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WAR AS AN INEVITABLE FACTOR OF CHANGE

THE IMPACT OF NEO-EURASIANIST GEOPOLITICS ON THE DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY POLICY AFTER 1991¹

ABSTRACT

Russian neo-Eurasianism is currently considered to be the most influential political doctrine in Russia, actively influencing its foreign and security policy. It is also suspected to have indirectly triggered the Kremlin's decision to launch a war in Ukraine. However, the direction of this influence is not clear; therefore, the aim of the article is to examine to what extent the determinants of Russia's national security policy are consistent with the most representative elements of the neo-Eurasianist doctrine. Thus, the reasoning in this study is based on the analysis of issues such as the historical and institutional process of rapprochement between neo-Eurasianists and the Kremlin, the dominant position of geopolitics in contemporary Eurasian thought, the neo-Eurasianist understanding of war, the perception of the enemy, as well as potential allies, and the crucial position of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a result and trigger for modifications in the doctrine. An analysis of the major individual components of Eurasianism, as well as the content of key policy documents and statements on Russia's security issues, leads to ambiguous conclusions. On the one hand, it is impossible to clearly identify a real causal relationship between Eurasianist geopolitics and the direction of development in Russian security policy, but on the other, there is a noticeable convergence between the Eurasianist doctrine and the evolution of Russia's security policy and her international behaviours.

Keywords: Eurasianism, Russia, security, policy, war

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INTRODUCTION

Main characteristics of the research

There was in fact no impact of early Russian Eurasianism on the policies of the state; its founding fathers (such as N.S. Trubetskoy, P. Savitsky, P. Suvchinsky and G. Florovsky) became émigrés after the revolution of 1917. The only Soviet Eurasianist, Lev N. Gumilyov, became famous as an ethnologist and historian only after his death in 1992. After the collapse of the USSR, the situation changed drastically, and Eurasianism in the 'neo' version could – at this point – influence the new Russian elites. The main figures of the movement in the 1990s were Aleksandr S. Panarin (1940-2003), the leader of the movement and famous geopolitical thinker Aleksandr Dugin (born 1962) and the Muslim reformist Geydar Dzhemal (1947-2016). In recent decades, some new and diverse aspects of the Eurasianist branch have been assumed by the younger generation – especially such figures as Valeriy Korovin, Mikhail Leontiev, Leonid Savin, Mikhail Khazin and Mikhail Delyagin.

The main objective of this article is to draw attention to Russian neo-Eurasianism as a war trigger and a stimulant of today's Russian security policy. This is not only due to the intellectual clarity of the circle's doctrine, but also because of its presumed influence on the Russian political sphere – especially its international behaviour since the beginning of the new millennium. In other words, our main research task is to inquire whether one can determine an unquestionable interrelationship between neo-Eurasianist ideology and the genuine imperatives of the Kremlin elite in the broader context of the security sphere.

In consideration of these aims, our methodology is comparative and deductive, determined by the supposition that it is possible to assume some kind of constant relationship between the shape of the Eurasian doctrine and the latent or overt tendencies in current Russian security policy. What interests us in particular is the role of conflict, especially in the form of war, as both content and a factor shaping the Eurasian doctrine itself in terms of its influence on the crucial decisions of Russia's leaders.

Suggestions of a connection between neo-Eurasianism and Russian policies, especially in the international arena, have been circulating in the media for quite some time. So far, there are no analyses that can unequivocally confirm or rule out a genetic link between the two realities. This article in no way claims to fully explain this alleged connection but indirectly attempts to point out similarities that are functional rather than genetic.

Major trends in recent research

From as early as the late 20th century, neo-Eurasianist ideology received attention in scholarly discourse, but only a few researchers recognised its significant potential. Nonetheless, in the wild atmosphere of primitive liberalism in Russia in the 1990s,

Andrei Tsygankov published a study of hard-line Eurasianism in 1998, which would go on to make a significant mark on Russian political thought and the rhetoric of policymakers. Tsygankov divided the Eurasian radicals into Modernisers and Expansionists, both of whom proved influential in their own way years later. In 2003, Tsygankov, by correctly realising the geopolitical inclination of neo-Eurasianism, placed the doctrine into a group of five different geopolitical schools, thereby reiterating his argument about its expansionist and confrontational imperatives.²

A thorough insight into the development of Eurasianism was provided by Mark Bassin in 2003 and 2008, who explains the interwar roots of the doctrine and the specificity of the neo version. Thanks to his studies, the Eurasianist doctrine is illustrated as actually heterogeneous, as its 'neo' or 'Duginist' incarnation is based on ideological rather than geographical or civilisational principles.³

These noteworthy publications have provided a picture of the emerging Eurasianism in its social context, as well as its structural and, above all, chronological specificities. Over time, however, due to the increasingly noticeable parallels between the neo-Eurasianist narratives and the official Kremlin rhetoric, some researchers eventually began to consider the most pragmatic side of the issue, namely the real links that exist between the Eurasianist milieu and current Russian policies. The first suggestions were rather cautious. Even if scholars conceded the triumphant return of Eurasianism to the arena of political thought (this time, no longer in exile), it was suggested that Putin's policy of reintegrating the post-Soviet area was generally economic in nature and, therefore, did not correspond to the characteristics of expansionist Eurasianism. Basing themselves on such an approach, some researchers (e.g., Hahn⁴ and Schmidt⁵) described the Russian foreign policy of the early 21st century as not necessarily anti-modern, anti-Western or exclusivist – as the representatives of hard-line Eurasianism would prefer. However, Schmidt seems to correctly claim that, in the early 2000s, the Kremlin strongly separated the economic arena of the Eurasian-Atlantic dialogue, thereby promising the business circles the previous pro-Atlantic policy from the ideological sphere, where it adopted an anti-American and anti-globalist position.

This interpretational line was continued by Laruelle,⁶ who enriched this moderate position with a broader perspective. In doing so, she realises that the actual, implemented idea of a 'Great Power' should not be strictly identified with Eurasianism. Russia's growing assertiveness can easily be explained by its awareness of an existing conflict

² A.P. Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2003), pp. 101-127.

³ M. Bassin, "Eurasianism 'Classical' and 'Neo': The Lines of Continuity," *Slavic Eurasian Studies*, vol. 17 (2008), p. 290, at http://133.50.171.227/coe21/publish/no17_ses/14bassin.pdf, 3 January 2024.

⁴ G.M. Hahn, "The Rebirth of Eurasianism," *Russia Journal*, vol. 215 (2002), at <http://dlib.eastview.com/sources/article.jsp?id=4213895>, 5 January 2024.

⁵ M. Schmidt, "Is Putin Pursuing a Policy of Eurasianism?," *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2005), pp. 87-100.

⁶ M. Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Baltimore 2008, p. 8.

of interest, as noted in the Balkans or the Middle East. Moreover, Laruelle accurately points out that the idea of a 'Greater Russia' or the defence of the 'Orthodox civilisation' is equally an expression of long-entrenched, traditionalistic nationalism.

In 2016, a factual analysis of the origins and functioning of Eurasianism in the Russian Federation was presented in an interesting monograph by Charles Clover.⁷ This account does not focus on analysing the ideological influence of Dugin and his 'macro-nationalism' on the Kremlin's long-term policy, but it is nevertheless possible to trace the postulated links of the movement with the official foreign and domestic policies of the state, thanks to the significant number of facts and processes described by the author. The book does not provide definitive answers to the most important questions concerning Russia's foreign and security policy, but it does accurately draw a picture of the country's customs and methods of action against the background of a deepening doctrinal madness.

After the 2008 Georgian and 2014 Crimean events, Paolo Pizzolo offered another distanced analysis, stressing the point that Putin's doctrine is actually incoherent, piecing together several different elements rooted in political traditions such as liberalism, communism and nationalism. However, he also presents a modest but convincing list of ideas shared by neo-Eurasianist ideology and the narratives developed by the Kremlin: the obvious attempt to refresh the imperial identity, which has been implemented over the last two decades; Russia's consistent efforts aimed at the reintegration of the Eurasian area; the idea of a multipolar world order. Pizzolo also points to the growing importance of 'traditional values' as an ideological imperative used as a socially consolidating factor, as well as an argument against the cosmopolitan and globalist West.⁸

All of the proposals detailed above are far from complete, yet the trail for further comparison has been blazed.

Research hypotheses

Finding an indirect way to clarify the relationships between today's Eurasianist ideology and Moscow's genuine foreign and security policy – both the openly declared version and the one that could only be deduced from *Realpolitik* – cannot proceed without some introductory and general suppositions.

Firstly, it is possible to follow the opinions that prevailed in the early period of research, when it was supposed that there was most likely no important interrelation and that any similarities between contemporary Eurasianism and Moscow's policies are generally coincidental or arise from common national conservative tendencies. A more moderate hypothesis, based on the rational choice assumption, would suggest that there is some obvious or even growing impact, but the Kremlin still conducts its own policy, considering various possible options. The third hypothesis boils down to the supposition that Russia's current official concept of its international position and security is overwhelmed by Eurasianist logic and practical postulates. Such an assumption

⁷ Ch. Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, New Haven 2016.

⁸ P. Pizzolo, *Eurasianism: An Ideology for the Multipolar World*, Lanham 2020, p. 7, 37ff.

would require a relatively direct set of convincing facts to ensure that the other sources of impact are of secondary importance.

Last but not least, there is also an option in which neo-Eurasianism is not a natural creation. Instead, it emerges from certain influential political circles – especially security structures, which seemingly remained on the sidelines of the mainstream in the 1990s and then took power in the Putin era. This hypothesis is based on the model of an imaginary secret circle of sleeping post-Soviet agents who have finally managed to reveal their revisionist and expansionist intentions.

THE KREMLIN'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH NEO-EURASIANISM

It is not possible to clearly define when the moment of rapprochement between neo-Eurasianism and the power structures occurred in a substantive sense. However, it is worth noting that in 1991, Dugin's life path crossed that of Aleksandr Prokhanov, a post-communist and ultra-patriotic writer and the founder of the Izborsky Club. Dunlop points to the fact that one of the most important initiatives of both activists in those early years of geopolitical collapse was a seminar held in April 1992, which was attended by prominent military figures: Lieutenant General N. Klokotov, Lieutenant General N. Pishchev and Major General V. Iminov, as well as two far-right French activists – Alain de Benoist (born 1943) and Jean Lalou (1912-1994). During the meeting, the discussion focused mainly on the necessity of renewing the German-Russian alliance in order to build a reliable security system in Europe.⁹

To understand Dugin's rise in popularity in political circles, it is worth mentioning that in 1998, he was invited by a radio station to take part in a discussion that also included Gennady Seleznev – the Speaker of the State Duma. This meeting opened the door for Dugin to Russia's political mainstream: Dugin became an advisor to Seleznev, and in 1999, he began to head the Centre for Geopolitical Expertise of the Expert Advisory Council on National Security Problems under the Speaker of the State Duma. During the same period, Dugin began lecturing on geopolitics at the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. His famous *Foundations of Geopolitics* was actively sponsored by the Military Academy of the Russian General Staff, where Dugin later became a lecturer. Moreover, he was cited extensively in the geopolitics textbook recommended by the Russian Ministry of Education. In August 2000, Dugin wrote to Gleb Pavlovsky, one of the Kremlin's leading ideologists at that time, requesting a meeting, which was accepted. Dunlop, citing Andrei Kolesnikov, correctly points out that radical rightist views were no longer an oddity at that time. Moreover, before his trip to the Sultanate of Brunei, Putin declared that: *Russia has always perceived itself as a Eurasian country* – words that Dugin interpreted as a symptom of his ideology's achievement.¹⁰

⁹ J.B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics," *Demokratizatsiia*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), p. 41, at <https://tec.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/aleksandr-dugins-foundations-geopolitics>, 7 January 2024.

¹⁰ Ibid.

With the departure of G. Seleznev, Dugin's Eurasian projects lost the support of the authorities, and Dugin took up his academic career. From 2009 to 2014, he worked as acting head of the Department of the Sociology of International Relations at the Faculty of Sociology at Moscow State University (MGU). In 2012, he was appointed a member of the Expert Council under State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, a former KGB officer.

Dugin's radicalism led to his dismissal from the MGU faculty, but his position increased considerably in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict, particularly after 24 February 2022. The death of his daughter in the assassination on 20 August 2022 gave his dramatic persona additional weight; the internal political bloc of the presidential administration began to invite ultra-conservative thinkers, including Dugin, to participate in consultations in the Kremlin.

As Andrei Pertsev suggests, Dugin and Prokhanov have now been given new roles: if previously, according to the Kremlin's idea, they were supposed to work for a specific (i.e., ultra-conservative) audience, after the Russian invasion in February 2022, they would be expected to formulate a more 'general' Russian ideology. After the assassination of Dugin's daughter Daria, Putin took a 'serious interest' in the figure of Dugin; he sent a telegram with his condolences to the philosopher and, in a way, accepted the presidential administration's contacts with the Eurasian thinker. A month after the assassination, on 30 September 2022, Putin even used one of Dugin's favourite terms – 'Anglo-Saxons' (*anglosaksy*) – for the first time in a public speech.¹¹

Among the various opinions about the influence of the Eurasianists on realpolitik in post-2000 Russia, facts such as the obvious centralisation of the state, the drive to reintegrate the post-Soviet area or the radical attempt to limit the real or perceived Western influence on the life of the country (with its clearest expression in the *Bill on Foreign Agents*¹²) are usually listed as the most obvious revelations of Eurasianist zeal in political practice. Some commentators stress the fact that Dugin's initiatives have received some financial aid. For example, among the recipients of state grants in 2015, one may notice that the Eurasian Cooperation Development Fund, the

¹¹ А. Перцев, "Александра Дугина много раз называли 'мозгом' Кремля. Как утверждают источники 'Медузы', его влияние на Путина действительно выросло — но произошло это после убийства его дочери Дарьи Дугиной," [A. Percev, "Aleksandra Dugina mnogo raz nazyvali 'mozgom' Kremlâ. Kak utverzdaït istočniki 'Meduzy', ego vliânie na Putina dejstvitelno vyroslo — no proizošlo èto posle ubijstva ego dočeri Dari Duginoj] *Meduza*, 3 November 2022, at <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/11/03/aleksandra-dugina-mnogo-raz-nazyvali-mozgom-kremlya-kak-utverzhdajut-istochniki-meduzy-ego-vliyanie-na-putina-deystvitelno-vyroslo-no-proizoshlo-eto-posle-ubijstva-ego-docheri-dari-duginoy>, 14 January 2024.

¹² "Федеральный закон от 20.07.2012 № 121-ФЗ. О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации в части регулирования деятельности некоммерческих организаций, выполняющих функции иностранного агента," ["Federalnyi zakon ot 20.07.2012 № 121-FZ. O vnesenii izmeneniy v otdelnye zakonodatelnye акты Rossijskoj Federacii v časti regulirovaniâ deâtelnosti nekommerčeskikh organizacij, vypolnâûših funkcii inostrannogo agenta,"] *President of Russia*, 20 July 2012, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/35748>, 14 January 2024.

Eurasian Youth Union and the Institute of Eurasian Studies were included.¹³ However, what seems to be more important is a possible insight into the structure of the assumed 'Eurasianist template', a set of basic principles that could be attributed to both the radical ideological pressure group and the logic of Russia's official security policies.

GEOPOLITICS FIRST!

One of the most striking tendencies in Russia's intellectual development after 1991 is the rapid and increasingly intense interest in geopolitics, both in the academic and pragmatic sense. In 2003, while reviewing Russia's first decade, Andrei Tsygankov was able to distinguish as many as five trends in the constantly evolving world of Russian geopolitics. The most radical and assertive of these was Dugin's Eurasianism, with its conceptual embodiment in the famous *Foundations of Geopolitics* – first published in 1997. Tsygankov correctly emphasised that Dugin was obsessed with the idea of rebuilding the empire by creating special relations with Germany, Iran and Japan while simultaneously ignoring the interests of China, which was perceived as a threat to the idea of the European continental empire.¹⁴ However, something that seems paradoxical can be found in the 2000 edition of Dugin's geopolitical bestseller. There, the author approached the idea of solidarity not only with Islamic states, but also with the 'Confucian' ones. Moreover, he supported the idea of Chinese expansion to the South.¹⁵ Generally, during the earlier stages of his eclectic concept's development, the geopolitical paradigm was absolutely predominant.

In his 1997 *magnum opus*, Dugin provided enough evidence to confirm his satisfactory competence in geopolitical theory. Citing R. Kjellen, A.T. Mahan, H. Mackinder and K. Haushofer, among other thinkers, he is generally faithful to the major convictions of classical geopolitics, where the main divide is drawn between sea and continental powers. His book is conceptually dominated by the distinction between *tellurocracy* – the continental domain – and *thalassocracy* – sea power. Dugin, in his own way, continues the well-known schemes of continental obsessions, such as the idea of the Heartland, primarily named 'the pivot area' by Sir Halford Mackinder, and is clearly glad that this honourable title can only be attributed to Russia.¹⁶

As Tsygankov correctly stated, the Kremlin, while accepting a geopolitical approach, had at least five options on the menu, and Eurasianism was actually a risky and

¹³ "РПЦ стала основным получателем президентских грантов," ["RPC stala osnovnym poluchatelem prezidentskih grantov,"] *The Village*, 21 December 2015, at <https://www.the-village.ru/city/situation/228675-grants>, 16 February 2024.

¹⁴ A.P. Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia...", pp. 124-125.

¹⁵ А. Дугин, *Основы геополитики*, Москва [A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moskva] 2000, p. 432 (the first edition of the book appeared in 1997 in the same Eurasianist publishing house. After that the text was revised and supplemented several times).

¹⁶ А. Дугин, *Основы геополитики*, Москва [A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moskva] 1997, pp. 165ff., 423.

spicy item. The most 'academic' alternative, well-rooted in Russian tradition, was the famous concept of Island Russia (*Ostrov Rossiā*), created in 1993 by Vadim Tsymbursky (1957-2009) – a philologist and political thinker. He openly disavowed Eurasian expansionism and regarded this trend as one of Russia's many dangerous attempts to embrace a reality that ultimately would turn against it.¹⁷ He proposed an isolationist conception in which Russia was supposed to adopt a passive international position, developing its Eastern territories and avoiding trespassing the Grand Limitrophe, a geopolitical buffer zone encompassing Eastern Europe and Russia's southern underbelly.¹⁸

Until the mid-2000s, it certainly seemed that this kind of defensive realism would predominate. However, very soon the aggressive functionaries, previously only controlling and observing the actions of the post-communist political leaders, could terminate their period of fasting and begin to assert the real image of a new Russia. In 2005, Putin, in his famous address to the National Assembly, said that: *...the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century*. He later explained his position predominantly by the undeniable fact that after 1991 millions of ethnic Russians found themselves outside the Russian state.¹⁹ However, the very fact that he introduced the message that the fate of nations and, in particular the Russian nation, depends on a geopolitical and, therefore, territorial factor into the official narrative is evidence of a significant reorientation. The point was that Russia's main problem was actually geopolitical. It is no wonder that in 2009, Dugin expressed his satisfaction with the fact that Putin, at that time, was beginning to pay more and more attention to geopolitics.²⁰

Gradually, it has become apparent that geopolitical rhetoric has become permanently embedded in the Kremlin's narrative. For example, on 12 November 2023, Foreign Minister S. Lavrov, while commenting on the EU's demands for Serbia to join its anti-Russian sanctions, stated that such demands were a kind of *geopolitical exercise*.²¹ In some way, the geopolitical turn is accompanied by the 'no illusions' principle: the

¹⁷ В.Л. Цымбурский, *Остров Россия. Геополитические и хронополитические работы 1993-2006*, Москва [V.L. Cymburskij, *Ostrov Rossiā. Geopolitičeskie i hronopolitičeskie raboty 1993-2006*, Moskva] 2007, pp. 5-28.

¹⁸ Comp. I. Torbakov, "‘Middle Continent’ or ‘Island Russia’: Eurasianist Legacy and Vadim Tsymburskii's Revisionist Geopolitics," in N. Bernsand, B. Törnquist-Plewa (eds), *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia*, Leiden–Boston 2019, pp. 39-51.

¹⁹ "Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации," *Президент России* ["Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniiu Rossijskoj Federacii," *Prezident Rossii*], 25 April 2005, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>, 11 October 2024.

²⁰ А. Дугин, *Четвертая политическая теория. Россия и политические идеи XXI века*, Санкт-Петербург [A. Dugin, *Četvertaā političeskaā teoriā. Rossiā i političeskie idei XXI veka*, Sankt-Peterburg] 2009, p. 153.

²¹ "Ответы Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В. Лаврова на вопросы программы 'Москва. Кремль. Путин,'" *Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации*, ["Otvetu Ministra inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii S.V. Lavrova na voprosy programmy 'Moskva. Kreml. Putin,'" *Ministerstvo inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii*.], 12 November 2023, at <https://www.mid.ru/tv/?id=1914430&lang=ru>, 11 October 2024.

disappointed partner has abandoned the option of strategic partnership and, thus, resorted to hard realism, where all aspects of the state's activity boil down to the logic of war.

THE EURASIANIST UNDERSTANDING OF WAR

The awareness of the importance of war has generally been higher in Russian society than among Western nations. Even after 1945, the Russians had experience with real war: a border conflict with China in 1969 and a long and bloody intervention in Afghanistan (1979-1989). The collapse of the USSR was followed by internal conflict in the North Caucasus, which included, among other issues, two Chechen wars (1994-1996; 1999-2009). Russian troops took part in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict in 2008. The spirit of militancy was strengthened by conscription and parades commemorating Russia's victory in the Great Patriotic War. However, the greatest shock came after the generally unexpected Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, followed by countless losses on the Russian side.

From the very beginning of the post-communist period, Eurasianists did not shy away from war and security issues – they began to become bolder, but only during Putin's presidency. In 2004, Dugin published his controversial *Philosophy of War* (*Filosofia vojny*), where he refers to selected theses proclaimed by Carl Schmitt in his *Concept of the Political*. One of the crucial points of his treatise is the passage that argues for the inevitability of perceiving nations as friends and enemies. Thus, Dugin opposes the liberal utopia of 'humanistic demagogy'. From his point of view, without this basic differentiation, no state or nation could ever retain its own political identity or outline a specific historical line of development.²²

Another key idea of Schmitt's, eagerly picked up by Dugin, is the concept of a 'total war world', where the political and national are annihilated in favour of a world unified by the idea of individual human rights and a single market. In this world, the act of mastering the sea first (and, thus, shipping) then the air as the domain of aviation and, finally, space play an important role. Each of these realities is much more difficult to control than land, the traditional terrain of the state. The only agent acting against this totalitarianism is the protagonist of the *Theory of the Partisan*, who is faithful to the *Land* in spite of the lawless, terroristic means to which he resorts. For Dugin, it is Russia that acts as a *gigantic empire of partisans* in today's world, defending the historical niche of the nation.²³

With these ideas in mind, Dugin unequivocally advocates for strengthening Eurasian security structures, placing special emphasis on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). He explains this postulate by pointing out that while the USSR broke with the ideological tradition of tsarism, it did not abandon the geopolitical

²² А. Дугин, *Философия войны*, Москва [A. Dugin, *Filosofia vojny*, Moskva] 2004, pp. 82-86.

²³ Ibid., pp. 96-100.

principle of unifying the Eurasian space. Meanwhile, after 1990, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact occurred, which was not met with a corresponding reaction from the Western camp. Dugin, thus, laments the transition of Central and Eastern European countries from the Eurasian to the Atlantic camp; it is a type of realism where the logic of international relations boils down to a zero-sum game. This calls for a reorientation in security policy, as the question of Eurasian security goes far beyond the official range of the Tashkent Treaty. The new security system must take on a planetary shape and allow for new alliances to transcend the area of the previous USSR.²⁴

The younger generation of neo-Eurasianists did not limit themselves to general ideas in their concept of war. Since 2008, one can observe their tendency to understand it more holistically. Interestingly, the concept of hybrid war, although definitely familiar to them, gave way to a concept known from Admiral W. Owens, who wrote about the *system of systems* as a combination of three sub-systems: (1) intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); (2) advanced command, control, communications, computers and intelligence; (3) precision-guided munitions.²⁵ However, only a few years later, the new term *network-centric warfare* came into broad use and began to embrace the 'soft' intellectual methods of international rivalry as well.

In 2014, Korovin described *network-centric wars* as those where the main goal is to seize territory and gain control over it without the use of conventional, classical weapons and, if possible, without direct military aggression. Direct military participation in this kind of warfare is only possible at the final stage. Network-centric wars arose in the context of American dominance in the sphere of IT. However, Korovin claims that the main point of network warfare is the use of social networks – not necessarily Internet networks, but rather social communities of real people and groups – to create the prerequisites for the formation of the necessary context. To confront a given state or people with the fact that they will now be subject to different strategic models, it is necessary to prepare the population for ongoing social and political transformations. When the inhabitants of a state are ready to submit to new meanings and accept someone else's logic, the state can be considered conquered.

It is understandable, then, why the basic stage of a network-centric war is the formation of public opinion and social processes. With this groundwork laid, citizens avoid resistance to ongoing transformations and even participate in them. Everyone 'included' in the Network becomes a participant, and its ultimate goal is the 'desovereignisation' of Russia. All that remains is to understand the essence of this technology, so as not to end up in the hands of the enemy, being used as a tool of self-destruction.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 206ff.

²⁵ W.A. Owens, "The Emerging System of Systems," *Proceedings*, vol. 121, no. 5 (1995), p. 36. See also: D.S. Alberts, J.J. Garstka, F.P. Stein, *Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority*, Washington, D.C. 1999, p. 104; M.R. Sickert, *Network-Centric Warfare and the Operational Concepts of War: A Synergistic Effect*, Newport 2000.

²⁶ В.М. Коровин, *Третья мировая сетевая война*, Санкт-Петербург [V.M. Korovin, *Tret'â mirovââ setevââ vojna*, Sankt-Peterburg] 2014, pp. 12-13.

Probably the most important brain among the neo-Eurasianists in the area of the theory of war is Leonid Vladimirovich Savin (born 1974 in Sumy, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) – Editor-in-Chief of the analytical centre Geopolitics.ru and Head of Administration of the International Eurasian Movement. Savin attracted interest thanks to his books, such as *Towards Geopolitics (K geopolitike)*, *New Ways of Warfare: How America is Building an Empire (Novy sposoby vedeniâ vojny: Kak Amerika stroit imperiû)*, *Coaching War (Koučing vojna)* and *Centaur's Arrows: The American Cyberwar (Strely kentavra: Kibervojna po-amerikanski)*, which mainly concern contemporary variations of geopolitical thought and modern war theory, specifically focusing on network geopolitics and network political management.

Savin, resorting to direct American sources, is interested in the phenomenon of 'coaching wars', which, as he believes, are characterised by rapid adaptability on the part of the target group – the enemy. Savin was inspired by several strategists, especially Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski, one of the founders of the doctrine of network-centric warfare. Cebrowski believed that: *Victories and defeats are born in the mind*. The same type of inspiration came from Timothy Gallwey, who claimed that the enemy 'in the head' might be more dangerous than the 'real' opponent. In the sense of network-centred conflicts, Savin also resorts to George Stein, who claimed that the goal of network warfare is the human mind: *Information warfare is about the way humans think and, more important, the way humans make decisions*.²⁷

Savin generally follows the route of those who characterise network-centric warfare as a method aimed at subduing opponents without violence. In this way, he agrees with Korovin's assessment of the U.S. strategy, as well as with practical remarks made by Richard Szafranski, the author of the theory of *neocortical warfare*. Szafranski believed that when actively encouraging adversarial minds not to fight, the fighting party needs to understand the culture, worldview and systems of representation that the adversary recognises, values and uses to communicate its intentions.²⁸ In other words, this scheme has a genuinely economic origin; the intellectual energy expended on developing new and better ways to kill and destroy distracts us from the real purpose of war – the subordination of the target to the enemy's will.²⁹

In the neo-Eurasianist understanding of war and security, the economic aspect should not be ignored either. Dugin already wrote about the distinctiveness of the 'tel-luric' world of Eurasia in his *Foundations of Geopolitics*, emphasising that, unlike the Atlantic domination of the free market and capital, the world of Tradition focuses on protectionism and socialism. It avoids separating the economy and finances from the nation's real life. Within the neo-Eurasianist circle, the most important works

²⁷ G. Stein, "Information Warfare," *Airpower Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1995), at <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/stein.html>, 12 November 2023.

²⁸ R. Szafranski, "Neocortical Warfare? The Acme of Skill," *Military Review*, vol. 74, no. 11 (1994), pp. 41-55.

²⁹ Л. Савин, *Новые способы ведения войны. Как Америка строит империю* [L. Savin, *Novye sposoby vedeniâ vojny. Kak Amerika stroit imperiû*], 2016, at <https://litres.ru/chitat/ru/%D0%A1/savin-leonid/novie-sposobi-vedeniya-vojni-kak-amerika-stroit-imperiyu>, 14 February 2024.

on economic struggles were gradually written by Mikhail Khazin. In 2003, he wrote a book concerning the supposed end of U.S. dollar dominance, which did not represent the interests of most national economies. Later, he spoke directly about the growing economic war in the modern world and the necessity for Russia to take appropriate measures to ensure its economic security.³⁰ What neo-Eurasianists have furiously criticised in particular is the offshore investment undertaken with great intensity by the Russian business world. It was argued that we are not, in fact, dealing with strengthening Russian capital, but rather with a massive transfer of funds abroad, pleasing a political opponent, exposing the economy to a reduction in the country's potential and increased military losses.³¹

For a long time, the Kremlin's position regarding security was – more or less – 'traditional'. Russia's official security strategies, issued in the form of presidential decrees, did not show any particular interest in a new understanding of war. However, after 2014, the situation changed: official state documents approached the issue of the definition of threats and the essence of war in a more holistic way and recognised problems in the sphere of social and information technologies. This change correlates with the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war against Ukraine.

An example of this shift may be found in Art. 21 of Russia's *Security Strategy* of 13 December, 2015. It notes that: *The nature of the international situation is increasingly influenced by the growing confrontation in the global information space due to the desire of some countries to use information and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical goals (...) by manipulating public consciousness and falsifying history.*³² One can also observe the call for strengthening the internal unity of Russian society by ensuring social stability, inter-ethnic harmony and religious tolerance, as well as in the work of eliminating structural imbalances in the economy and its modernisation.³³ In other words, the Kremlin also focuses on economic security as a part of the country's safe development.

The narrative of the July 2021 *Security Strategy* is even more straightforward, as it suggests that: *...destructive forces abroad and within the country are making attempts to use objective socio-economic difficulties in the Russian Federation in order to stimulate negative social processes, aggravate interethnic and interfaith conflicts, and manipulate in the information sphere.* Moreover, the newest *Strategy* is highly critical of international

³⁰ М. Хазин, *Закат империи доллара и конец 'Pax Americana'*, Москва [M. Hazin, *Zakat imperii dollara i konec 'Pax Americana'*, Moskva] 2003; "Михаил Хазин. Цены на бензин, экономическая война США и Китая и бунт французских фермеров," ["Mihail Hazin. Ceny na benzin, èkonomičeskââ vojna SŠA i Kitaâ i bunt francuzskih fermerov,"] *RuTube*, 29 January 2024, at <https://rutube.ru/video/c7018ab5def1d80962f121f20a87e63f/>, 17 July 2024.

³¹ М. Делягин, "Что дороже, жизнь друзей или прибыль врагов?," *Изборский клуб*, [M. Delâgin, "Čto dorozhe, žizn družej ili pribyl vragov?," *Izborskij klub*,] 7 February 2024, at <https://izborsk-club.ru/25310>, 12 August 2024.

³² "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г. № 683," *Президент России* ["Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 31.12.2015 g. № 683," *Prezident Rossii*], 31 December 2015, Art. 21, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391>, 19 July 2024.

³³ *Ibid.*, Art. 26.

business and media, stating that the capabilities of global internet companies are widely used to disseminate false information and organise illegal public events in Russia – with the purpose of undermining its internal stability.³⁴ The document suggests the necessity of rescuing the human potential of the Russian people, as well as developing human potential through a process of several steps, including the training and education of children and youth based on traditional Russian spiritual, moral, cultural and historical values.³⁵ This follows the neo-Eurasianist obsession with Russia's elites and the younger generation falling into the abyss of nihilism and Western liberal values.

It must be noted that the Kremlin began to realise the economic threats as well, a point reflected in several open statements and some documents, with the 2017 *Strategy of Economic Security* taking the leading position. The document defined several challenges and threats to economic security such as the desire of developed countries to use their advantages at the level of economic development, including information technology, as a tool of global competition. One of the most interesting imperatives concerns reducing the use of foreign currency when carrying out business activities in the Russian jurisdiction.³⁶ The apparent convergence of these imperatives with the postulates of the Eurasianists may be theoretically coincidental. However, it should be remembered that the desire to abandon the dollar as the basic currency in international trade also appears in the rhetoric of leading politicians from other states.

THE ENEMY AND THE ALLIES

America as the heart of the darkness

For most Russian nationalists and Eurasianists in particular, the West has always been a destructive power – a genuinely anti-Russian formation – and the greatest civilisational challenge. However, while the Slavophile-oriented nationalists directed the blade of their criticism against Western Europe, Dugin and other neo-Eurasianists regard the Atlantic powers – the U.S., Canada and the UK – as the greatest evil, as the U.S. proposes a unitary and global Great Space that leaves no possibility for any national sovereignty.³⁷

This position was represented straightforwardly in the 1990s, and the results of its campaign were evident even in the initial months of the Putin period. Andrei

³⁴ “Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г. № 400,” *Президент России* [“Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 02.07.2021 g. № 400,” *Prezident Rossii*], 2 July 2021, Art. 44, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046/page/1>, 11 May 2024.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Art. 33, p. 13.

³⁶ “Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 13.05.2017 г. № 208,” *Президент России* [“Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 13.05.2017 g. № 208,” *Prezident Rossii*], 13 May 2017, Art. 12, p. 1, 4, 8; Art. 16, p. 1, 3, 5; Art. 19, p. 2, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41921/page/1>, 19 May 2024.

³⁷ А. Дугин, Основы геополитики, Москва [A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moskva] 1997, pp. 421–422.

Piontkovsky realised that in the first year following Yeltsin's presidency, the Russian establishment was already under the influence of a noticeable anti-American sentiment.³⁸ This could be explained by the misunderstandings connected to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, as well as the resentment caused by NATO's intervention in Kosovo. The coming months brought about a rapprochement with China, which provided evidence of the elite's turn to the East.³⁹ Trenin correctly points to the fact that even Solzhenitsyn interpreted Eurasianism as a reaction of those Russians who had been *slighted by the West*. He explains that there is nothing innovative in such an approach, as the present resentment toward the U.S. *...was historically preceded by the acute feeling of betrayal by Europe after the First World War and the Russian revolution*.⁴⁰

The neo-Eurasianists wildly criticised the belief that any attempt to establish good relations with all partners, including NATO member states, was beneficial for Russia. This is exemplified by Korovin's aggressive opposition to Medvedev's declaration of rejecting confrontation with any foreign partner and renunciation of isolationism. According to the former, this type of policy could result in the return of opportunities for Western NGOs, the main exporters of Western-style 'democratisation' to operate within Russia.⁴¹

Korovin claims that the West has already started the Third World War through bombing Serbia and intervening in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. The new war, however, is of a hybrid, post-modern character, pursuing a *clash of civilisations* scenario. The U.S., as a result of a financial crisis caused by the oversupply of its own currency, is provoking wars to avoid a total meltdown of its finances and perhaps statehood. America has defied the rest of humanity, and Russia, its only serious opponent, will be the next victim. This is why the 'weak policy' tactic is disastrous for Russia; the only warranty against an attack is Russia's nuclear arsenal. This is why the so-called 'sixth column' in Russia (the elite that officially supports the authorities but in reality educates their children abroad and mentally remains outside the Russian world) is trying to undermine the importance of these resources.⁴²

What is somewhat of an exception in the attitude of Eurasianists towards America is their approach to representatives of various alt-right types, as Gideon Rachman aptly notes. The researcher rightly recalls Dugin's interview with Alex Jones and, above all, the Russian geopolitician's fervent support for Trump, which cannot come as a surprise in view of the latter's attitude towards relations with Russia and a possible end to the dispute with Ukraine.⁴³

³⁸ A. Piontkovsky, "Russian Elite Tires of Eurasian Fantasy," *The Russia Journal*, 17 August 2001, at <http://dlib.eastview.com/sources/article.jsp?id=1906381>, 11 February 2024.

³⁹ M. Schmidt, "Is Putin Pursuing...", p. 92.

⁴⁰ D. Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalisation*, Moscow 2001, p. 284.

⁴¹ В.М. Коровин, *Удар по России. Геополитика и предчувствие войны*, Санкт-Петербург [V.M. Korovin, *Udar po Rossii. Geopolitika i predčuvstvie vojny*, Sankt-Peterburg] 2014, p. 77.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 92-96.

⁴³ Rachman, G., "The Global Reach of Alexander Dugin," *Financial Times*, 22 August 2022, at <https://www.ft.com/content/7184ab8c-c155-4198-a844-87b9a98d8b9b>, 12 October 2023.

This anti-American tone has since been echoed in some official statements, as well as in key documents. Profound criticism of NATO's alleged expansionism and the unilateralism of U.S. policy was visible even in Putin's famous Munich speech in 2007. According to Putin, *Individual norms, indeed, almost the entire system of law of one country, first of all, of course, the United States, has overstepped its national boundaries in all spheres: in the economy, in politics, and in the humanitarian sphere – and is being imposed on other states.*⁴⁴

An unequivocal, critical assessment of the U.S. and its satellites is also contained in several versions of *Russia's Strategy of National Security*. It was the 2009 version that stated that: *The inadequacy of the existing global and regional architecture, focused especially on the Euro-Atlantic region and solely on NATO, as well as the imperfection of legal instruments and mechanisms, increasingly poses a threat to international security.*⁴⁵ The 2015 version declared that Russia's policies are opposed by the United States and its allies, who seek to maintain dominance. Their policy of containment towards Russia involves political, economic, military and informational pressure.⁴⁶

The 2021 version of the *Strategy* was even more straightforward, suggesting that the desire of Western states to maintain their hegemony leads to the weakening of the influence of international institutions and the decreasing effectiveness of the global security system.⁴⁷ Similar rhetoric was more recently used in *The Conception of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* of 2023, which openly states that the U.S. used the measures taken by Russia to protect its interests in Ukraine as a pretext for aggravating its long-standing anti-Russian policy and unleashed a hybrid war of a new type aimed at weakening Russia by undermining its civilisational role.⁴⁸

To ignore American impact rather than ignite an open information war, Russia forms structures that 'bypass' American hegemony. Two of those structures are of particular importance: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, founded by Russia and China in 2001, and the BRICS, which was originally established as BRIC (an exclusive club consisting of Brazil, Russia, India and China) in 2009. The geopolitical stance of the SCO is congruent with the Eurasianist position, emphasising the necessity to build a *more representative, democratic, just and multipolar world order*, as stated in the *New Delhi Declaration* of 4 July, 2023. This was an allusion to the origin of the U.S. as a country that had

⁴⁴ "Выступление и дискуссия на Мюнхенской конференции по вопросам политики безопасности," *Президент России* ["Vystuplenie i diskussiiâ na Mûnhenskoj konferencii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti," *Prezident Rossii*], 10 February 2007, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>, 12 January 2024.

⁴⁵ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 12.05.2009 г. № 537," *Президент России* ["Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 12.05.2009 g. № 537," *Prezident Rossii*], 12 May 2009, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/29277>, 12 January 2024.

⁴⁶ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г..."

⁴⁷ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г...", Art. 7, 9.

⁴⁸ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.03.2023 г. № 229," *Президент России* ["Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 31.03.2023 g. № 229," *Prezident Rossii*], 31 March 2023, Art. 13, at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/49090>, 19 January 2024.

once liberated itself from the dominance of the world's leading empire.⁴⁹ Similar expectations were widely expressed among the BRICS decision-makers, who hoped that the anticipated admission of Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2024 would reflect how geopolitics is changing.⁵⁰

Europe as a new hope

Anti-Atlanticism does not exhaust the neo-Eurasianist geopolitical vision of the West. An alternative option for the Occident consists of the vision of the European Great Space, which should be centred around Germany and, even more specifically, around *Mittleuropa*. The crucial point of this concept lies in the 'continental' characteristic of Germany, which has always been reluctant to the British efforts to create a colonial empire overseas. Dugin perceives Germany as a power capable of unifying European nations; moreover, if Russia's international position does not improve, the states of the 'near neighbourhood' should rather seek their place in the European Great Space, as this will grant them some residual sovereignty. They could not achieve this if they were to adopt the function of a *cordon sanitaire*, as is so often proposed by the Atlantic powers.⁵¹

A couple of years later, Alexandr Panarin, a neo-Eurasianist of the oldest generation, put forward the idea of a 'Central European scenario'. From his perspective, after the unification of Germany, CEE did not need to risk homogenisation in the Atlantic bloc. NATO's Eastern Enlargement process actually poses threats to both Russia and Western Europe, as the 'uniformisation' of the West deprives it of diversity and internal inspirations. Germany and the Western Slavs now have the opportunity to construct their new future according to the 'Heartland idea' and protect their identity as the core agents in the new geopolitical creation.⁵²

Before February 2022, the Kremlin's policy, while generally moving away from good relations with the U.S. and its Trojan horses in Europe, had simultaneously sought to open up to Germany and other West European partners, perceiving several benefits in doing so. The first type of benefit concerned the economic sphere, specifically in supplying energy resources, mainly natural gas, to Germany but also to countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, France and Hungary.⁵³

⁴⁹ "New Delhi Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," *Ministry of External Affairs Government of India*, 4 July 2023, at https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36751/New_Delhi_Declaration_of_the_Council_of_Heads_of_State_of_Shanghai_Cooperation_Organisation, 11 January 2024.

⁵⁰ J. McDermott, "The BRICS Are Expanding," *The Economist*, 13 November 2023, at <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2023/11/13/the-brics-are-expanding>, 9 December 2023.

⁵¹ А. Дугин, Основы геополитики, Москва [A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moskva] 1997, pp. 365ff., 425-429.

⁵² А. Панарин, *Реванш истории*, Москва [A. Panarin, *Revans' istorii*, Moskva] 2005, pp. 393ff.

⁵³ K. Buchholz, "Which European Countries Depend on Russian Gas?," *Statista*, 24 February 2022, at <https://www.statista.com/chart/26768/dependence-on-russian-gas-by-european-country/>, 20 December 2023.

Apart from the obvious financial gains, which abundantly feed the Russian defence and security budget, it is also important to bear in mind Putin's obsession with making recipients dependent on Russian raw materials to prevent them from pursuing policies incompatible with Russian interests, especially those of a geopolitical nature. This action has led to evident success, embodied in such projects as the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, which were persistently promoted not only by the Kremlin, but also by the German cabinets under first G. Schroeder and then A. Merkel. The fact that such willing German support was motivated by the promised profits of German politicians, mainly Schroeder, did not prevent both countries from playing nice for years.

The Kremlin's narrative of cooperation with EU member states was long focused on pure benefits and a kind of Ariadne's thread. In 2010, Putin pointed to the parties' common interests, stressing that both Russia and the EU are *quite vulnerable in the economic sense* as Russia is still dependent on the commodity economy, whereas the EU is reaping the fruits of its many years of deindustrialisation. In reflection of this, he positively described the position of Germany, which is acting as *the locomotive of European integration*.⁵⁴ Five years later, Medvedev admitted that Russia's priority is obviously the Eurasian Economic Union. Nonetheless, active cooperation with China in the framework of the implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt is also underway. However, this is being done without abandoning the idea of a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.⁵⁵

The Eurasianists tried to make the rest of the world aware that Russia's good relations with the countries of continental Europe must be a thorn in America's side. In turn, the U.S. would seek any opportunity to undermine or discredit this cooperation in some way. Leonid Savin wrote about one such case back in 2012. He believed that the events in the political life of the EU suggested that *a number of forces* were systematically trying to implement the project of Atlanticism on the western edge of Eurasia. In Savin's opinion, the failure of the project of multiculturalism would undoubtedly be used by lobby groups in the U.S. to continue applying pressure on European states. All of that, as he claimed, was accompanied by Russian *liberals and the conductors of Western interests* who planned to undermine the foundations of national security and sovereignty.⁵⁶ This Russo-European honeymoon period was brutally interrupted by Russia's attack on Ukraine when it was no longer possible to hide from the European public opinion what the Russian state *de facto* was. Nonetheless, even in such circumstances Medvedev dared to declare that the goal of the invasion *...is for the sake of the*

⁵⁴ "Von Lissabon bis Wladiwostok," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 November 2010, at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/putinplaedoyer-fuer-wirtschaftsgemeinschaft-von-lissabon-bis-wladiwostok-1.1027908>, 19 January 2024.

⁵⁵ "Медведев: РФ выступает за экономическое пространство от Лиссабона до Владивостока," *Национальная Служба Новостей* ["Medvedev: RF vystupaet za èkonomičeskoe prostranstvo ot Lissabona do Vladivostoka," *Nacionalnaâ Služba Novostej*,] 13 December 2015, at <https://nsn.fm/hots/hots-medvedev-rf-vystupaet-za-ekonomicheskoe-prostranstvo-ot-lissabona-do-vladivostoka>, 19 January 2024.

⁵⁶ Л.В. Савин, *Очерки о геополитике США*, Москва [L.V. Savin, *Očerki o geopolitike SŠA*, Moskva] 2022, p. 15.

*peace of future generations of Ukrainians themselves and the opportunity to finally build an open Eurasia – from Lisbon to Vladivostok.*⁵⁷

Dugin noticed the symptoms of the essential change in the Kremlin's activities concerning the European direction of Russia's foreign policy much earlier. He expressed his satisfaction with the fact that Putin clearly distinguished between two poles in the structure of the West: the United States and continental Europe. In Dugin's opinion, Putin was absolutely correct in his endeavour to come closer to Europe to the detriment of the United States, although the United States strengthened anti-Russian sentiments in the European Union through Euro-Atlanticism, actively using the countries of New (i.e., Central and Eastern) Europe to create a *cordon sanitaire* to separate Russia from continental Europe.⁵⁸

In his 2015 handbook on geopolitics, Dugin presented a slightly modified project of Mitteleuropa called *Great Eastern Europe*. His book brought back memories of the disagreement over the 2001 American and British intervention in Iraq, when Germany and France joined Russia in her essential criticism of this act. Dugin, however, was highly critical of the new EU members that opted for the Anglo-Saxon option. The only state that did not fall under this category is Hungary, whose Eurasian roots (the Finno-Ugric heritage of the Great Steppe) made the country suitable for the new continental alliance.⁵⁹

The ensuing years saw the Eurasianists reflecting on the Atlantic powers, as well as the European project, in a wider geopolitical context. Efforts have been made to convince European partners to move away from the spirit of the Washington Treaty to the *space from Lisbon to Vladivostok*. What seems interesting in this context is Mikhail Leontyev's opinion. In 2020, Leontyev suspected the U.S. of planning to use the North Atlantic alliance to address a more significant divide in today's world competition. According to Leontyev, the difference between Europe and the U.S. actually lies in strategic priorities and that the fate of the alliance will ultimately *...be determined by Europe's ability or inability to support the U.S. in the fight against China, or, rather, by the ability of the U.S. to get Europe to do so*. Importantly, he claims that it will save NATO – but only for a while and will ultimately bury Europe.⁶⁰

The Allies

Remarks concerning possible alliances appeared in various neo-Eurasianist texts, including Dugin's *Foundations of Geopolitics*. The narrative was sometimes apologetic about the potential cooperation with previous CEE partners, but after their drastic pro-Western turn, these types of insinuations were abandoned. As far as the post-Soviet

⁵⁷ Д. Медведев, "О фейках и настоящей истории," [D. Medvedev, "O fejkah i nastoâšej istorii,"] *Telegram*, 5 April 2022, at https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/34, 11 January 2024.

⁵⁸ А. Дугин, *Четвертая политическая теория...*, p. 153.

⁵⁹ А. Дугин, *Геополитика*, Москва [A. Dugin, *Geopolitika*, Moskva] 2015, pp. 477-480.

⁶⁰ М. Леонтьев, "Судьба НАТО определится способностью Европы поддержать США в борьбе с Китаем," *Изборский клуб*, [M. Leontev, "Sudba NATO opredelitsâ sposobnostû Evropy podderžat SŠA v borbe s Kitaem," *Izborskij klub*,] 23 July 2020, at <https://izborsk-club.ru/19658>, 22 January 2024.

states are concerned, the neo-Eurasianists strongly supported the idea of rebuilding strong ties with them in response to the consolidation of the West, which had been reinforced by several CEE actors.

Another area of partnership was detected in the Islamic world. However, initially, the entire set of Muslim states was by no means a point of interest among the Eurasianists. The most striking and unexpected proposal was Dugin's idea of the Moscow–Tehran axis, which was supplemented by a possible alliance with Berlin and Tokyo.⁶¹ This choice was understandable; Iran is a state that openly rejected its previous dependence on the U.S. and became a self-reliant actor. After a time, the neo-Eurasianists began to pay attention to other Muslim players. In a later edition of *Foundations...*, Dugin even proposed the idea of equipping Islamic states with nuclear weapons.⁶² The attention directed towards these countries significantly intensified after the Arab Spring. In Korovin's 2014 book, the events in Libya and Syria were depicted as a proxy war against Russia, as those countries were Moscow's previous partners and their reorientation was a blow to the geopolitical order.⁶³

As for China, Dugin was for a long time reluctant towards it, treating such a vision of partnership as a threat. However, the situation changed when Beijing became a more obvious and significant rival of the U.S. Accordingly, China was soon incorporated into Russia's set of strategic allies. Over time, the narrative about the PRC tended to glorify the Chinese state and the positive role of the Communist Party as the source of spectacular success. In Dugin's 2005 book on his *Philosophy of War*, we can see China, Iran and India portrayed as the most preferable geopolitical partners of Russia, at least in the sphere of security.⁶⁴

The most controversial idea concerning Russia's possible alliances is the Eurasianist belief in the necessity of supporting friendly relations with North Korea. This concept was not present in early Eurasianist thought. However, over time, as relations between Russia and the West have become increasingly tense, any ally could prove valuable. In 2011, Dugin expressed his conviction that Russia needs to support North Korea's military initiatives *in the name of peace on Earth, to stop the U.S.*⁶⁵ The Eurasianists generally believe that Kim's country is the 'genuine Korea'. In 2017, Korovin claimed that Moscow ought to support that regime and establish its military base there, as it is through North Korea that Russia may gain access to the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea; therefore, North Korea meets Russia's strategic interests.⁶⁶

⁶¹ А. Дугин, *Основы геополитики*, Москва [A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moskva] 1997, pp. 220-245.

⁶² "The Rest against the West," *Elements Lenin*, at <http://elements.lenin.ru/7rest.htm>, 21 February 2024.

⁶³ В.М. Коровин, *Удар по России...*, pp. 125-176.

⁶⁴ А. Дугин, *Философия...*, p. 211.

⁶⁵ "Александр Дугин о Северной Корее," ["Aleksandr Dugin o Severnoi Koree,"] *Karpets Live Journal*, 19 December 2011, at <https://karpets.livejournal.com/638313.html>.

⁶⁶ В. Коровин, "Северная Корея должна стать нашим форпостом," *Изборский клуб*, [V. Korovin, "Severnaâ Koreâ dolžna stat našim forpostom,"] *Izboriskij klub*,] 31 August 2017, at <https://izbor-sk-club.ru/13940>, 19 January 2024.

Moscow's official position on its preferred allies seemed to be inspired by Eurasianist proposals, especially after the Crimean conflict, although this rapprochement could just as well be incidental. The 2015 *Security Strategy* is preoccupied with several actors, and the CSTO partners take the most comfortable position. It is clearly stated that Russia advocates the qualitative development of the CSTO so that it is able to adequately meet any challenges, including threats in the information sphere.⁶⁷ However, there are several other states whose position is highly appreciated, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the BRICS member states, the SCO and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.⁶⁸

Surprisingly, the 2021 *Strategy* does not focus on preferable allies; the document simply stresses the necessity of developing *comprehensive partnership* and *strategic interaction* relations with China, as well as a privileged strategic partnership with India.⁶⁹ The real change occurred after the outbreak of the Ukrainian war. Russia's 2023 *Conception of the Foreign Policy* reflects the radicalisation of sentiments and resentments. According to this document, Russia aims to *further strengthen relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction with the PRC* and to strengthen coordination to ensure that security is a priority. The *Conception* also declares a *particularly privileged* strategic partnership with India. The document states that *...countries of friendly Islamic civilisation are becoming increasingly popular and reliable partners of Russia in matters of ensuring security at the global and regional levels*. Russia also declared the intention to collaborate with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation member states, especially Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt,⁷⁰ which reflects the reality of Russia's foreign activity: imports of Iranian drones and (possibly) of 400 ballistic missiles, which caused an immediate reaction from the White House.⁷¹

Russian officials have also begun to express Moscow's position concerning North Korea, although the predominant tone has generally been 'cautious'. However, over time, common interests in the area of security have found a much more straightforward expression. One example is an interview given by Andrei Kortunov, the head of the analytical section of the Russian International Affairs Council. On 20 February 2024, he declared that both states were under strong pressure from the West and that strengthening bilateral ties between Moscow and Pyongyang was a mutual interest, which was emphasised by Putin's personal visit to North Korea.⁷² Kortunov's statement relates to

⁶⁷ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.12.2015 г....", Art. 90.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Art. 88-89.

⁶⁹ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г....", Art. 100, p. 7.

⁷⁰ "Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 31.03.2023 г....", Art. 52-53, 56.

⁷¹ "On-the-Record Press Gaggle by White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby," *The White House*, 22 February 2024, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2024/02/22/on-the-record-press-gaggle-by-white-house-national-security-communications-advisor-john-kirby-2/>, 23 February 2024.

⁷² А. Кортунув, "О значении предстоящего визита Владимира Путина в КНДР," *Российский совет по международным делам* [A. Kortunov, "O značenii predstojšego vizita Vladimira Putina v KNDR," *Rossiiskij sovet po meždunarodnym delam*], 20 February 2024, at <https://russiancouncil.ru/>

the fact that active military cooperation has been established between Moscow and Pyongyang following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This includes the supply of munitions to Moscow, which, incidentally, mirrors Russia's highly successful cooperation with Iran.

UKRAINE: A *CASUS BELLI*

One of the important issues for Eurasianists, even in the early years of the movement, was the Ukrainian question. The founding father of the movement, N.S. Trubetskoy, argued in 1927 that Ukrainian nationalism had long been a product of European propaganda, active since the Petrine times, and of Soviet educational policy, which ignored the common cultural and spiritual pillars and the inherent unity between Russian culture and Ukrainian culture, a unity that had been disturbed by the realities of communist oppression.⁷³

Kazansky and Lysova (2022) correctly pointed to the fact that the origins of the neo-Eurasianist engagement with the Ukrainian question go back to the first half of the 1990s, when Dugin – together with Limonov (who was then forming the National-Bolshevik Party) – firmly rejected the borders of the Russian Federation that were established after the collapse of the USSR,⁷⁴ which seems quite typical for totalitarian nationalists – especially in the situation of post-imperial phantom pains.

The revisionist sentiments remained dormant for years. However, much changed with the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) and the Euromaidan Uprising, which began in November 2013 and was a massive protest against President Yanukovych's halting of Ukraine's association process with the European Union. These events modified the attitudes of both neo-Eurasianists and the Kremlin towards the Ukrainian question. Firstly, their rhetoric was now joined by the admittedly quite rational argument that much of Ukraine is inhabited by a *de facto* Russian population and is, thus, linked to Russia. Secondly, it introduced the thesis of illegal American involvement in Ukrainian internal affairs.

In his *Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin reiterated the well-known argument that if Ukraine or Georgia were to join the American Empire, it would dangerously strengthen Atlanticist influence in Europe. He also pointed out that more than half of the population belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church and did not wish their country to join NATO. However, he acknowledged that Ukraine represents two worlds: its Western section was heading towards Europe, while its Eastern and Southern provinces, and

analytics-and-comments/comments/o-znachenii-predstoyashchego-vizita-vladimira-putina-v-kndr/, 22 February 2024.

⁷³ N.S. Trubetskoy, *K ukrainskoy probleme*, "Evrazijskiy sovremennik", 1927, book 5, pp. 165-184. Comp. S. Fuller, "Eurasianism as the Deep History of Russia's Discontent," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 54, no. 7 (2022), pp. 863-866.

⁷⁴ R. Kazansky, L. Rysova, "Eurasianism as a Geopolitical Ideology: Geopolitical Consequences of Potential Russian Ukrainian Conflict," *Security Science Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2022), p. 51-62.

even more so Crimea, were inclined to get back to Russia. He, therefore, did not rule out the possibility of *direct action*.⁷⁵

Over time, especially after the Euromaidan Revolution and Russia's annexation of Crimea, the tone towards Ukraine has visibly hardened in Eurasian rhetoric. For example, in describing the geopolitical shape of contemporary Ukraine, Korovin drew attention to a number of factors but was strikingly clear about the 'randomness' of Ukraine's borders in the wake of the collapse of the USSR. Ukraine, in this narrative, is a *de facto* failed state, where the population is either closer in mentality to its Western neighbours – Poland, Hungary and Romania – or (predominantly) is actually Russian in character. In essence, Korovin believes that Ukraine's functioning as a unitary nation-state is a *de facto* American, anti-Russian project and remains unacceptable to the majority of the country's population. The best option would, therefore, be to divide Ukraine into four political entities: the West, which has always been part of the European world anyway; the East (including the Donbas) as a normal part of Russia; the Ukraine proper or 'Novorossiia'; and Crimea, which should be an autonomous region, preferably part of Russia.⁷⁶

After the 2014 'Little Victorious War' in Crimea, Dugin, the main prophet of neo-Eurasianism, clearly became an extremist ideologue preaching a project of accelerating action against the Ukrainian authorities, whom he called the *Kiev junta*. On 6 May, following the Odessa riots in which 48 people were killed, Dugin gave an interview to Anna Novosti, stating that further negotiations with the Ukrainian regime made no sense and that all that needed to be done then was to *kill, kill, kill*.⁷⁷ Some Eurasianists have taken a more balanced, but still imperialist, position. Khazin, for instance, openly stated that great powers resolve their issues through negotiations, not on the battlefield. Consequently, Russia not only has the right, but is also obliged to maintain law and order in its *sphere of responsibility*.⁷⁸

Did the Kremlin follow any of these narratives? Moscow's position seemed to be slightly more 'open'. What shines through in the Kremlin's rhetoric is the deep belief that Euromaidan was an *unconstitutional coup and armed seizure of power*. Such a view was expressed in March 2014 by Putin himself at a conference in Novo-Ogaryovo. The Kremlin's determination to find a justification for Russian control over Ukraine, however, has gone deeper and continuously moved significantly closer to the Eurasianist position. The turning point in the development of this narrative was Putin's article of

⁷⁵ А. Дугин, *Четвертая политическая теория...*, pp. 233-236. Comp. A. Shekhovtsov, "How Alexander Dugin's Neo-Eurasianists Geared Up for the Russian-Ukrainian War in 2005-2013," *Anton Shekhovtsov Blogspot*, 25 January 2016, at <https://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2016/01/how-alexander-dugins-neo-eurasianists.html>, 21 February 2024; T. Kuzio, *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War: Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality*, London–New York 2022, p. 23.

⁷⁶ В. Коровин, *Конец проекта Украина*, Санкт-Петербург [V. Korovin, *Konec proekta Ukraina*, Sankt-Peterburg] 2015, pp. 48-56.

⁷⁷ "Александр Дугин: 'Убивать...'"

⁷⁸ В. Винников, М. Хазин, "В поиске истины," [V. Vinnikov, M. Hazin, "V poiske istiny,"] *Khazin*, 5 May 2022, at <https://khazin.ru/v-poiske-istiny/>, 11 December 2023.

12 April, 2021, in which he conveyed his doctrine about the unity of the Russian nation made up of three branches (Great Russia, Ukraine and Belarus). At the same time, however, Putin wove a different thread of argument in the same text. Like Korovin, he regarded contemporary Ukraine as the brainchild of the Soviet era, a creation that was largely constructed at the expense of historical Russia. According to Putin's argument, one needs only to compare the lands reunited with the Russian state in the 17th century with the territories of the Ukrainian SSR, which seceded from the USSR. In other words, Ukrainians should *leave with what they came with*.⁷⁹

In this way, Putin demonstrated an important inconsistency: if Ukraine came to Russia with some territories, it may also leave with them; nevertheless, there is a *separate* Ukraine and a Ukrainian nation *distinct* from the Russians. This intellectual schizophrenia can, of course, be regarded as an error in reasoning. However, it can also be considered that the president was preparing the ground for two possible options for development. In the first, he assumed the subjugation of Ukraine almost completely, while in the alternative idea, he at least opened the door for himself to save face by once again acting as a *unifier of Russian lands*.

CONCLUSIONS

It is hardly surprising that neo-Eurasianism is sometimes seen as a covert *Kremlin Doctrine*. One can point to the numerous connections of the movement's leader with important politicians, his attendance at Kremlin seminars or, finally, the fact of personal protection guaranteed by the state. Moreover, his geopolitical outlook is increasingly visible in the Kremlin's narrative. However, this can only be said about Putin himself and some hawks, such as Patrushev or Rogozin, while the business-oriented 'pragmatists' usually avoid this kind of rhetoric.

The Eurasianist influence stems from Russia's experience of disastrous wars, and neo-Eurasianists generally proclaim the unavoidability of conflict as they perceive modern international relations in terms of permanent, network-centric warfare, with rivalry in the sphere of information as a crucial component. The same intuition is evident in several official statements and even more so in the newest basic documents concerning security. The Atlantic West, primarily the U.S., has always been perceived as the root of all evil by Dugin and his adherents. A clear definition of the main threat has been maturing in Kremlin circles for a long time, but the Eurasian vision of demonic NATO, as well as a Europe dominated by it (while still leaving some hope for cooperation with Russia), has taken root for good. The list of allies, featuring Iran, China and North Korea, which originally seemed exotic at the beginning of the new millennium, was later included by Kremlin officials in Russia's *Security Strategies* as an element balancing the pressure generated by Western structures. In other words, we

⁷⁹ "Статья Владимира Путина 'Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев,'" *Президент России* ["Statâ Vladimira Putina 'Ob istoričeskom edinstve russkih i ukraincev,'" *Prezident Rossii*], 12 July 2021, at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>, 9 January 2024.

have to make do with an obvious convergence in this case as well. Last but not least, the aggressive position of the Eurasianists regarding the Ukrainian question was adopted by the Kremlin following Russia's experiences with wars: not only the one against Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 2014, but also the Georgian War in 2008 and the Arab Spring.

On the other hand, the Kremlin does not seem ready to overstep the boundaries of decency too openly yet. This is the case, for example, with North Korea, whose friendship has been declared in a much more cautious tone than is evident in the writings of neo-Eurasianists. Moscow, contrary to the Eurasianist narrative, has never given up its international trade within the framework drawn by Western powers and keeps the information sphere relatively open, being satisfied with the effectiveness of its own propaganda.

In other words, it seems that although it is not possible to prove that the Eurasianist circle is a product of post-Soviet secret security structures or that Moscow entirely follows the intuitions prompted by Dugin and other representatives of the movement, one can speak not only about the obvious convergences between both narratives, but also about the fact that Moscow's Realpolitik is significantly getting closer to the postulate of 'The Rest Against the West' through its security alliances and even more so through its war against Ukraine.

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