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**One For All, All For God:
Strategic Christian Nationalism in the United
States and Russia**

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“Because we are Americans and Americans kneel to God, and God alone” – Donald Trump

“It is impossible to imagine the Russian state without the spiritual and historical experience of the Russian Orthodox Church” – Vladimir Putin

I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the global trend has increasingly been toward conservative religious nationalism (Juergensmeyer, 2007). Broadly defined as the belief that one’s nation must be governed through Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and so forth, religious nationalistic ideologies are centered on devout audiences and have become immersed within the realm of international security. These religious nationalisms have not been associated with a singular faith or corner of the world, as countless examples of conservative religious nationalism exist across the globe. Hindu nationalism has been rampant within India, especially since Narendra Modi’s election in 2014. Hindu nationalists like Modi have been in pursuit of demoting the Muslim population to “second-class citizenship” through various obstructive policies (Varshney and Staggs, 2024). In Israel, the racialization of religion and nationality has been imperative in the development of Zionism, a movement advocating for the advancement and protection of a Jewish nation (Ben Porat and Filc, 2020) Even in Italy, their most recent prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, characterized herself as a far-right Christian nationalist (Cilento, 2023). In the case of Christian nationalism, what once was an unassuming subcultural movement is now immersed within politics and securitized into national security policies. Using the United States and Russia as case studies, I argue that Christian nationalism has surpassed its classification as an ideology. Moreover, this thesis serves as a formal expansion into an international Christian nationalism. By exploring how this conservative Christian ideology can be effectively utilized within the national security strategy by the state, this research examines exactly how influential Christian nationalism is through

‘securitization.’ Using this security studies theory, I contend that religions and liberal communities outside of the Christian faith are established and interpreted as threats to Christian nationalists and their beloved nation’s security – regardless of location.

The installation of the United States and Russia as Christian nations has been accomplished through recent conservative national security policies in both nations, with critical issues such as the course of action toward Ukraine, several nations across the Middle East, and even the ‘non-traditional liberal’ West. This paper extends the assumption that ideologies such as Christian nationalism can be corporealized, predominantly as the catalyst for a national leader’s military policy and individual power, through an extension of the Copenhagen School of Securitization¹. As discussed, this far-right religious ideology has historically prevailed across the globe; still, the current theories surrounding Christian nationalism have yet to 1) explain its widespread aspect and 2) differentiate it from the Christian Right. This is why an assessment through the Copenhagen School provides a theoretical framework to understand the securitization and subsequent weaponization of faith, which indicates current policy goes beyond mere politicization and, in fact, constitutes securitization of religion. For this study, Christian nationalism operates as a unique social framework due to its individual characteristics that separate it from the traditional model of religious nationalism and the thriving Christian Right movement. Current literature refers to Christian nationalism as a historically “pervasive set of beliefs and ideals that merge American and Christian group memberships.” At the same time, the label “Christian” has been found to indicate less theological significance compared to conservatism and white superiority in Christian nationalist communities (Armaly et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022). In exploring the offered theory surrounding the international far-right Christian personality, my conclusion suggests that

authoritative political figures have securitized the Christian nationalist ideology in an effort to stoke support for military initiatives.

I begin with a comprehensive background on Christianity in the United States and Russia, nationalism, and a distinction between the Christian Right and Christian nationalism throughout the current literature. I then re-situate a lens of securitization within my theory of a Christian nationalist military strategy within a securitized analysis of the past Trump and Putin presidencies, which provides a foundation for postulating Christian nationalism as a calculated tactic of the state instead of an isolated subcultural idea. This thesis then materializes as a two-part methodological study. My theory of an international, strategic Christian nationalism extends hypothetical conjecture into a measurable case. The empirical analysis for this thesis includes a rhetorical analysis of the speech acts and operative national security policies of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin from June 2015 to the end of March 2024, which presents securitization mechanisms for correlational analysis. This is primarily accomplished through intensive action towards nations in the Middle East, as well as the War in Ukraine. The final section is a discussion, with an examination of the influence of Christian nationalism as a dominant military strategy and an explanation of the outcomes for both nations. Followed by empirical limitations, future avenues for research on the topic of international strategic Christian nationalism and concluding thoughts will be offered.

II. Background

Christianity in US Politics – Evangelism

Christianity has had its claws sunk into American politics since the original Protestants and Puritans settled. Supposedly a secular nation, Daniel K. Williams (2020) goes on to explain how a majority of the original thirteen American colonies were founded by Protestants who held that

“religion was necessary to secure social order” (279). This Puritan and Protestant missionary movement in the early 18th century additionally strove to “convert and aid unchurched peoples, both domestically and internationally” – often viewed as the facilitator of the First Great Awakening (ARDA, 2024). The revitalization of religion throughout the nation during this time cultivated a reformatory movement within American Christianity as evangelicalism permeated sects across the colonies. Evangelicalism, a subset of the mainline Protestant tradition, is known to believe in “spiritual rebirth, a born-again experience... and an emphasis on spiritual piety” through biblical interpretation and encompasses fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and other modes of an enigmatic Christianity (Pluralism Project 2020, 1). Evangelicalism is a denomination within Christian Protestantism most associated with Christian nationalism and the Christian Right but also with the United States’ civil religion as a whole. From the mid-1700s to the present day, these religious Great Awakenings provide organizational groundwork for the civil religion desired by evangelicals across American history.

Fogel (2002) extends evangelicalism’s significance to civil society and religion with the “Four” Great Awakenings into clarified divisions: the First Awakening eventually matured into the American Revolution by encouraging “views and values with regard to personal and national identity, unity, democratic equality, and civil freedom,” while the Second Awakening was characterized by reformatory movements such as anti-alcohol, abolition of slavery, and women’s rights; the Third Awakening in the mid-nineteenth century “led to the rise of the welfare state and policies to promote diversity,” and Fogel’s proposed Fourth Great Awakening, beginning in the late 1960s, centered on traditionalism and political “issues of spiritual (immaterial) equity,” (Kamrath 2014; Fogel, 2002, 10, 12). This Awakening that the United States is undergoing mirrors the commodities sought after by the Christian Right, a holistic movement that will be discussed

later. Each of these four Awakenings is vital, as their supplementary social movements allowed evangelicalism to lay the foundation for Christian nationalism, placing evangelical Christianity at the core of US history in followers' minds. Great Awakenings and evangelicalism aside, the people of the United States are told and recite that they stand for one nation under God, liberty and justice for all – God-willing or not.

Christianity in Russian Politics – Orthodoxy

Deeming the Christian faith and the Church as indivisible and accepting communal elucidations of the Bible by the church, Eastern Orthodox Christianity intrinsically adopts a narrower stance than evangelicals or protestants. When concerned with the Russian Federation's history, it is similar to the United States in the typification as a secular democracy but has likewise a deep association with Christianity. Even before Putin was first elected in 1999, the Russian Orthodox Church possessed a vacillating position throughout politics and society. The patriarchate was established in 1589 in imperial Russia to supervise the "patriarchal region" (patriarshaia oblast') and its neighboring districts. Nevertheless, the Church as an institution had no centralized administration for its coveted policies for centuries (Freeze 2008, 284). For over two hundred years, reforms were proposed – such as the creation of an assembly of bishops, later the Holy Synod, or church-building instead of state – that regulated the Russian Orthodox Church while subtly integrating it into the government and society. Two significant events that reversed this incorporation were the reforms of Patriarch Nikon in the middle of the seventeenth century, which caused a schism between the Church and the liturgical Old Believers, and Peter the First abolishing the patriarchate in 1721, making the Church an official branch of the state (Meyendorff, 1897; Freeze, 2008). From 1894 until the First World War, ties between the Church and the state were constant until the patriarchate was reestablished in 1917, just before the Bolshevik revolution. The

First World War motivated the Russian Orthodox Church to mobilize substantial resources during combat, allow churches to be used as infirmaries, raise funds for the war victims, and “sustain the fighting morale of the troops and the home front” (ibid.). Ultimately, anti-capitalist and anti-war sentiments fueled the Bolsheviks into mass resentment toward the Church. This led to anti-religious policies that weakened the Russian Orthodox Church institutionally under Soviet rule through the “confiscation or nationalizing of church and monastic lands and properties, the denial of legal status to religious communities, and a ban on public services and religious education...” alongside attempts to dispute the public's faith and foster ‘scientific atheism’ as a “new social order” (Shevzov 2022, 10). Before the total dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Orthodox Church began to regain its authority, predominantly through the development of a “broad civic identity,” with Orthodoxy as cultural – not faith-related (ibid., 14). The political history of Orthodoxy in Russia persists with the formerly mentioned Putin Administration in the coming sections.

The Christian Right vs. Christian Nationalism

The sanctified trend of Christian nationalism is an extremist ideological movement that falls under the label of the “Christian Right.” The Christian Right must be distinguished as 1) a global religious alliance with encompassing conservative movements within – this is for the sake of offering an accurately characterized Christian nationalism, as it is a subculture created inside of the international Christian Right, and 2) a movement where the communal goal is more conservative, traditional policies being implemented (Williams 2012). This thesis utilizes Daniel K. Williams’ exposition of the Christian Right in *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (2012) and his eponymic chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Fundamentalism* (2023). The present trend of American traditionalist Christian alliances with political conservatism

originated in the early twentieth century and universalized the conservative Christian ideology into a political coalition otherwise referred to as the “silent majority” by President Richard Nixon (ibid., 2012). Developed further in the late 1970s as a reaction against liberalization, the seemingly peripheral ‘American Christian Right’ does not *inherently* entail extremist ideology. Instead, what develops are conservative Christian offshoots.

One of the major characteristics that deviates Christian nationalism from the Christian Right as a whole is the desire to merge Christian and national identities, distorting the Christian religion and constitutional secularism (Perry et al., 2022). Devout followers of the Christian Right additionally recognize that, through a fundamentalist reading of the Bible, any disciple whose devotion to Christ was the same as their loyalty to their nation would be guilty of fanaticism or idolatry (Leviticus 19:4). This desire of “dominionism” – the recreation of the United States and Russia as “right-wing Christian theocracies” – has been fundamental to the Christian nationalist rhetoric and movement (citation). It is for this reason that the goal of a mandatory Christian government *and* society is what separates Christian nationalism from the expansive Christian Right. This subcultural movement has become a dominant actor within domestic and foreign politics in the United States and Russia, as I explore how the use of speech acts and securitizing religions that “pose a threat” to Christianity have become the driving force behind their national security policies.

My later analysis relies on a careful deviation between the Christian Right and Christian nationalism, as the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory relies on the analysis of speech acts in relation to referent objects and perceived threats. Outside of the aforementioned examples of the United States and Russia, several countries have seen a substantial expansion in traditionalist Christian principles. From a more regional perspective, evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity

have grown exponentially throughout Latin America as a far-right tactic over the past three decades, indicating that religious nationalism and the Christian Right as ideologies are not strictly American. Influenced by neo-Pentecostalist churches, governmental campaigns and public policy in nations such as Brazil, Chile, and Costa Rica soon became entrenched with “a health and wealth prosperity theology and the grassroots mobilization of believers of humble origins” (Boas, 2021). Recent scholarship has demarcated Europe as the newfound face of the Christian Right – nevertheless, this tendency should not be considered an utterly novel development. Numerous Christian-majority countries outside of the evangelical and orthodox traditions have taken calculated steps to cultivate political subcultures and parties rich with traditionalist values. Conservative regimes in Poland and Hungary have publicly sponsored NGOs with far-right Christian values, such as the extremist Polish Catholic think tank *Ordo Iuris*, and the “ascent and sustenance of illiberal governments (Lo Mascolo and Stoeckl, 2023). Several nations serve as dominant cases of the Christian Right in the current era but only a few have successfully modified and securitized its ideological nature into their national security. It stands to reason that, while these countries have gained a comparably large following of Christian nationalists as well, the focus remains on the United States and Russia as the preeminent example for this project. Now, I cover the central paradigms of Christian nationalism – such as religious histories and movements in the United States and Russia – in the next section to offer the necessary context for the political crusade in its entirety.

III. Literature Review

Christian Nationalism in the Trump Administration

Scholars refer to the phenomenon of Christian nationalism as a pervasive ideology, cultural framework (Whitehead and Perry, 2022), convergent social identity (ibid., 2015), a constellation

of beliefs (Perry et al., 2022), movement (Davis 2019), political theology (Perry et al. 2022), or politicized religion (Baker et al. 2020). None of these terms exhaustively define Christian nationalism, never mind in the context of IR, but they regularly encompass the conversation surrounding the “American-ness” of the ideology. The definition provided by Perry, Whitehead, and Baker (2018) in their article “Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election” best delineates the version of Christian nationalism found in the United States as

a set of beliefs and ideals that seek the national preservation of a supposedly unique Christian identity... its roots from “Old Testament” parallels... commanded to maintain cultural and blood purity, often through war, conquest, and separatism, and indicates that the historical and contemporary appeals to Christian nationalism are often quite explicitly evangelical, and consequently, imply the exclusion of other religious faiths or cultures (153;150).

As previously mentioned, most scholarship on Christian nationalism utilizes a Western lens, with the United States as the archetypical example. In conjunction with Donald Trump’s election in 2016, outrage over the rising liberal authority, and a perceived drop in white supremacy, Whitehead, Perry, and Baker (2018) point out that these various factors have proliferated into this popular historical fundamentalist movement in the people and their political representatives over the past decade. Christianity has been a dominant factor in American politics for almost four decades, with the Evangelical community staking the most significant claim within the integration of the Republican Party with the “Christian Right” in the 1980s (Conger, 2010). These concepts and the religious background of the United States will be expounded upon further in the following analysis. Yet, it is essential to note that this assimilation of conservative right-wing groups is paired with a re-interpretation of history as pragmatic American Christian political folklore. This tradition, which scholars call “historical fundamentalism,” hinges on disinformation or

intentionally misleading the subject through incorrect information on American history (Perry et al., 2021; Lepore, 2011). Historical fundamentalism is often displayed through conspirational or disinformational efforts, such as allowing radical interpretations of the First Amendment to vindicate the establishment of Christian laws. The concept of historical fundamentalism is imperative to the story of a “distinct” American Christian nationalism as it leaves its subscribers prone to simplistic and often misinformative historical materials, such as the rightful religious “heritage” of the nation.

Christian nationalism in the United States is classifiable by these “interpretations of American political history as revisionist ‘political mythology’” (Perry et al. 2021, 22; 24). According to Li and Froese (2023), there are two additional defining characteristics of American Christian nationalism: religious traditionalism, which is in favor of “high religiosity in the civil sphere and is historically linked to the defense of religious disestablishment as well as a rhetoric of ethnic and racial color-blindness,” and Christian Statism, which advocates for “exclusive ethno-religious state rule” (777). The latter dominates the contemporary movement, coupled with the presence of Bibles, prayers, Christian symbols, and motivations at the insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6th, 2021, due to Trump’s loss in the 2020 presidential election. In this, Christian nationalism was reified in its most corporal form as Christian nationalists in the United States have deemed “that Donald Trump is an agent of God meant to reestablish conservative Christian authority in the United States,” placing him at the forefront of the present-day ‘culture wars’ between cultural conservatism and liberalism (Li and Froese 2023, 772). Smith and Adler Jr. (2022) corroborate this by establishing a link between Christian nationalism and a wide variety of right-wing cultural and political beliefs in the United States, touching on virtually every source of extremist controversy implicated in the culture wars. As innately correlated with the Trump

administration, even as a historically American ideology, this framework of Christian nationalism has festered outside of the United States for a great deal of time.

Christian Nationalism in the Putin Administration

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the reality that religion has been a conduit for geopolitics since the initial stages of European imperialism (Whitehead, Perry, and Baker, 2018). While the literature on Christian nationalism has remained engrossed in its alleged American evangelical stipulation, Russian Orthodoxy has played a significant role in Russian history and politics as a catalyst for Christian chauvinism. Persevering since the nineteenth-century within the effort to ignite the “paradox [which] is the distinctive exceptionalist view of the Russian Christian identity” and the present-day cultural wars in the West, Christian nationalism functions as a reinforcing mechanism in the Russian Orthodox Right as Williams (2023) asserts. Since 1999, Vladimir Putin has covertly nurtured a Christian nationalist ideology that strives toward a Russia at the forefront of the international order. Masquerading as a defender of Christian ideals, Putin and his coterie have taken inspiration from Alexander Dugin, a “far-right, ultra-nationalist, [and] ultra-conservative Russian philosopher and political scientist” (ADL 2019). An extremist with fundamentalist, anti-Western, and authoritarian opinions, Dugin constructed Eurasianism – a political theory which claimed that Russia, with the help of former nations of the Soviet Union and Central Europe, will be at war with the United States. Embedded in Russian exceptionalism, both metamorphosed into Putinism, a model of nationalism unique in its use of traditionalism that White Jr. (2023) contends is rooted in the desire to reimplement the Russian Tsardom and Orthodoxy against the existential threat of the “satanic” West. This faithfulness to conservative morals in Putinism has culminated in an overarching Russian Christian nationalism (Yusupova 2023, 17). It is an exclusionary “far-right ideology... [with] tenets of fascism, white supremacy, and neo-

Nazism,” in conjunction with a unique aspiration to “legitimize an authoritarian regime and delegitimize those who oppose it” (White Jr., 2023, 14; Kolesnikov 2022). Culturally and nationally, it is also “intrinsically tied to the country’s spiritual rebirth,” all necessary for Russia’s reestablishment as an “Orthodox power” in a Western-dominant society (Saiya 2022, 99). Theories of Eurasianism and exceptionalism come into play, campaigning for the predominance of Russia and the Putin Administration within the competitive international order. Still, it is not just philosophical models that catalyzed the Christian nationalist movement in the state – it is the direct Orthodox influence and strategic tactics of Putin.

The Putin Administration's leading strategy has become domestic and international partnerships. Soroka (2022) claims that church-state affairs in Russia have intensified as a result of “political expediency and the agency of leading figures on both sides” (1). This coordinates with Russia’s long-term objective of sanctioning “a socially conservative policy agenda, both domestically and beyond the Russian Federation’s borders,” which has led the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to conservatize socially in an effort to garner reverence politically (ibid., 2022, 4). In conjunction with the tactical use of cooperation, the Putin Administration and the Russian Federation began to highlight an ideological model based upon old-fashioned “spiritual-moral and cultural-historical values” (ibid., 2022, 13). At the same time, a preliminary allusion to the rhetoric surrounding the Russian offensive on Ukraine as part of a ‘holy war’ against “absolute Evil, embodied in Western civilization, its liberal-totalitarian hegemony and in Ukrainian Nazism” (MKRU, 2022). Putin’s direct application of Orthodox Christianity is displayed in his quest for communal nationalism and undertaking of the ‘Holy Rus’ in their *Russkii mir*, or Russian world (Riccardi-Swartz 2022). This concept of constructing a holistic image of a worldly Russia was utilized to augment Putin’s goal of a nationalistic identity, “together with ‘great-powerness’

(*derzhavnost*), ‘state-centeredness’ (*gosudarstvennichestvo*) and ‘social solidarity’” (Blakkisrud and Kolsto 2017, 251). Russia’s history and culture define the nation as a collection of “competing collective identities – Westernist, centrist, and civilizational” (Narozhna 2021). This combined strategy sought to protect Christians and their moral opinions and securitize and fortify the Russian national identity. Outside of its internal objectives, the Putin Administration actively took an interest and “expressed concern about a "massive exodus" of Christian communities from the Middle East...[where] Christians face persecution and being killed, raped, and robbed” (Bos 2019). Years later, Putin ascribed himself as the “great defender of traditional values” against the liberal outside world (Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2022, 105). As long as Putin remains in power, the inclination of the Kremlin will continue toward a socially conservative nation with profoundly entrenched ties to the Orthodox Church.

IV. Theory

What constitutes national security has varied greatly for decades. Since the end of the Cold War, the argument for an analysis of security outside of militaristic and atomic dimensions was made by international relations scholars. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde established the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, which was dedicated to researching security through a broader interpretation of non-military threats. As mentioned throughout, this project incorporates the Copenhagen School’s framework of how speech acts within a securitization act functions as a method of constructing matters as “existential threats to a referent object by the actor” (Buzan et al., 1998; 25). Speech acts are utilized by securitizing actors, those who speak on and formally declare what security is, typically referring to national leaders and institutions with the authority to do so. These securitizing actors will address the threat to the referent object, which is the “main object whose existence is threatened” (Balzacq et al., 2016; 88) Last is the audience, which is the

target of the securitizing move that needs persuading and acceptance of the issue as a pragmatic security threat (ibid.). When exercising a speech act, a securitizing actor is attempting to legitimize considerable measures against a socially constructed threat; in turn, “by labeling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means” (Buzan et al., 1998; 26). Wæver additionally mentioned in one of his pieces that “something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so” (1993, 54–55). The Copenhagen School paints securitization as a securitizing actor’s commandment of what is to be prioritized by the nation; in the end, the goal is to have the issues that were once “threats” be put back into the public and political spheres, referred to as desecuritization (Balzacq et al., 2016; 89). Securitization theory’s ability to explain these shifts in strategic culture can illuminate its ideological mutation – nationalism.

As a belief system that stresses “loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligations outweigh other individual or group interests,” nationalism molds public and private nationalities into a collective national identity (Kohn 2024). To most scholars, nationalism is dynamic and conditional, “a discourse shaped by changing constellations of belief and authority” (Berger and Storm 2019, 150). Christian nationalism and its ideological framework have assisted in the rebuilding of the histories and identities of Americans and Russians, all culminating in a population of “competing collective identities” (Narozhna 2021). With this, the ability for securitizing actors to step in and securitize socially constructed dangers to a national identity – in what could be referred to as “over-securitization” (Mustaffa 2024). Although religion can be a base for an identity, it does not propose creating a separate state exclusively for this. However, in the era of the nation-state, religious identity works as an origin for nationalistic sentiments, which is defined as a feeling of belonging to an imaginary community (Anderson 1983). Securitization enables the examination of national security threats not only to states but also

to societies, governments, and other forms of real or imagined communities. In this, the standard democratic procedures can be circumvented and foster distinctive threat management through speech acts (Wæver 1995). According to Buzan in “New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century,” five sectors of securitization were established: economic, societal, military, political, and environmental. In each division, a particular threat is discussed as to how they may affect the “periphery” based on alterations in the “center” – predominantly by actions that can be recognized as attempts at transforming preexisting regimes of practices (Balzacq et al., 2015; 29) For the purpose of this thesis, a securitizing actor can “securitize” certain religions as threats to a Christian nation and society. I argue that the goal of Christian nationalism in the United States and Russian governments is to protect the referent object of traditional Christian principles: in doing so, securitizing actors such as Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin’s presidential administrations’ address and mobilize their audiences for support through their speech acts.

This study is a part of a growing examination of Christian nationalism outside of its ideological confines, as a manner of political activism and violence. A direct comparison of the United States and Russia contributes significantly, as little literature within has examined Christian nationalism exclusively as a transnational movement. Scholars across the social sciences have acknowledged the Christian Right and Christian nationalism within the historical and political structures of the United States and Russia – Perry et al.; Riccardi-Swartz; Saiya – but my hypothesis of a religious ideology guiding a securitizing actor is part of a novel intervention within the field of security studies. The recent development of Christian nationalism must be examined through a broader lens, as international politics has come to hinge upon popularized ideological undertakings. Real instances of blatant Christian nationalism ideologically comprising the national security strategy of the United States and Russia can be identified within the forthcoming

evaluation: both the United States and Russia have more in common than two conservative Christian presidents in the past ten years – the national security strategies of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin seek to remake their respective nations in accordance with Christian nationalism.

V. Methodology

Since an ideology as a national security strategy is the heart of this thesis, understanding Trump and Putin’s use of Christian nationalism in their securitizing processes is essential. It is important to acknowledge a major limitation regarding timing for this thesis: voting for president in Russia has concluded as of March 17th, with a landslide victory for Putin, while the 2024 United States Presidential Election will not take place until this November. Due to the timeframe’s unique nature, methods will be mixed with the classification of Christian nationalism as a referent object and an exploration of past, present, and potential national security policy decisions. As such, this proposal seeks a rhetorical case study of the speech acts and securitizing efforts implemented throughout the Putin and Trump Administrations.

To support my analysis of Christian nationalism as a national security strategy, I gathered data through public speeches performed by Trump and Putin from June 2015 to the end of March 2024, applying codified Christian nationalist indicators (see Figure 1). All relevant statements have been selected for analysis to reach the most trustworthy and objective result. Through these speech acts, I illustrate whether or not national security policy has been significantly influenced by Christian nationalism and the rhetoric of securitizing actors like Trump and Putin. Interspersed within, I examine implemented national security policies during the aforementioned period used to carry out securitizing acts. Both sections have a slight focus on national security policy towards nations in the Middle East, while the recent conflict between Ukraine and Russia will also be analyzed. The empirical findings offer insight into what the national security strategies of Trump

and Putin aim to securitize while ensuring that not all of their statements referring to religion are interpreted as Christian nationalist. To unambiguously differentiate between the Christian Right and Christian nationalism, key Christian nationalist buzzwords utilized by Trump and Putin have been codified into the table below. Figure 1 displays common phrases and themes of Christian nationalism that I cautiously selected and have not been previously defined. These buzzwords are routinely used in speech acts and policies by Trump and Putin to promote securitization through Christian nationalism, in addition to being coded into my approach for selecting speech acts and policies to be analyzed.

| Christian Nationalist Buzzwords | Definition and/or Deviations |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Pre and Postmillennialism | <u>Pre</u> : Jesus' return <i>precedes</i> the formation of his material kingdom on Earth for 1000 years. <u>Post</u> : Jesus will return to Earth <i>after</i> the thousand-year age in which Christian ethics prosper. |
| Eschatology | Otherwise referred to as the "end times." |
| (Strategic-Level) Spiritual Warfare | The battle that demonic forces of evil wage against Christians; these powers control nations, cities, populations, and vital networks around the world, and are devoted to preventing the advancement of God. |
| Christian Zionism | Originating in 19th-century British premillennialism. Supporting the State of Israel is crucial to fulfilling prophecies in the Book of Revelation. |
| Religious Freedom/Liberty | The idea that people's religious views should be neither an advantage nor a disadvantage under the law; recently redefined to prioritize respective nations following Christian doctrine. |
| Theocracy | System of government in which political leaders are also clerical leaders of an official organized religion or are backed and validated by said religion. |

Figure 1: Common themes and phrases associated with Christian nationalism.

VI. Results

1. Christian nationalist rhetoric and policy employed by Trump

Through common tactics of the contemporary Christian nationalist movement, a direct shift towards Christian nationalism came as Trump's first presidential campaign commenced. In September 2015, at the Faith and Freedom Coalition Dinner in Washington D.C., Trump resolutely declared that Christianity was under attack around the world but, as "religious liberty is so important, and I will fight for [religious] liberty like no one will fight, and I win" (Petroski 2015).

This direct acknowledgment of the struggle for Christian preeminence within American politics was in tandem with Trump's declaration of his faith, as the initial tactic of his first presidential campaign was to catalyze the larger Christian Right population into Christian nationalists. This seemingly small occasion of Trump invoking Christianity snowballed into a direct courting of the Evangelical vote through the early beginnings of securitizing religion. As previously mentioned, although the desire for Christianity to be present within politics can be associated with the Christian Right, the active immersion of the Christian faith into a federal government is Christian nationalist. These speech acts campaigning for religious liberty acted as validations for Trump as a trustworthy figure in the eyes of evangelical voters, as a politician who would fight against spiritual warfare across the nation. This was soon supported by a call for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" at a rally in South Carolina before the end of the year, igniting communal support for the xenophobic beliefs that characterize Christian nationalism as an extremist subset besides securitizing Islam (Taylor 2015). These exclusionary sentiments and speech acts regarding the place of Christianity as a pillar within American politics began to characterize a prospective Trump Administration and its advocates as Christian nationalists. Trump made a careful shift from constructing himself as a part of the Christian Right to a potential securitizing actor for the Christian nationalist movement at the beginning of his political career.

The efforts made the year before centered the Trump Administration's strategy for 2016 in Christian nationalism and opened with an infamous speech at Dordt University, an Evangelical Christian university in Sioux Center, Iowa. Similar to his previous speeches, Trump's primary corroboration within this speech act was that

Christianity is under tremendous siege, whether we want to talk about it or we don't want to talk about it. And yet we don't exert the power that we should have...Christianity will have power. If I'm there, you're going to have plenty of power, you don't need anybody else. You're going to have somebody representing you very, very well. Remember that. (Dias 2020).

Throughout his first campaign for the presidency, and with decades of candidates before, the evangelical vote was viewed as an essential cog in the fight – and so, the election that November, which had 135.5 million Americans cast ballots for president, 35.2 million of those voters were identified as white evangelical, “born-again,” or Christian nationalist. A total of 28.2 million of the 62.6 million votes received by Trump were tied to the ‘quiet majority’ throughout the nation, indicating a rising correlation between the Trump Administration and Christian nationalists (CNN 2016). Their primary concern was electing a president in the modern age who actively supported the idea of the United States as a Christian nation, and Trump advocated for a direct shift in national security policy after winning the 2016 presidency.

As previously mentioned, to Christian nationalists, the realization of the United States as a Christian nation necessitated religious liberty – not exclusively state-sponsored religion but a securitization of all religious communities outside of white evangelical categories, meaning anti-Muslim, antisemitic, and overall discriminatory stances toward minority populations (PRRI; Brookings 2023). One of the first Christian nationalist undertakings of the Trump Administration as a securitizing actor was to implement a long-promised Muslim ban after officially taking office in January 2017. Executive Order (EO) 13769, otherwise known as ‘Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,’ prevented international refugees from seven countries – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen – entrance into the United States; this injunction was to stand for at least 90 days, in addition to prerequisites that lengthened the

refugee admissions process (White House Archives 2017). Now, the Trumpian notion of the Christian nationalist identity began to securitize the Islamic faith as a whole, as these actions taken during his first year in office began to fully immerse the Trump Administration with Christian nationalist rhetoric. Two months later, the Trump Administration released a modified Muslim ban – EO 13780 – which was blocked by federal judges in Hawaii. The third Muslim ban – Presidential Proclamation 9645 – made more changes to the ban, such as now including North Koreans and Venezuelan government officials. This was a step back from the starkly religious tone of the previous two bans, framing all Muslim refugees as national security threats. Federal courts continually blocked the ban until the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in September, which upheld the Trump administration's third and final Muslim ban (ACLU 2020). After the third ban was passed, it became apparent that Christian nationalism was being constructed into harsher domestic and foreign policies in relation to the "faith."

President Trump signed EO 13788 in May 2017 to permit churches and other religious organizations to participate politically and openly exercise their First Amendment rights, greatly enhancing freedom of speech and religious liberties – most evident with advocacy for candidates and topics aligned with their moral standards (Federal Register, 2018). President Trump emphasized within a speech act the importance of this executive order as United States soldiers were "forbidden from giving or receiving religious items at a military hospital" – likely referring to an "unsolicited proselytizing" incident at Walter Reed Medical Center years before (Lamothe 2017; Starr 2017). From this point on, the relationship between the Trump Administration and the U.S. military became synonymous with Christian nationalist rhetoric. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) was proposed towards the end of the year, portraying the individualistic ideas that animate Christian nationalism and the internationalism that has prevailed in U.S. foreign

policy since 1945; undoubtedly, the idea of “America First” engulfed the document, advocating for the sovereignty of the United States. The Trump Administration distinguishes the necessity for national sovereignty as “the first duty of a government is to serve the interests of its own people... a necessary condition for protecting [national interests]” (NSS, 2017). As if it is the archetypical identity of the ideal American civilian, Trump’s Christian nationalist ideology has come to redefine the national security strategy of the United States, as the priority for the government is to respond to the Christians of the United States before anyone else. Trump’s reframing abandoned the true meaning of the word “sovereignty,” along with the concept of freedom and justice for all in the United States – all for the establishment of a national strategy consisting of Christian nationalist interests. The minimal good that came from defending “American” interests was nothing but ideological sentiment in support of the Christian nationalist agenda.

2018 began with a conglomeration of religious liberty updates from the Trump Administration. First, President Trump proclaimed January 16th as Religious Freedom Day to “remind [Americans] of [their] shared heritage of religious liberty” (White House Archives, 2018a). Days later, two federal agencies made concurrent shifts within their policies; the Department of Justice rehabbed the U.S. Attorneys’ Manual by “raising the profile of religious liberty cases and directing the designation of a Religious Liberty Point of Contact for all U.S. Attorney’s offices,” alongside major changes within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) surrounding freedom of religion, beginning with the creation of a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division (White House Archives, 2018b). On May 14, the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Israel, Trump recognized Jerusalem – a holy city for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – as Israel’s capital and opened the United States Embassy there. This came after countless past Presidents failed to fulfill similar promises and even the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act with

the same objective (White House Archives, 2018c). Ideologically, for Christian nationalists, Israel has been the most critical foreign policy issue of the United States. Biblical interpretations demanded the protection of Israel from external threats, as evangelicals believed that the second coming of Jesus Christ in the “end times” would take place in Jerusalem after the Jewish people lived on the lands of ancient Israel according to the Bible. This is why the decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem and pull out of the Iran nuclear deal may not have seemed like a massive shift in foreign military strategy, but in addition to the assassination of Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani, the words inscribed in the Book of Ezekiel prophesized that one day that the “place in the far north” or Russia would team up with “many nations,” including Iraq and Iran, to attack the “peaceful and unsuspecting people” of Israel (Ezekiel 38). This is similarly why Christian nationalists interpret the Six-Day War in 1967 as a sign from God as Israel occupied the West Bank – or Judea and Samaria as conservative evangelicals refer to it – as well as the whole of Jerusalem despite all odds. Although all conservative evangelicals do not share this premillennial view, the protection of Israel is still essential for Christian nationalists as two biblical injunctions, Psalm 12:2 and Genesis 12:3, offer prosperity and blessing to those who bless Israel and the Jewish people. This construction of Christian nationalist interests as military concerns has remained consistent throughout the Trump Administration.

Additionally, throughout his first full year as president, numerous conservative judges were also selected across the nation, all Trump declared would “defend our constitution and interpret the law as written” (White House Archives, 2018d). For the Christian nationalist, adherence to evangelical fundamentalist Christianity is essential to becoming a Christian nation; without the eschatology of the “end times” and the promise of the golden millennium, the Trump Administration structured the policy surrounding the United States and its national security

interests around Christian nationalism. This was furthered months later in April 2019, when the United Nations sought a resolution to supply health services and products to victims of sexual violence during wartime; yet the Trump Administration's top priority was to eliminate any references to sexual and reproductive rights, leading to a "watering down" of said motion (Buncombe 2019). This was a direct method of securitizing sexual and reproductive health in accordance with Christian nationalist values. As the final year of Trump's presidency began to end, Christian nationalism became staunchly associated with his administration. An infamous photo op with a Bible in front of St. John's Church in 2020 and the subsequent removal of protestors using "a mass of law enforcement, including US Secret Service agents, Park Police, and National Guardsmen" was not just a securitizing act based in the threat of the left but likewise a misuse of mobilized forces (Colvin and Superville 2020). This was up until he lost the 2020 Presidential Election. Trump directly engaged with dog-whistles of the Christian nationalist movement at the previously mentioned January 6th Insurrection in 2021 in response to his loss. The former president, during his "Save America" assembly that occurred before the uprising on the Capitol, delivered a combination of victim-cueing and one-sided rhetoric where he claimed

...something's wrong here, something is really wrong... We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore. Our exciting adventures and boldest endeavors have not yet begun. My fellow Americans, for our movement, for our children, and for our beloved country. And I say this despite all that's happened. The best is yet to come (Trump 2021).

Along with the closing remarks of "God Bless you and God Bless America," when recounting the significance of the Christian identity in relation to this speech act, the copious amounts of redemptive language that has encapsulated the Trump administration should not be disregarded (Trump, 2021). This threat to the conservative Christian population substantially losing favor with

the “corrupt” American government catalyzed the Trump Administration into a direct condemnation of the liberal Democrats – as well as his promise to continue this fight against spiritual warfare in the future. As political violence transpired and the Trump presidency culminated, the securitization of Christian nationalism continued among the former president’s devotees.

In November 2022, Trump embarked on his campaign for his second presidency. More overt than his previous administration’s platform of ‘religious liberty,’ Trump held that he would use a second term to “defend Christian values” and cautioned other like-minded individuals that the “left wants to tear down crosses” (Weissert 2024). With this, concerns surrounded a second Trump presidency and what its potential national security policy would entail. This can most presently be seen in Project 2025, a multi-part plan for the next conservative President of the United States oriented on Christian nationalist principles, which includes safeguarding our “God-given individual rights to live freely” and direct calls to the Judeo-Christian practice (Project 2025, 2022). Although denounced and not formally part of Trump’s presidential platform, Agenda47, the policy recommendations have been predominantly geared towards the Republican presidential candidate. Campaigning in Iowa in late 2023, Donald Trump announced that he was prevented during his presidency from using the military to quell violence in primarily Democratic cities and states. Trump finally recognized in 2024 that the identity tied to his voters was inherent with the beliefs that “if you hate America, if you want to abolish Israel, if you don’t like our religion – which a lot of them don’t – if you sympathize with jihadists, then we don’t want you in our country” (Bump 2024). Trump has framed his 2024 campaign as the sole solution to save a nation of martyrs from an apocalyptic implosion. This has been accomplished through the active utilization of affiliated Christian nationalist rhetoric that prevailed on a social media platform

established earlier that year by Trump Media & Technology Group called Truth Social. This interim period was welcome to a variety of tactics, such as the former president sharing a video titled “God Made Trump” to his profile, which portrayed a “dominating messianic figure divinely chosen to fight the Marxists” and “strong enough to wrestle the deep state” (Jones 2024). Although the voting and results of the United States presidential election are not for another couple of months, what can be foreseen is a second round of Trump’s direct immersion of Christian nationalism within the United States’ government and military.

2. Christian nationalist rhetoric and policy employed by Putin

Christian nationalist sentiments have prevailed ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, as the Russian state has strategically fostered its relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. Vladimir Putin understood, even in his first term as president, that the Church was more than influential when it came to heightening nationalism and began to work on the Church's role in Russian society to “sacralize the Russian national identity” (Coyer 2015). A year before this thesis’s selected timeframe, critical events dominated Russian society in 2014. For instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the occupation of Crimea, and the widespread conviction that the West triggered the rise of non-traditionalism and economic difficulties were framed as major national security concerns (Kolesnikov 2015). Rejections to acknowledge Crimea and Ukraine as sovereign nations were additionally incentivized by Putin’s aspiration for a Eurasian Union with Russia at the center. Putin expressed to his Federal Assembly in a speech act in 2014 that “Christianity was a powerful spiritual unifying force that helped involve various tribes and tribal unions of the vast Eastern Slavic world in the creation of a Russian nation and Russian state,” attributing the “spiritual union” in Ukraine to the formation of the “Holy Rus.” In addition, the President described both locales as having the same religious importance to Russia as the Temple

Mount in Jerusalem has for Jewish and Muslim followers (Putin 2014). And so, Putin successfully launched himself as a protector of Christian ethics to preserve the Russian identity as a national security directive. The diplomatic alliance between Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church has been the consecrated idea of Russian national identity and exceptionalism. Russia, according to this mutual revelation, is not a Western nor Asian nation – instead, it is a culturally distinctive nation with religious-inspired values (Coyer 2015). This has provided the ideological justification for Putin's stance toward opposition and the rationale behind the Church's complacency. It is his Orthodox faith and deep knowledge of history that have shaped Russia's current domestic and foreign policies, which aim to revert Russia back to its imperial roots.

Russia's involvement in Syria against ISIS in 2015 was not initially described as “holy,” but it wasn't until securitization and propaganda efforts began. Putin made several claims over the course of his presidency to justify military intervention in nations of interest and rehab the collective Russian image after years of turmoil. He proclaimed to the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2013 that “Many Euro-Atlantic countries have moved away from their roots, including Christian values... Policies are being pursued that place on the same level a multi-child family and a same-sex partnership, a faith in God, and a belief in Satan. This is the path to degradation” (Putin 2013). In addition, Putin claimed that this intervention was to ensure the protection of Israel because “Israel is threatened directly by Iran and by the activities of Iranian proxies like Hezbollah and the Islamic State inside Syria” (Huggard and Hill 2024). Using a speech act to paint two Muslim nations as threats to both Russia and Israel as securitizing actors was the first step in the securitization of the Muslim faith. Matching his accusations that the West awakened ISIS and has been ignorantly supplying weapons to freedom fighters, along with condemning the United States for aiding Muslim extremists in Syria who “kill Christians in order

to help the U.S. assert hegemony in the Middle East and carve out the region to its liking” (Borshchevskaya 2015). In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church made public statements announcing support for the Kremlin’s decision to carry out airstrikes (Comerford 2015). The Orthodox Church’s Patriarch Kirill, a loyal ally of the Russian government, praised Putin’s choice to “protect the Syrian people from the woes brought on by the tyranny of terrorists” (Bennetts 2015). Even the head of the Church's Public Affairs department, Vsevolod Chaplin, was quoted saying, “The fight with terrorism is a holy battle, and today our country is perhaps the most active force in the world fighting it” (Tharoor 2015). The Russian Orthodox Church’s deliberate labeling of the intervention as a religious endeavor, combined with a concentrated effort of propaganda with social media and journalistic efforts, helped to securitize and convince the public of Putin’s conservative crusade.

The following two years contained contradictory decisions made by the President regarding the role of religion in Russia. 2016 was characterized by the Yarovaya Package, which was passed in July and widely viewed as an extension of previous religious national security policy. With a similar basis as Boris Yeltsin’s divisive law in 1997 that designated the Russian Orthodox Church as the “preeminent religion and limit[ed] the activities of other religious groups” in Russia, these bills openly discouraged the propagation of missionary work (Library of Congress 2016; CNN 1997). It was now required that citizens obtain permits from the Kremlin in order to participate in proselytism or convert someone to the Christian faith, and only through registered religious organizations – such as churches and religious locales (Shellnutt 2016). As proselytism was more commonly found in the evangelical faith, this action of securitizing specific Christian acts within a Russian Orthodox nationalism was inherent with the Church and no other. May finished with Putin speaking to the congregation at the Divine Liturgy in Sretensky Monastery after the

consecration of two churches: the Church of Resurrection of Christ and the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church, the latter after a group of saints, the former martyred after the October Revolution of 1917. In this speech act, Putin held that “Our country and Russian statehood itself is impossible to imagine without the spiritual and historical experience of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is passed down from generation to generation through pastoral words” (Putin 2017). Just a month later, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Putin’s Anti-LGBT Law back in 2013 was bigoted, endorsed homophobia, and violated the European Convention on Human Rights – while Putin maintained that the law only protected children and did not show prejudice, safeguarding Russian “traditional values” in opposition to alleged Western “tolerance” (Reid 2017). To Putin and Christian nationalists alike, anti-LGBTQ+ policies had the same securitizing properties as the Church. The continued securitization of religious freedom in Russia acted as a legitimization to discriminate against those outside of the Orthodox “norm.”

In a televised performance in January 2018, Putin immersed himself in the waters of a frozen lake – an Orthodox Christian ritual that denotes the Feast of the Epiphany and “commemorates the baptism of Jesus” in the River Jordan (Gigova and Masters 2018). This campaign tactic would soon characterize the intensification of Christianity within Putin’s re-election. Marking the anniversary of the Christianization of Russia by Prince Vladimir, Putin addressed the crowd in a public ceremony on the day of the anniversary. Of his claims was that Russia embracing Christianity was “the starting point for the formation and development of Russian statehood, the true spiritual birth of our ancestors, the determination of their identity. Identity, the flowering of national culture and education” (Putin 2018). Then, in October, the Orthodox Church’s leader in Istanbul, Patriarch Bartholomew, announced that he would grant Ukraine independence from the Russian Church (Deutch 2018). Nevertheless, the Russian

Orthodox Church raised objections and claimed that the separation between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches was illegitimate, maintaining that the Patriarchate of Moscow “[held] jurisdiction beyond Russian borders into Ukraine and Belarus;” the ROC swiftly decided to cut all relations with the Constantinople Patriarchate days later (Mrachek and McCrum 2019). Once the official decree was signed at the beginning of 2019, Putin condemned Ukrainian politicians for inciting the schism within Orthodox Christianity and “meddling” in the affairs of the Church as a “secular political project” (Putin 2019a). Once again, Russia was situated as a protector of religious freedom against the liberal West by the President, declaring weeks later in a meeting with several leaders of Orthodox churches that this had “nothing to do with the faith,” only “hatred and intolerance” and that Russian Christians as a whole “reserve the right to react and do everything to protect human rights, including the freedom of worship” (Putin 2019b). The continued persecution of Christians in Syria and other neighboring countries led to a meeting in October between Putin, Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, and ecclesiastical heads in the Middle East. During the gathering, Putin announced his alarm over the “exodus” of Christian populations in the region, as

although the Middle East is the cradle of Christianity, the position of Christians in the region is very difficult, with murder, violence, and plunder...We see that Christians are leaving the Middle East en masse. This is an alarming development. It is alarming because our identity is based on the Christian culture, as we have noted at the meeting with Mr. Prime Minister today. It is hard to watch what is happening to Christians in the Middle East. (Putin 2019c)

With this priority of Christian salvation still in mind, the Kremlin increased its pressure on Israel to negotiate the return of the Russian Compound of the Elizabeth Courtyard in December 2019. Located in Jerusalem, the Compound was erected by the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS) for Russian pilgrims to Jerusalem. Israel took over the site in 1967 after the Soviet Union

cut diplomatic connections to Israel (Harkov 2019). Since then, tensions between Israel and Russia have remained high.

Constructing the Russian Christian nationalist identity would not be possible without Putin's proposed overhaul of the Russian constitution in January 2020. Submitting to the Duma – one of the chambers in the Russian parliament – a number of new constitutional amendments, including direct mentions of God, the lower house unanimously approved the constitutional reform bill after less than two hours of debate (Moscow Times 2020). That following May, the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ was opened, garnished with stained-glass mosaics of both Vladimir Putin and Joseph Stalin. On the same level of ascribing himself and Stalin as religious figures, the church was conceived as the main cathedral for the Russian Armed Forces and was to open on the 75th anniversary of World War II on May 9th (Kirikov 2020). In July 2021, Putin published an essay titled 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,' which proposed that all Slavic populaces belonged to "one holy Russian nation, and must be reunified, in order to make that nation great again" (Putin 2021). These speech acts directly tied the Russian government and military with the now blatantly Christian nationalist motives of the Putin Administration; glorified throughout the nation, Russian Orthodoxy lent its support to the state to expand, surmount, and amplify itself on the international stage. Just over half a year later, Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine in the last stage of securitizing Russian Christian nationalism. Submerged in the eschatological "end times" rhetoric that has become synonymous with Christian nationalism, Putin addressed thousands in Moscow and echoed the words of John 15:13. This speech act was a direct undertaking of securitization as, instead of offering his life for that of his civilians in the military initiative, it became a Christian nationalist appeal to sacrifice *themselves* for Russia and the 'denazification' of Ukraine:

The main goal and motive of the military operation that we launched in Donbas and Ukraine is to relieve these people of suffering, of this genocide. At this point, I recall the words from the Holy Scripture: ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’... These words come from the Holy Scripture of Christianity, from what is cherished by those who profess this religion (Putin 2022).

Similarly, in an address to the Russian Federal Assembly in February 2023, Putin detailed how Ukraine and its Western allies abandoned their Christian values as they vie after the Russian Orthodox Church and “the destruction of the family, of cultural and national identity” (Putin 2023). As the war has continued over the past two years, the Russian Orthodox Church’s Moscow Patriarchate, Patriarch Kirill, formally adopted a mandate that has declared that the “entire territory of present-day Ukraine should be included in the area of Russia's exclusive influence” and called the assault on Ukraine a “holy war” this past March (Oliynyk 2024). It is not just Putin’s usage of the Orthodox Christian faith – it is now the Church’s backing of the Russian Christian nationalist agenda. This connection to Russian history acts as a central component of Putin’s efforts to return Russia to its ‘former glory’ by promoting domestic cohesion, justifying malign foreign policy actions, and generating cultural friction within and amongst his Western rivals.

VII. Discussion

From their initial formations to contemporary times, the United States and Russia have cultivated their own respective political and societal subcultures rich with Christian conservatism. Yet, as the ideological basis of Christian nationalism lies within its construction of a “Christian” nation and an inability to reconcile Christianity with conservatism, the current state of Christian nationalism is volatile. The Christian nationalist directive for both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin has shifted from a national ideology to unify the people to tangible military policies and

operations. For the Christian nationalists in both nations, the common trend has become a view of Christianity as a defining element of one's national and cultural identity – even civil society – instead of as a religion (Chawrylo 2024). It is this that has allowed Christian nationalism to mutate into the current national security agendas of Trump and Putin in accordance with the securitization of non-Christian affairs. As previously mentioned, the distinction that has come to characterize the Christian nationalist movement is oriented around an extremist mindset, more conservative and symbolic than the more general Christian Right.

Take Putin's integration plans: the wish to unite all Eastern Slavic Orthodox Christians against Islamist extremism, as well as Western and Chinese civilizations, is abstractly conservative but securitized in the Christian faith. What he does not presently share is the belief that the Israeli state is innocent in its military action against the Palestinian people and must be protected at all costs; funnily enough, Putin criticizes Israel for the very same crimes it had committed decades before in Chechnya and now in Ukraine (Huggard and Hill 2024). This is crucial as the securitization of Israel is largely found in evangelical sects, not shared by the Russian Orthodox Church – however, Russia has provided monetary support as, “on the eve of the attacks, Hamas received millions of dollars through a Moscow-based crypto exchange” as to present themselves as a conciliator for the Global South (Czerny and Storyev 2023). On the contrary, the United States' government has maintained its stance with Israel over the securitization of Hamas since late 2023 – whilst Trump has become more critical in his outlook since the first attack on October 7th nevertheless stands at “one hundred percent” with the nation (Hewitt and Trump 2024). When taking military operations such as wars into account, the present state of both the United States and Russia has gone from stable to a relatively high level of demand for conservative ideology over the past fifteen years. After multiple sociopolitical transitions, international crises, and estrangement throughout the

socioeconomic order, the popular demand for Christian nationalism and its subsequent military initiatives in the United States and Russian governments almost seems as if it was meant to occur.

Is this a cyclical or even symbiotic relationship between the Christian nationalists of the United States and Russia? The likelihood of this is slim, especially when considering the Copenhagen School's conceptualization of security. As the School prioritizes desecuritization, speech acts and policies securitizing religions outside of American and Russian Christian nationalisms have only fostered collective sentiment among the believers, in addition to aiding in increased hostility towards communities that are regarded as threats (Broeren and Djupe 2024; Fisher 2012). Although the similarities between American and European Christian nationalist ideologies have persisted for decades, it is important to recognize, in general and during discussion, that these movements are separate from each other. American Christian Nationalism and Trumpism have to be seen as separate from Putinism and European populist Identitarianism. As a pan-European, nationalist, and far-right political ideology, these parallel movements should be interpreted as "the result of intensive transnational interactions between local and international NGOs and social movements that show... remarkable organizational cohesion" instead of solitary clusters of far-right Christians per nation (Lo Mascolo and Stoeckl 2023, 22). By ignoring the securitization in their national security policies reinforced with Christian symbols and signals before, during, and after their time in office, one conflates an international Christian nationalism to the extremist ideologies of Trumpism or Putinism. The continued claim that conservative Christian mindsets require more attention, as they are "represented in many European institutions and governments, including the coalition governments in Italy, Sweden, Austria...and Hungary...pos[ing] a real challenge to liberal democracy" (ibid., 35). As the world becomes more cognizant of the mounting threat of militarized ideologies, the traditionally American conversation

becomes oriented around a nation of kindred values: Russia. Russian nationalism began to rise along with the spread of the Russian Orthodox Church's influence in society and the diminishing of the influence of alternative religious groups. This restriction of religious freedom marked the beginning of a trend of increasing limitations on citizenship rights and the beginning of the slow death of Russia's democracy, illustrating that religious freedom is often the first freedom to be curtailed by the state (Trigg 2012). This is not to say that what is to come in the future Trump and Putin presidencies are repressive Christian nationalist empires in the United States and Russia – but one cannot overlook the potential for that possibility.

VIII. Conclusion

In the present construction of a securitized Christian nationalism by Trump and Putin, the United States and Russia have come to dominate the realm of far-right Christian governments and national security matters throughout their political careers. In the case of exploring Christian nationalism as a national security strategy for the United States and Russia, through the strategic construction of norms as both policy indicators and interests, both Trump and Putin have become securitizing actors oriented on the particularized curiosities of Christian nationalism. It is equivalent Christian nationalist rhetoric – from the eschatological “end times” to the martyrdom of the ‘innocent’ – that has dominated the national security operations and policies of the United States and Russia for almost a decade. Prospective ways for furthering the proposed avenue of international Christian nationalism involve a more intensive investigation into the potential political science or international relations theories to explain the rapid development of Christian nationalism around the globe, such as the rational choice framework or even Stephen M. Walt's neorealist balance of threat theory. It would also be prudent to consider the additional versions of securitization theory – the Aberystwyth and Paris Schools, respectively – in relation to this theory

and further accounts of international Christian nationalism. Moreover, nations such as Poland, Hungary, and Northern Ireland may serve as potential case studies within international Christian nationalism. As conservative religious nationalisms across Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc., continue to proliferate, I hold that the formulation of a comprehensive international relations theory explaining this rise of securitizing religions is necessary to ensure our own national security. With the gospel being spread and advocated for by the securitizing actors of their respective nations, Christian nationalism has grown to play a contentious role regarding international democracy and security in the modern age of the United States and Russia. Until the 2024 Presidential Elections are finalized in both nations, scholars and civilians alike will have to remain conscious of the interdependent threat posed by an international Christian nationalism and securitization.

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ⁱMany scholars within the field of International Relations will mention the various “schools” and distinguish between the Aberystwyth School, the Copenhagen School, and the Paris School of Security Studies – for the purpose of this project, the concentration is solely on the Copenhagen School as its focus is on securitization, primarily through speech acts.