elite. In recent years the influence of his original St Petersburg friends and security service cohort has waned, although a small coterie of trusted insiders remains (including Nikolai Patrushev at the head of the Security Council, as well as Dmitry Medvedev and Dmitry Kozak), while the weight of technocrats with few previous ties to Putin has increased (notably people like Sergei Kirienko, Anton Vaino and significantly, Mikhail Mishustin). The authority of the government officials is derived both from their formal offices as well as their closeness to Putin. This group includes Medvedev (even after his dismissal as prime minister in January 2020 and appointment as deputy head of the Security Council subordinate only to Putin), the minister of defence Sergei Shoigu, as well as the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyanin. The other major group comprises businesspeople in Putin's inner court: Arkady Rotenberg, Gennady Timchenko and Yuri Kovalchuk. Some figures bridge the two constituencies, notably Sechin, who in certain respects remains a law unto himself. The Politburo analogy is complemented by the "court" model, comprising various individuals with no formal government authority or business interests, but who nevertheless are influential. These include Tikhon Shevkunov, the Orthodox bishop formerly at the Sretensky Monastery and now Metropolitan of Pskov and Porkhov, who is considered Putin's confessor. Individuals who began their careers as part of Putin's court later moved to occupy official positions, notably Putin's protocol officer Anton Vaino who became head of the PA, Alexei Dyumin, Putin's former chief security guard and advisor before becoming governor of Tula region in February 2016, and Yevgeny Zinichev, a former bodyguard who before being appointed minister for emergency situations in May 2018 was acting governor of Kaliningrad region (Gaaze 2017). The core of the Putin elite remains unchanged, but renewal is underway in the regions and the centre. These changes are beginning to rejuvenate the system, but not enough to avert the tensions accompanying the culminating inflexion point of the Putin era, the uncertainty associated with 2024, hence the recourse to constitutional change.

Heterarchy and governance

Comprising a large, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population and a history of regime collapse, Russia remains one of the world's most complex states to govern. Fear of dissolution and disintegration feeds the tutelary impulse. This gave rise to dual state governance regulated by two operative systems: one generated by the constitutional state, in which the formal institutions of the presidency, government and ministries can be found, accompanied by the law and the courts, the parties, elections and representative system; and the second spawned by various "regime complexes" of the administrative system, including its para-constitutional and parastatal innovations as well as the three tiers of factional politics. Eroding the logic of both is the corruption and criminality of the third state, which in the 1990s looked as if it would turn Russia into a "mafiya state" (Handelman 1994; and see also Varese 2001 and Volkov 2002), but which Putin checked by fair means and foul. If Russia had become a kleptocracy (*pace* Dawisha 2014) the foreign reserves would be in Swiss bank accounts rather than in the federal treasury. In this dual system (three if the criminalised third state is included) governance is disaggregated, typically personalised and consequently fragmented and de-institutionalised. The system is "inherently dynamic, with constant regime change being essential to how the regime operates and survives" (Hale, Lipman and Petrov 2019, 168). Until the amendments of 2020, the constitution acted as an anchor of stability, constraining the arbitrariness of the administrative regime. The shifting boundary between

regime and state blurred the line between the public and the private, as in so many late developing states.

Regime politics seeks to prevent fragmentation becoming segmentation. The latter had become dominant in federal and business relations in the 1990s, and Putin's first independent measures were designed to counteract this phenomenon. This became the bedrock of the performative aspect of regime legitimation (Sharafutdinova 2020). In international relations anarchy is tempered by hierarchy, in which the sovereignty of subordinates is in part or wholly ceded to the hegemonic state (Lake 2007, 2009), so "the Kremlin" (taken as the symbol of authority) seeks to impose hierarchy in domestic politics. Ever since the Rurikids united the nation political integration has always been a challenge. The struggle against heterarchy has characterised Russian politics whatever the regime type – monarchy, empire, Communist state or republic. However, none could do away with the substantive fact of heterarchy. This is why Putin repeatedly argued that Russia had to remain a strongly presidential republic. Questioned shortly after his 15 January 2020 *poslanie* announcing constitutional amendments about a possible shift to a parliamentary system in Russia, Putin (2020a) argued that it would be inadvisable: "We should better not carry out any experiments", noting the drawbacks of parliamentary systems. With its "huge territory, many faiths and a large number of nations, peoples and nationalities living in the country – you can't even count, someone says 160, someone 190", Russia in his view "still needs strong presidential power". The zero-option allowing Putin to run for two more terms sought to avoid a runaway nuclear reaction of elite fragmentation and segmentation (Putin 2020b). The appeal to stability and continuity is the classic call of strongmen (Kribbe 2020), but in Russia's case has a particular poignancy, given repeated regime collapses: the "Time of Troubles" (*Smuta*) at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the fall of Tsarism in 1917, the dissolution of Soviet Communism in 1989-90, and the disintegration of the Soviet state in 1991.

The charismatic leader is ultimately perceived to represent the bulwark against chaos. In Russia, this is a president who represents "the identity aspirations of different groups in the nation; and through a search for political unity, mobilised above all by the apparent threat from an external enemy" (Lewis 2020, 13). The president acts as the power-broker rather than taskmaster, but can do so in different ways. Yeltsin worked more through accommodation and concessions, allowing political pluralism to flourish at the regional and corporate levels, but by the same token fostered segmentation that at times veered towards separatism. The state lost its ability to stand above competing factions as supreme arbiter, and this helps explain the emergence of the administrative regime as a power system able to reassert steering capacity. In the dual state, the tree and the rhizome both flourish on a thousand plateaux. Putin remorselessly pushed back against this fragmentation, reducing not only separatist impulses but also the associated institutionalised pluralism. At the head of the administrative regime, Putin as the supreme balancer achieved a certain autonomy irrespective of the post held, as evidenced by the authority he wielded as prime minister during Medvedev's presidency, yet his mode of rule remained consensual and within the bounds of the dual state. Both the state and regime reasserted their prerogatives as supreme arbiters and decisional authority. The *vertikal'* subdued the unruly forces that had constrained Yeltsin, but the price to pay was not only the loss of pluralism and political competitiveness, but also the paradoxical incorporation of heterarchy into the regime itself. Chaos did not disappear but became part of the "network" of regime rule, the *sistema* that was identified earlier. Paradoxically, in maintaining a system based on the regime's ability to exercise discretionary power in the pursuit of control, sovereignty became dispersed across the heterarchical spectrum. Lewis (2020, 219) puts this well when he argues "the assertion of exceptionality as the basis of sovereignty – and therefore of political order – has the effect of

undermining order in the normal sphere, in everyday judicial processes, business transactions and security operations". The exception not only threatened to become the norm, but the norm itself is subverted by the exception (cf. Jayasuriya 2001).

When it comes to specific moments of decision, the three layers of heterarchy and each of the components engage with various levels of commitment, depending on how the issue affects their core concerns in policy-making. For example, the embezzlement case against the theatre director Kirill Serebrennikov and colleagues ended in July 2020 with a suspended sentence, although the more conservative groups had pressed for a harsher sentence. The case demonstrates the factional model at work: "Custodial sentences in the Serebrennikov case would have been too obvious a victory for one particular group. For the leader of a personalistic regime, the victory of one group would mean a loss of balance. He would no longer represent different groups, and would not be guided by them in equal measures, but would become dependent on the winners and risk losing the support of rival groups" (Baunov 2020b). The power of societal resistance was evident in the regime's attempt to subordinate the Telegram encrypted messaging service, which in this case was pursued by an over-zealous state agency (Roskomnadzor) eager to display its patriotism. The attempt ended with the partial victory of Telegram, and demonstrates why the authorities have not yet dared to block major international platforms such a YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or Wikipedia (Baunov 2020a). This is not to suggest that factions enjoy veto power, but as relatively autonomous agents they enjoy the influence that derives from being part of the informal balance of power. This can take dangerous forms, as when an SU-24 fighter flew low over the deck of the USS Donald Cook in April 2014, an event that Putin described as "hooliganism" when asked about the incident by the film-maker Andrei Kondrashov (Saradzhyan 2019). Competing groups in the security-guardianship bloc could lead to the loss of central control in a crisis. Russia's involvement in the US presidential election in 2016, although its scale and nature is highly contested (Sakwa 2021), had devastating consequences for the relationship. It has been ascribed in part to such free-lancing activities by agents in which "intelligence and commercial interests are intertwined". This rendered it "difficult for Putin to retain any degree of meaningful control over the individuals who are supposedly serving him" (Marten 2019, 755).

Putin is clearly tiring of the whole exercise. His *poslanie* of 15 January 2020 appeared at first to represent a shift to greater institutionalisation and less personalised elite management (Putin 2020c), although in the end only timid steps were taken in this direction. Stanovaya goes so far as to argue that Putin has deliberately withdrawn, allowing inter-elite conflicts free rein: "With Putin increasingly absent from everyday decision-making and rarely available to intervene and arbitrate in these intra-elite battles, the regime is riven by internal conflicts" (Stanovaya 2020, 40). This is true but exaggerated, although in pushing through the constitutional changes that reset his presidential term to zero, Putin admitted that this was to constrain elite contestation at the micro-level, and possibly even at the meso-level. As for the ideational-factional blocs at the macro-level, in countries where elections are free and fair they would compete for public office and seek to build consensus behind favoured policies. The views of the various groups are represented in the Federal Assembly, and in a diluted manner are reflected in the various United Russia programmes and its positioning as a "conservative" political party. Above all, the various factions exercise their influence through administrative channels and bureaucratic agencies. The economic liberals, as noted, continue to shape macroeconomic policy, while the *silovik-okhranitel'* bloc influences national security issues. The neo-traditionalists enjoyed a moment in the sun in 2014, and in general are part of Putin's consensual management of identity issues. They gained an important victory when a 2020 constitutional amendment (Article 68.1) now describes the Russian language as 'state-forming'. Pragmatic and technocratic Eurasianist perspectives (techno-

Eurasianism) have been given institutional form in the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union and contribute to the formulation of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP). Throughout, the more extreme representations of these blocs have been suppressed. Thus the radical liberals, who unequivocally see Russia's future as part of the Atlantic power system (now more politely described as the liberal international order), have been marginalised; the more repressive instincts of the *silovik*-guardians constrained (as in their attempts fully to control the internet); the militant Russian nationalists and xenophobes among the neo-traditionalists have endured tough police action and are the largest political group in jail; while the radical Eurasianists who dream of a sustained geopolitical breach with the West have become more of a sect than a movement.

Once considered the core of pluralist democracies, traditional interest groups in late modern neoliberal states have undergone a qualitative transformation, described by Phil Cerny (2010) as "neopluralism". The increased role of transnational webs of power transformed the way that classic sectoral or value interest groups and NGOs interact and challenged the pre-eminence of the state. It also challenged the pluralism that Robert Dahl described in his classic work on polyarchy (Dahl 1971). Heterarchy everywhere challenges classical hierarchical Weberian representations of the state as well as customary notions of political pluralism. Russia has an enormous diversity of interests, value communities and actors (ranged in my schema on three levels, as described above), and thus it is certainly correct to describe the country as inherently pluralistic. However, the mechanical quality of interactions between the ensembles that comprise the polity undermines organic integration. Instead, manual management means that mechanical forms of stability management predominate. The dual state voids constitutional institutions of the autonomy and actorness that would embed them in a functioning political organism. Neopluralism means that the interactions between them have an equally mimetic character. This is more than the privatisation of governance condemned by critics of the neoliberal state, but a qualitative transformation of social and political relationships.

Classic Weberian representations of the modern state have given way to models stressing informality and the diffusion of power and authority. While formally unchanged, the institutions and processes of governance have been hollowed out (Crouch 2004; Mair 2013). The Russian governance model is an extreme version of this. It is far from what the International Monetary Fund and other international agencies advance as models of good governance. Rules about tendering for public contracts, for example, are often flouted, and awards for major projects are typically made in a non-transparent manner. However, there are many different forms of bad governance and the Russian case is particularly distinctive because of the coexistence of two operative principles: the legality and procedures of the constitutional state; and the arbitrariness and cronyism of the administrative regime. Not only do actors not know which code will operate at any particular time, but the two often interact simultaneously. This means that arbitrary acts are often couched in the language of legality, as with the expropriation of the Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Yukos oil company (Sakwa 2014). However, it is more than just the instrumental use of legal institutions to achieve political goals (rule by law), the practice of authoritarians everywhere, but the competitive coexistence of two modes of legitimation – the legality and proceduralism of the constitutional state, and the decisionism that justifies regime forms of governance.

Heterarchy represents a new form of social order and political system in which the processes described constitute a type of governance and social order. The structure of the political sphere generates the duality of the polity, and it has done so since at least the mid-1990s. Constitutional procedures largely manage formal political competition (however much abused in practice); but the regime also has to manage the neopluralism represented by the agents populating the three levels of factionalism. None of the levels or the actors of which

they are comprised has been able to become hegemonic, but neither has the regime-state itself. The domination of the power system is achieved by drawing on the resources of both the constitutional state and of the administrative regime. Contrary to the late perestroika view that a reawakened civil society (representing the political sphere) was just waiting to shape a new democratic polity (Bloomfield 1989; Lewin 1988), no historical bloc has been able to impose its representation of the knowledge-power nexus – in other words, to become hegemonic.

Instead, the administrative regime gained relative autonomy, and under Yeltsin won the 1996 election by unfair means, but thereby found itself in hoc to powerful social forces. Putin released the administrative regime from these constraints, but this does not mean that it was freed from all constraints. Instead, Putin became the faction manager, balancing interests and elite groups, ensuring that they all had a stake in the system but not allowing any to predominate. The liberals remain important in certain areas (notably macroeconomic policy), but have less influence over others; and the same applies to the *okhraniteli-siloviki*, although their ambitions are unlimited; while the neo-traditionalists have become strong in the media and shape elements of public policy, but when it comes to social policy, the regime tempers their attempts to roll back Soviet achievements, for example in the sphere of women's rights and abortion; and the Eurasianists can now feel satisfied that with estrangement from the West and the "pivot to the East", their injunction about the fundamental incompatibility between Russia and the West appear to have been borne out.

In the ensuing heterarchy, it is as difficult to manage governance as it is to organise opposition. The Russian political sphere is deeply plural, but this is not a polyarchy of the classical sort. The clusters comprising the various rhizomes have a surprising ability to self-regulate and even to influence policy-making, although not in the classical manner of direct and organised political interventions. Public policy is shaped by interactions cascading within and between the three levels, although with Putin as the ultimate arbiter. Even here, as Zygar' (2016) observes, Putin's leadership style is usually not to issue orders, but to listen, observe and then adjudicate. These decisions may well be shaped by the "code of Putinism" – statism, conservatism, anti-Americanism and practices of loyalty and control (Taylor 2018) – but these are the superficial aspects of a more profound political reality. They describe the authoritarianism and the limitations of the system, but the sources of regime power remain obscured. Regime power is constrained not only by its formal commitment to the formalism of the constitutional state, typical of electoral authoritarianism (Schedler (ed.) 2006), but also by the ability of extra-state actors to shape the political field. At the micro-factional level this simply means that "A collective leadership already exists in Russia, comprised of a multitude of small and medium-sized Putins" (Kolesnikov 2019). In the absence of specific instructions officials seek to second-guess the party line, but unlike in the Soviet Union, there is none. As Maxim Trudolyubov (2019) notes, "Analysts keep peering into an imaginary control room somewhere behind the Kremlin"s walls, while Russia's policymakers, most of whom do not even sit in the Kremlin, are torn by infighting, do not have a single control room, and keep looking back into an opposing 'control room' too". There are many real and aspiring "control rooms", including among the grass-roots opposition, but these sub-systems are constrained precisely by the administrative regime, designed to prevent sub-system dominance.

This has important implications for any putative post-Putin system. A revolutionary change would simply mean the excess empowerment of one of the heterarchical networks, to the detriment of the others. It would not mean the creation of a hegemonic historical bloc but the imposition of one faction over the others. In the present historical conjuncture the triumph of the liberal faction would deliver important public goods, including rapprochement with the West and the strengthening of the rule of law and defensible property rights. However, we have been here before, and the liberal dominance of the 1990s appeared simply to reproduce

Bolshevik methods, although with a radically different purpose (Reddaway and Glinski 2001). The victory of the *okhraniteli-siloviki*, neo-traditionalists or Eurasianists, in alliance with various meso- and micro-factions, would reinforce "fortress Russia" strategies (Yablokov 2018), and while probably delivering short-term gains, would represent yet again a blind alley of development. Putinism is one way of managing heterarchy, and by far not the least successful, but by manually managing stability, it stymied the development of more organic forms of Lockean pluralist interaction.

The incorporation of factionalism is characteristic of authoritarian systems, but what is distinctive about post-communist Russia is not only the coexistence of constitutional and administrative (emergency) forms of rule, but that the potentiality of the one does not preclude the capacity of the other. In other words, while heterarchy is an enduring feature of Russian politics, reactions to it vary. Over the ages there have been various responses to the fear of chaos overwhelming the elements of control, and chaos at times becomes part of the repertoire of control. This applies to the Yeltsin era, when regime and state capacity were both low, and even in a different way to the Putin years, when the capacity of both greatly increased. The dual state model suggests that the organic evolution of the polity could strengthen the institutions of the constitutional state, reduce the arbitrary interventions of the administrative regime, and achieve accommodation with pluralism through political compromise and consensus. An evolutionary approach would allow mechanical stability to give way to more organic forms of political integration and would represent a solution to the great problem of Russian politics: how to convert heterarchy into polyarchy. At that point, the enduring tension between chaos and control would give way to a structurally competitive polity comprising shared sovereignty, the moderation of hierarchical governance structures, multi-level governance, the renunciation of exclusive claims to regimes of truth, and the reconstruction of forms of public political engagement and political will formation. Such a reconfiguration of political space would allow heterarchy to temper hierarchical authoritarianism by horizontal empowerment, although the danger of renewed segmentation would not disappear. If new forms of organically integrated diversity can take root heterarchy would combine with constitutional pluralism, and the tree and the rhizome would share the same shade. Can Russia at last find a way to overcome the contradiction between chaos and control in this way?

Disclosure statement: No conflict of interest has arisen in the preparation of this article.

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