Irredentist Claim-Making: Legitimation Warrants for Possessive Statism in Vladimir Putin's War Rhetoric

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Irredentist Claim-Making

Legitimation Warrants for Possessive Statism in Vladimir Putin's War Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT: A source of significant tensions, irredentist claims are a form of strategic political argumentation by which a state claims territory from across its borders by laying claim to the people who inhabit those areas. Through a rhetorical analysis of statements by President Vladimir Putin which extended irredentist claims in the days leading to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this paper explores irredentism as a mode of claim making that bridges local with global argumentative contexts.

KEYWORDS: global governance, international, irredentism, legitimacy, legitimation warrant, multipolarity, relations, Russian-Ukrainian war, possessive statism

1. INTRODUCTION

On February 21, 2022, in a major public address delivered three days before his country's invasion of its neighboring state, Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the people in Ukraine as "our comrades, dear ones, among whom are not only colleagues, friends, former co-servicemen, but also relatives, people who are connected to us with blood, family ties" (Putin, 2022a). Then on the day of his so called "military operation," Putin characterized the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk as "genocide with respect to the millions of people living there who count only on Russia, who count only on us, on you" (Putin, 2022b). Less than a month later, Russia's government-controlled news media announced that the country had posted a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, claiming "mass abridgements of the rights of Russian compatriots abroad on the grounds of citizenship, nationality, and language" (RIA News, 2022). Collectively these statements suggested that Russia's aggressive foreign policy was motivated by care for people living outside its borders. Claiming those people as its own served as justification for Russia's effort to redraw the political map of Eurasia by annexing Donbas and its population.

There is a name for this type of political action and its accompanying claims. Irredentism is a form of strategic political argumentation by which a state claims territory from across its borders by laying claim to the people who inhabit those areas. The phenomenon of irredentism is not new and it has long been viewed with concern. Some of the bloodiest conflicts over the last century and a half originated with irredentist claims. The First Balkan War was fought over territories of the Ottoman Empire. Nazi Germany's claims on Czechoslovakia ignited World War II. "Greater

Serbia" claims led to the Yugoslav wars. Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh seized a significant amount of land from Azerbaijan and generated a million Azeri refugees (Kornprobst, 2008). And beyond Europe, a number of irredentist disputes linger into the present as a source of significant tension. Among the better-known cases are China's annexation of Tibet and its claim on Taiwan, Somalia's claims to parts of Kenya and Ethiopia, the Sino-Japanese disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaki islands, Bolivia's claims to the Atacama region, India and Pakistan's competing claims over Kashmir, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ireland's claim to Northern Ireland, and many others. Given this background, Russia's invasion of Ukraine may be its own unique development, but President Putin's irredentist justification for authorizing his military action takes up an argumentative form that exceeds this particular conflict. Thus, rhetorically, the Russia-Ukrainian war is not an isolated event and there are significant stakes for closely examining its argumentative buildup.

There are several reasons why irredentist claim-making is a worthy object of study for argumentation scholars. First, whereas scholars from a variety of disciplines such as history, geography, international relations, anthropology and others have attended to cases of irredentism either separately or comparatively, one fundamental aspect of irredentism remains stubbornly out of view. Regardless of their geo-political and cultural contexts, what makes irredentist claims distinctive is precisely their rhetorical character: they are speech acts that constitute a relationship between people, place, and political structure. Each case of irredentism has been framed by an official statement by the government laying claim to people across its borders and the responses of the challenged government as well as other foreign actors. In this sense, claim-making is a core feature of irredentism.

A step further, the political character of irredentist claim-making challenges some of the basic assumptions of our dominant models of public argumentation. First, for arguments to work, as Stephen Toulmin (1958) established, some warrant needs to be shared by speakers and audiences. The claims-grounds-warrant model thus presumes the existence of some form of community. This is the reason why we commonly justify the study of political rhetoric in its national forms as an opportunity to inquire into the character and value structure of a political community that is held together through shared cultural, symbolic, and institutional means. Irredentist claims, however, operate in the field of international relations. And if there is one feature of that field that scholars and philosophers have long highlighted and tried to work around, it is that beyond sovereignty which has been characterized as an institution—a territorial property right predicated on recognition from other states—international relations operate as an anarchy (Wendt, 1994; Hurd, 1999). From there, the question of "what motivates states to follow international norms, rules, and commitments?" (Hurd, p. 379) remains largely unanswered even as debates continue to rage among various academic schools of international relations.

Thomas Risse (2000) has also highlighted a second presupposition that has stood in the way of seriously engaging with the role of arguing in international relations. For him, the extent to which relationships of power are ever present in international relations had made it "preposterous to assume that truth-seeking discourse is possible in international politics" (p. 14). Showcasing the limits of both realist (rational choice) and social constructivist approaches to international relations, Risse has made a useful intervention by differentiating between various forms and functions of arguing in international affairs such as bargaining, rhetorical action, and truth seeking that in turn operate differently on the planes of diplomatic negotiations and public discourses. The

yield of such finer-grained approach would be to demonstrate that "argumentative rationality appears to be crucially linked to the constitutive rather than the regulative role of norms and identities" (Risse, p. 2). Consequently, this line of scholarship suggests that for international relations to operate in any form other than anarchically, some form authority and legitimacy needs to be constituted so that states' actions and the justifications for their actions could appear as system building in some way rather than fully arbitrary.

Hence, in this paper I investigate irredentist claim making, a form of argumentation commonly perceived as a violation of international norms of sovereignty, a major assault on international law, a direct challenge to the post-colonial territorial status quo, and thus seemingly antithetical to the project of global order. I am interested in an elusive element that might better equip our argumentation models to approach the "complex case" of global politics. I take Goodnight's definition of a complex case as "a situated argument where the settlement of a disagreement depends upon the resolution of multiple points of disagreement" (Goodnight, p. 158). Specifically, the element I seek to identify is what G. Thomas Goodnight has called the "legitimation warrant": a missing piece in Toulmin's model that may allow argumentation scholars "to seek out those argumentative situations where standards for reasoning essential to a field evolve" (Goodnight, p. 164). In focusing on the way legitimacy is construed in irredentist claims I, therefore, both echo and challenge Isabela Ieţcu-Fairclough's (2008) suggestion that judgments of "legitimacy in the political field, should be placed in concrete political, social contexts, and assessed in terms of the shared beliefs and norms of a given community and in terms of how they attempt to *transform* these contexts" (p. 416). I echo her emphasis on the dynamic character of legitimacy, but to honor that, I argue, we need to abandon a static notion of argumentative context as a pre-given container of argumentation and focus instead on the system-building capacity of claim-making (Keremidchieva, 2014). In my paper, therefore, I proceed in three steps. First, I provide an overview of irredentist claim-making and its connection to the problem of legitimacy in global politics. Next, I examine textual evidence from Russian President Vladimir Putin's public announcements at the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war. I conclude by suggesting that this most recent iteration of irredentist rhetoric has implications for the character of the system of global governance, signaling, in particular, a discursive move toward multi-polarity as an emergent model of international relations.

2. JUSTIFYING IRREDENTISM, OR THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMACY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The term "irredentism" was first coined in Italy in the 19th century when the country referred to Italian speakers living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Switzerland as "irredenta," or "the unredeemed" (Petacco, 1998). Since then a range of political behaviors and expressions have been defined as irredentist. For example, in his study of Turkish policies in the Balkan and Middle Eastern contexts, Jacob M. Landau (1995) defines irredentism as "an ideological or organizational expression of passionate interest in the welfare of an ethnic minority living outside the boundaries of the state peopled by that same group" (p. 1). Such interest may vary greatly in intensity, with some states extending only tacit symbolic support and others providing more material

aid to kin groups outside their borders. In view of this range of behaviors, however, some scholars have opted to treat as irredentist only situations in which military action gets initiated against a neighboring country in the name of protecting ethnically similar, but territorially separated, people (Hale & Siroky, 2023, p. 500).

Even though irredentism is not rare, as Markus Kornprobst (2007) points out, it is dramatically understudied, with most of the literature developing in the 1990s "amid fears that Europe's future may resemble its past" (p. 481 n.2). For the most part, irredentism is considered a side effect of the end of empires, when political and territorial dissolution renders ethnic groups separated by newly drawn borders. For example, irredentist claims have originated in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman empire, the British empire, more recently the Soviet Union, but also as far back as Song China (960-1279 AD). But it is also important to emphasize that all states, and not only empires, are ethnically and culturally diverse, so irredentism cannot be understood as the pursuit of territorial and demographic congruity or as a response to the challenges of diversity per se. Finally, irredentism is a phenomenon that is distinctive from secessionism, whereas a group seeks to claim territory for itself without necessarily looking to reunite with a proverbial motherland.

The majority of the extant scholarship has sought to determine, in a realist fashion, the major causes of irredentism. For example, in a global empirical analysis, Christopher W. Hale and David S. Siroky (20023) tested the comparative significance of factors that prior scholarship had suggested might be contributing to irredentist conflict. Factors for consideration included ethno-demographics, economic situations, regime types, and the presence of various forms of political and economic competition on both sides of the irredentist border. Other scholars have focused on the character of diasporic politics (Kim, 2016). Examining comparative data from the 1980s and 1990s, Stephen M Saideman and R. Williams Ayres (2000) tested the comparative value of five other explanations: the nature of the group seeking reunification with its motherland, "characteristics of the group's kin, contagion processes, ethnic security dilemmas, and the end of the Cold War" (p. 1126). Despite their diverse methodologies and the range of cases that they cover, however, these studies have failed to produce a coherent explanatory or predictive theory of irredentism.

Still, the extant scholarship has generated insights that are relevant to the question of what could legitimize and, on the flip side, de-legitimize irredentism in contemporary global politics and why a rhetorical approach to the phenomenon would be especially productive. First, irredentism entails the work of communication in mobilizing group identities. Emergent media forms are likely to "repurpose" messages in ways that may render communication itself a mechanism of insurgency and counterinsurgency (Driscoll & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2020). Along with that, irredentism is closely tied to the development of the nation-state as the premier form of political organization in modernity. A significant dimension of this development is the emergence and circulation of nationalism as a historically particular ideology connecting territory and people in ways that defy human diversity, mobility, and cultural variegation as facts of life (Gellner, 2006).

The third, and I believe most underappreciated dimension of irredentism, is its relation to the plane of international relations itself. While they are a direct and express challenge to the Liberal International Order, irredentist claims can also be characterized as a symptom both of the system's emergence and of its precarity. And at the current moment, if there is any consensus, it is that the system is failing on all fronts (Ponsard, 2006; Hlatky & Fortmann, 2020). The sense of foreboding has been building from all corners.

For example, dating the literature on global security appears to also be a measure of its optimism, with early faith in cooperative security giving way to frustration (Klein, 1994; Lepgold & Weiss, 1998). Those invested in institution building as a mechanism for coordinating action and promoting justice now recognize that institutions themselves can become engines of inequality (Hurrell, 2005). Others find fault with the core liberal grammar of the global political order (Mearsheimer, 2019) as well as its communicative processes (Keremidchieva, 2024). It is in this context, therefore, that I wish to examine Russia's irredentist claims towards Ukraine with specific attention to their legitimation warrants.

3. PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S IRREDENTIST RHETORIC

The rhetorical centerpieces of Russia's justification for the invasion of Ukraine came on the 21st and the 24th of February, 2022. On those dates, Russian President Vladimir Putin made extended televised speeches discussing the topic of Russia-Ukraine relations and the country's stance toward its neighbor. In opening the first address, which was delivered three days before the launch of his military invasion, Putin (2022a) first appealed to his fellow "citizens of Russia" and "dear friends," informing them that the topic of his speech would be "the events in Ukraine and why they are so important to us, to Russia." Then he immediately stated that "of course, my speech is also addressed to our compatriots in Ukraine." Thus, from the very beginning, Putin made a classic irredentist move by extending political belonging to people living across a territorial border. It wasn't just people in Ukraine that he laid claim to, however. He quickly emphasized that "Ukraine for us—it is not just an adjacent country. It is an inseparable part of our own history, culture, spiritual space." He further elaborated that "for a long time the inhabitants of the south-western ancient Russian lands called themselves Russians and Orthodox. It was this way till the 17th century, when parts of these territories united with the Russian state." From there, Putin moved the narrative chronologically. His historical timeline next asserted that "contemporary Ukraine was wholly and completely created by Russia, more specifically Bolshevik, communist Russia. This process began in practice right after the 1917 revolution…" Putin's narrative highlighted the numerous changes in the political map and status of Ukraine's territory over the years of communist rule, from its incorporation into the newly created USSR in the 1920s, through Stalin's disputes with Lenin over the administrative governance of the new country's territories and peoples, to Khruschev's decision to add Crimea to the Soviet Ukraine, to what Putin termed the "humiliating" Brest-Litovsk treaty and the subsequent development of the Soviets' nationalities policies, which Putin interpreted as recklessly dabbling in nationalism. From Putin's point of view, these early Soviet policies were "not just a mistake, they were much worse, a big mistake." He emphasized that from his perspective after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 "that became absolutely obvious."

Putin's critique of nationalism in these passages tests popular journalistic interpretations of his governing ideology as being itself nationalist in character (Kuzio, 2017). It also contradicts to some extent the idea that the capture of Donbas was sought in the name of ethnic reunification per se. Instead, my reading of his speeches in their original form, prior to translation, focuses on the way Putin invokes the root of the term "nazi" (нация -nation), in a way that recalls earlier soviet discourses that resisted the

coupling of state and nation, so as to combat the spread of fascism. Communism meant to present a radical challenge to nationalism. The earlier history and theory of global communism was an effort to establish worker solidarity as an alternative relational principle to displace the sense of community and affiliation offered by traditional social forms such as clan and nation (Keremidchieva, 2020). The formation of the Soviet Union prompted radical revisioning of the meaning of "nationality." Starting in the 1920s, the project of re-defining and re-thinking how populations could be described, organized, and governed, became a core imperative.

By the 1930s, the project of building a multinational socialist federation meant that nationalities had to be constructed in a literal sense. As Francine Hirsch (1997) recalls, in their search for a 'standardized' system to organize the new state, specialists and officials sometimes gave official status to peoples who wanted recognition as distinct nationalities, and sometimes actually created nationalities out of groups of people with (and sometimes without) ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities. The official classification of the population by nationality in large part was what made the category a highly politicized marker of identity. The production of the demographic censuses created nationalisms in regions where it did not previously exist (p. 277).

The irony, as Hirsh recognizes, is that the Soviets' revolutionary agenda in the end produced a "modern citizenry" that was "based on a western European prototype—a citizenry divided into economically viable national-territorial units, each with an official language, culture, and history" (Hirsch, p. 278).

Still, what is distinctive and significant about this history to this day, is the memory of nation building through administrative means which entails both the denaturalization of nationality and a lingering recognition of the political character of nationalism. Putin has seized on that very legacy. He did not just find particular folly in the decision that "each republic of the USSR shall have citizenship of its own, which shall apply to all its residents" (Putin, 2022a). He found that representational model to be a recipe for nationalism and a catalyst for the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. As he put it, "the virus of nationalist ambitions is still with us, and the landmine laid at the initial stage to undermine the state's immunity against the disease of nationalism was just waiting for its time. As I've said before, the landmine was the right of secession from the Soviet Union." In that respect, at least, Putin's reservations toward certain versions of multicultural political representation is not too distant from similar critiques emanating from both progressive and conservative scholars of diversity governance in liberal political regimes (Antonsich, 2016; Greene & Keremidchieva, 2023). The effort to ground the state form in an equivalence between ethnicities and peoples has long been recognized as a fraught project.

I am not claiming, based on my reading of his speeches, that Putin is a Soviet man who is attempting to revive soviet ideology. I find comparisons between Stalin and Putin like the ones Kuzio and others draw, perfunctory and mostly agitational. Neither am I suggesting that Putin is offering a progressive approach to managing diversity. I am suggesting instead that Putin drew very particular lessons from the Soviet struggle to handle matters of cultural and national identity and its efforts to govern in a new way. One of these lessons was that cultural identity and political representation should not mingle. Putin accused Lenin of "making concessions to nationalists" by embracing the principle of self-determination for the USSR's first constitution. The concept of self-determination, of course, is neither a Russian nor a Soviet creation, but a phrase that US President Wilson used in his "Fourteen Points" speech to European audiences at the end of WWI. The concept's subsequent uptake as part of the formation of the UN and

the 20th century anti-colonial movements, which the USSR would often aid, was a case of motivated appropriation by unlikely audiences (Martel, 2017; Manela, 2007; Getachew, 2019). Furthermore, the USSR's own policies toward these developments were at best contradictory (Loefflad, 2019). For Putin, however, the Soviet constitution's tentative embrace of ethnic identity politics pointed to a deeper problem. He critiqued Stalin for not catching that flaw in the soviet system when he took over. In sum, for Putin "the disintegration of our united country was brought about by the historic, strategic mistakes on the part of the Bolshevik leaders and the CPSU leadership, mistakes committed at different times in state-building and in economic and ethnic policies."

The second lesson Putin drew was that a break with communist dogma was necessary. But moving Ukraine away from the legacies of Soviet rule would mean also challenging its very existence as a sovereign territory. As he put it flatly and with a hardly veiled threat, "you want decommunization? Oh yes, that agrees with us completely. But we must not, so to speak, stop halfway. We are ready to show you what real decommunization means for Ukraine." Consequently, when formulating his irredentist claim through his discussion of the character of national identity, Putin was invoking a core legitimation warrant. For him, irredentism is justified when it aims to correct historical mistakes in the way people and territory have been organized and administered. It is also justified in the name of steady governance; irredentism is right and just when it creates the conditions for strong statehood and effective administration. If there is a central ideological dimension to Putin's legitimation warrant, then, I would define it as strong, possessive statism. Without suggesting that the state form be anthropomorphized, the possessive statism I highlight here echoes and re-purposes for the state some of the tenets of possessive individualism (MacPherson, 1962), namely the notion that one should not be depended on the will of others and that economic and political relations with others are only means of securing one's own possessions. In such possessive statism, irredentism would be a measure to counteract secessionism.

In an international system that is deeply troubled by attempts to redraw borders, regardless of how those borders were first drawn, Putin's aversion to secessionism should not seem unusual. What troubles the system, however, is the question of who or what authorizes and legitimizes political and territorial boundaries. This is where the first legitimation warrant activated by Putin, namely that Russia's irredentist claim can legitimized autogenously, proves insufficient and the international system's significance as argumentation context becomes apparent. So, President Putin engages the character and exploits the flaws of that system directly. In standard stories, the Liberal International Order (LIO) emerged in the aftermath of WWII as a project of global governance based on two mechanisms: the development of international law as a tool for coordinated security and the development of a human rights regime as a tool for ensuring the dignity of the person (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999; Mouffe, 2009). However, the track record of the system has been far from smooth or systematic.

President Putin's specific and repeated claims that his actions in Ukraine were a reaction to the expansion of NATO and the failure of the UN to stop NATO's extralegal actions around the world may amount to being only the most recent crisis in a system that is challenged from all sides. It is worth acknowledging that international law has limited resources for adjudicating irredentist claims. And in a global governance model that still privileges great powers, given the Security Council's membership and veto rights, the abundance of irredentist claims currently emerging

from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, suggest that the post-colonial map which the LIO aims to maintain is far from fully functional or sustainable. To the extent that nations are "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006), attempts to find clear congruence between territory and people are at best futile and at worst dangerous. A reflexive defense of the LIO and its promises to ensure "capitalist development, security, and order" (Whyte, 2017, p. 308) on a grid made of nation states, thus, may displace the question, as Edward Said (2002) once put it, "Who decides when (and if) the influence of imperialism has ended?"

4. CONCLUSION

As a way to conclude, I want to return to my initial questions as derived from Goodnight's legitimation warrant, Ian Hurd's question about "what motivates states to follow international norms, rules, and commitments?" and Isabela Ieţcu-Fairclough's suggestion that judgments of legitimacy in the political field can be derived from "shared beliefs and norms" even if we recognize that all rhetorical actions continuously re-make these contexts. Specifically, I ask, can norms in themselves legitimate? Our conventional approaches to argumentation that stress the importance of community and value congruity seem to suggest that yes, they can. But this is where, I believe, Putin's possessive statism strikes at the heart of the international system as a norm-producing and norm-maintaining mechanism, threatening the promises and assumptions of the LIO and, potentially, our argumentation models as well.

To wit, I see little evidence to suggest that Putin is not aware of the presence of international norms and institutions or that he believes that such things should not matter per se. In fact, in the weeks leading to the invasion of Ukraine, he issued a number of statements expressing Russia's desire to be a player in such arrangements. For example, on January 3, 2022, the Kremlin issued a joint statement affirming Russian's commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, including article VI's provision to "pursue negotiations in good faith…" ("Joint Statement"). But in a meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President Putin made an important qualification. As he put it, on the one hand, "as one of the founders of the United Nations and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia…[is] doing all we can to support the principles on which it rests, and intend to continue doing this in the future." On the other hand, however, he also distinguished between the international system's core texts (e.g., the UN Charter) and what he referred to as "some papers written by their authors as they see fit or aimed at ensuring their own interests." The presence of mixed precedents such as the status of Kosovo, which has yet to receive full international recognition even though the International Court of Justice ruled in 2010 that "international law contains no prohibition on declarations of independence", further seems to suggest for Putin that norms are a shaky ground for legitimacy simply because norms appear in practice to be quite inconsistent. As he put it to the UN Secretary-General, "we are also surprised to hear statements by our colleagues that imply that some in the world have exceptional status or can claim exclusive rights because the Charter of the United Nations reads that all participants in international communication are equal regardless of their strength, size or geographical location" ("Meeting", 2022). The international system's inconsistencies in practice and precedent have suggested to Putin that power differentials have a lot to do with political outcomes. Putin is, in other words, getting at the gap between normative principles and power

exceptions, and as I have previously argued, as argumentation scholars we too need "a useful and reasonable way out of the 'paradox of ideal theory'" (Keremidchieva, 2019, p. 620).

The persistent and assertive presence of power differentials is indeed what has led scholars of international relations since Hobbes to advance the anarchy thesis. But power has a complicated relation to both legitimacy and authority and there are plenty of incentives to seek modes of engagement other than the proverbial state of nature. For scholars like Helen V. Milner, the anarchic character of international relations persists to the extent that it lacks a structure of authority that could then legitimate power. That last statement by Putin, however, if viewed in connection with a series of others, may point to a different possibility. From the moment of the UN's founding and through the Cold War, the Soviet Union fashioned itself as a great power which aimed to serve as a defender of the smaller ones. With the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of global communism as a political and ideological alternative to liberalism and conservatism, Russia's own position and role in the world could not be asserted on ideological grounds per se. The Yugoslav wars, which Putin continuously returns to as the trigger for his country's re-awakening in the international arena, I believe, prompted Putin and his regime to seek a new positionality that could both capitalize on the past but also assert a distinctive future.

The international relations paradigm that Russia has embraced and is actively testing is multipolarity. As Putin stated in his address to participants of the 10th St. Petersburg International Legal Forum, "it is true, a multipolar system of international relations is now being formed. It is an irreversible process; it is happening before our eyes, and it is objective in nature. The position of Russia and many other countries is that this democratic, more just world order…where mankind's cultural and civilizational diversity is preserved." Importantly, the multipolarity that Putin envisions is a direct critique of the United States' dominance in the LIO's "unjust unipolar model" (Putin, 2022c). Notably, the model of legitimacy Putin offers is a departure from the currently dominant paradigms of both liberal proceduralism and normative cosmopolitanism. Instead, I find it to be a melding of two somewhat contradictory warrants. Putin repurposes the Soviets' old rhetoric of radical equality—a form of immanent rather than nominal freedom—in international relations. Simultaneously, it asserts a form of possessive statism that both recognizes the need for active multilateral diplomacy and negotiation and minimizes the capacity of international institutions to move toward models of global governance with the potential of centralizing authority. Even if it offers little help in alleviating the intensity of conflict, we cannot not acknowledge that Putin's model of international relations is well aligned with the current and historical realities of the way irredentism has been handled. That, in itself, should make the need to study irredentism more pressing. At the same time, I want to highlight how Putin's model also pours a lot more dynamism and contingency into the connection between cultural identities, political identities, and state formation. This is a connection that argumentation theory typically likes to treat as its solid starting point, a starting point whose own legitimacy, I would argue, is in need of critical rethinking.

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