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THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

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➤ INTRODUCTION

Since the first decade of the new millennium, as Russia began to reassert itself purposefully on the international stage, Russian strategic thinking once again became a topic of concern for the experts. Is it “*open, predictable and pragmatic*”, if we are to believe the strategic doctrine adopted in 2013¹? For others², it is suffering from the “phantom pain of the Empire”, or perhaps it is simply non-existent³. Its specificity appears to reside in the persistence of certain “strategic habits” inherited from the Soviet Union and particularly the Cold War. Numerous experts declare Russian strategic policy to be “irrational”: they believe the decisions made “in the face of all common sense” to be the echo of internalized reflexes from the confrontation era⁴. However, though Russia has continued to position itself as the strategic heir to the URSS since 1992⁵, the origins of its strategic thinking are much older.

The aim of this study is to decipher Russian strategic thinking, by bringing to light the key elements of its unique nature, while going further than the limiting context of the Cold War. The constructivist approach of international relations, which focus on perception and identity, providing an explanatory element to ideas, perceptions and interpretations, was the theoretical basis of the analysis. Though the analysis of Russian strategy in terms of power, security, international influence and military and economic components provides a partial explanation for the situation, a meta-analysis focusing on discourse, perceptions and imagination is an incomparable tool for understanding the elements underlying strategic decisions. Although considerations of an economic, political or security-related nature are taken into account by the actors in the decision-making process, strategic decisions are also influenced by socially-constructed knowledge⁶. The constructivist theory provides a link between social identities and political decisions: perceptions develop in different ideological contexts, providing a method to understand international relations, giving meaning to the different strategic decisions, shaping perceptions of national interest, of threats and challenges, the vision of the country’s place in the world, its historical mission and the notion of national security that results.

¹ Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 12th February, 2013, document no. 303-18-02-2013, available for consultation on the Department of Foreign Affairs website http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D

² See the many documents produced by the Liberal Mission Foundation that focus on “the spread of liberal values in Russian society”, for example KLYAMKINE I.M. (dir.), *Posle Imperii / After the Empire*, Moscow, Liberal Mission Foundation, 2007, 224 p.

³ Some Russian experts point to the “deficit in strategic planning” in modern-day Russia; see for example the interview with Fyodor Lukyanov, editor in chief of the journal “Russia in Global Affairs” (<http://www.globalaffairs.ru/>) on Russia’s main federal TV channel: “In Russia, there is no strategic vision, nor strategy [seen as] a plan of action”, full report on the debate available for consultation at http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_edition_p/si=5691&fi=2928

⁴ See the recent publication by Lilya Schevtsova, an expert in Russian foreign policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Lonely Power. Why Russia Has Not Become the West and Why the West Is Difficult for Russia*, Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010.

⁵ *Rechenie Soveta Glav Gosudarstv outchastnikov soudroujestva nezavisimyykh gosudarstv ot 20.03.92 o pravopremstve v otnochenii dogovorov predstavliaiouschikh vzaimnyi interes / Decision of the Council of Heads of State of members of the Commonwealth of Independent States on 20th March 1992, on the legal succession concerning agreements on mutual interests*, available for consultation on the “LawRussia” website, which provides access to legislative texts http://lawrussia.ru/texts/legal_185/doc185a655x748.htm

⁶ ADLER Emmanuel, “Constructivism and International Relations,” in CARLSNAES Walter, RISSE Thomas and SIMMONS A. Beth (dir.), *Handbook of International Relations*, London, Sage, 2002, p. 95.

THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

The study of Russian strategic thinking, broadly defined as “the ideas shared and expressed by the different actors in the decision-making process”, helps us understand why Russia historically acted in the ways that it did. It involves exploring the culturally-determined and long-established contexts of this thinking, through which policy-makers view the key elements of national strategy. The study will provide some avenues for analysis that are a key to understanding current paradoxes. It is structured with three levels of analysis: the first, *an analysis in institutional terms*, i.e. the identification of the main actors and institutions that take part in creating Russian strategic doctrine; the second, a *normative analysis* which focuses on programme documents and discourse (Foreign policy concept, national security concept, documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, articles published by state authorities) that explicitly define Russian strategy; the third is *meta-analysis*, based on historic, philosophical or literary texts that, at different moments in history, expressed a certain school of thought that implicitly shaped strategic doctrine.

➤ **PART ONE: THE ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING: FROM THE “THIRD ROME” TO THE “THIRD INTERNATIONAL”**

Certainly more than anywhere else in the world, the specific nature of strategic thinking in Russia and its position in the world are intrinsically linked to a questioning of identity within the country. Russia’s position in terms of East and West has long been both a geographical as well as a cultural challenge. Although the West has, throughout Russia’s history, been the “other” alongside which Russia has constructed its identity⁷, the perception of Asia has been no less an ideological mainstay that legitimized the expansion of the Russian territory and construction of the empire. The constructing of identity plays a key role in foreign policy and in discussions of strategy: contrary to Western Europe where the notion of national identity is mainly an individual perception, in Russia it is one with that of the State. The policies of Russian sovereigns were justified by consistent doctrine on identity, formed by the intelligentsia and transformed by the State into “a geopolitical representation with unavoidable repercussions⁸”.

I- THE ORTHODOX EMPIRE

From the beginning of the 16th century, strategic thinking in Russia revolved around the religious and the spatial, intrinsically linked to the dialectics of kinship and otherness in Russia in relation to Europe on one side, and Asia on the other. The orthodox legacy of the Byzantine Empire and its geographical position between Europe and Asia gave rise to Russia’s particular geopolitical role and provided the conceptual context for strategy throughout the Tsarist era.

1. *The religious and the spatial in Russian strategy*

Both the political development of Russia and the creation of its key strategic concepts were heavily influenced by the adoption of the Byzantine Orthodox form of Christianity. Since the Ecumenical Council of Florence (1439), which laid the foundations of the alliance between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, strategic thinking was shaped by the notion that Moscow was the only centre of “true” Christianity. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the progressive conquering of the Balkans by the Turks, which ended the Byzantine Empire, were seen in Muscovy as divine punishment that was justly deserved for the concessions made to Catholics. This idea culminated in the first official Russian doctrine, one of the cornerstones of national identity and strategy, known as “Moscow – Third Rome”.

⁷ NEUMANN Iver B., MEDVEDEV Sergei, *Identity Issues in EU-Russian Relations*, in *Constructing Identities in Europe: German and Russian Perspectives*. Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012, p. 12.

⁸ FILLER André, “L’identité nationale russe: anatomie d’une représentation”, *Hérodote*, 2010/3 no. 138, p. 94.

Drafted at the beginning of the 16th century by the monk Philotheus of Pskov, this doctrine – as religious as it was political – defined the position of Russia in the world, legitimizing the principality of Moscow as the only independent Orthodox community since the fall of Constantinople, which the Russians referred to as “Tsargrad”, the city of the Tsars⁹. Moscow’s historic and imperial vocation was thus cemented: from then on it took on a universal spiritual mission to become “the third and last Rome”. It aimed to be not only the most powerful State, but also the most “just”, in terms of a pure, Christian doctrine, and “the seat of a universal empire¹⁰”.

The strategic alliances were the first sign of the importance for the Russian tsars of obtaining the status of successors to the Byzantine Empire. In 1472, Tsar Ivan III (father of Ivan IV “the Terrible”), whose reign was marked by the emancipation of Russia from the Tatar-Mongol yoke and the beginning of State centralization, married Sophie Palaiologina of Byzantium, demonstrating the spiritual and diplomatic links between Russia and Byzantium. In 1488, he adopted the imperial heraldry: a double-headed eagle, the legacy of the Byzantine Empire. At the beginning of the 18th century, when Russia’s role on the international stage was taking hold, it declared itself an Empire – the historic and political successor to Byzantium.

2. *Orthodox unity in the Slav world*

At the military level, the doctrine “Moscow – Third Rome” played an important role in lending credence to the territorial claims of the Russian monarchs, with the notion of unifying the orthodox churches of the Slavic countries in central and Eastern Europe, in particular the Balkans. The representations expressed in the doctrine provided an ideological base for Russia’s intervention in the battle of the southern Slavs against the Ottoman Empire. Aside from the Polish Catholics, all other Slavs could hope to look to Russia as a sort of protector¹¹. As such, the efforts of Russian sovereigns to obtain access to the Bosphorus straits and the Dardanelles in the 19th century were highly symbolic, tied to the concern proclaimed for the destiny of eastern Christianity. Constantinople, as the strategic centre of the South with an access to the Mediterranean and ensuring the control of the Balkan Peninsula – thereby allowing Russia to expand its power – remained the spiritual centre and the cradle of Orthodoxy, its glory in need of restoring. This religious dimension gave a unique meaning to the aspirations of Russian monarchs to “free Constantinople”: from a symbolic point of view, this meant revenge for the Orthodox faith of Russia on the Islam of the Ottoman Empire.

Numerous Russo-Turkish wars in the 18th and the 19th centuries put the “Moscow – Third Rome” doctrine into practice: they were justified, in the private diplomatic correspondence of the

⁹ The word *tsar* is the Slavic form of Caesar.

¹⁰ MALIA Martin, *L’Occident et l’énigme russe. Du cavalier en bronze au mausolée de Lénine*, Editions du Seuil, 2003, p. 22.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 161.

Russian monarchs, as attempts to liberate the Christians from Ottoman control (“the liberation of Hellas¹²”). For example, the strategic intentions of Catherine II that were spoken of in terms of the “Greek plan” were to liberate all the Orthodox peoples of the Balkan Peninsula, with Russia as their protector, and the expulsion of the Turks from the European continent. Buffer states under Russia’s protection would be created on the southern borders, rendering Russia the political and military centre of the Christian Orthodox civilizations, increasing its influence in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe. When the Crimea peninsula, controlled by the Tatars, vassals of the Ottoman sultan, fell under Russian control in 1785, this was seen as the first step towards reaching its goal. Although it was Catherine II who used the idea of Orthodox unity as a pretext, there is no denying that geopolitical considerations were intricately linked to the cultural element. One of the grandsons of the Tsaritsa, baptized Constantine, was brought up in a Grecian environment by Greek tutors, with the intention of making him the first governor of Constantinople once the Greek people were freed from the Turkish yoke. The construction of the city of Sebastopol on the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Kherson was another incarnation of the plan for imperial domination that would give Russia control of the Black Sea¹³. More generally, the conquest of Constantinople – Tsargrad for Russia “remained an ideal goal until the first World War¹⁴”.

The Orthodox element therefore played an important role in constructing the concept of Russia’s role within the transnational cultural and linguistic configuration that is the Slav world. Though the ambitious plans of Russian monarchs for the Balkans did not always succeed – namely due to the intervention of other Western powers, in particular England, seeing their influence threatened – the matter of protection for the Slav people and the spiritual unity of the Orthodox world continued to be cited within Russian diplomatic discourse throughout the Tsarist era.

3. *Geosophical theories*

Russia’s unique geographical position is another ideological element that had a lasting impact on the shaping of Russian strategic thinking. The natural opening of the western and eastern land borders add to the notion of its Orthodox “otherness” in relation to the “Latin world” on one side and the “Turkish hordes” on the other, which explains “the complex of being surrounded by potentially hostile powers¹⁵”. No matter the political system, dominant ideology or the land settlement, the notion of territory remained “practically ontologically inherent to the definition of Russia¹⁶”. “In the Russian soul”, wrote the philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev in 1951, “there remained a strong natural element,

¹² See the letters from Catherine II to Voltaire and Diderot.

¹³ “Manifeste de l’union de la Crimée à la Russie”, t. XXI, no. 15.708, cited in LIMONIER Kevin, “La flotte russe de mer Noire à Sébastopol : une “forteresse imperial” au sud ?”, *Hérodote*, 2010/3 no. 138, p. 67.

¹⁴ De MEAUX Lorraine, “L’Orient russe. Représentations de l’Orient et identité russe du début du XIXe siècle à 1917”, *IRICE / Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 2008/2 - N° 28, p. 117.

¹⁵ ROMER Jean-Christophe, *La pensée stratégique russe au XX siècle*, Paris, Economica and Institut de stratégie comparée, 1997, p. 8.

¹⁶ FILLER André, “L’identité nationale russe: anatomie d’une représentation”, *Hérodote*, 2010/3 no. 138, p. 96.

linked with the immensity of Russia itself, with the boundless Russian plain.¹⁷ With no distinct geographical boundaries separating Russia from Western Europe or Asia, Russian thinking was shaped by cultural categories that distinguish the Russian identity.

The work of historian and philosopher Nicolay Danilevsky (1822-1885) was a first attempt to conceptualize “the immensity of Russia” in strategic terms. In *Russia and Europe*, the author presents the international stage as a permanent battleground between Roman and Byzantine civilizations, represented in modern times by Latin-German and Slavic cultures and their respective religious faiths (western Christianity and Orthodoxy¹⁸). Although the Orthodox Church justified the imaginary border between the “Russian” and “Latin” worlds, Russia’s expansion towards Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East, while also positioning itself as a European power in the 18th and 19th centuries required ideological legitimacy. It was at this time that “geosophical” theories began to be developed, founded on the concept of Russia’s unique geopolitical role due to its geographical position. Geosophy – literally the “philosophy of geography” – was an intellectual movement in Russia that asserted the critical, almost sacred link between the landscape and the national destiny. Imperialism was characteristic of this movement: it sought to legitimize the constant expansion of Russia, postulating that it could be nothing other than an empire. Vasily Klyuchevsky, one of the most influential historians of the 19th century, developed an entire argumentation in an attempt to prove that Russia’s geographic position determined its permanent aspiration to expand and colonise territories (see Table 1 below).

1552: Annexation of Kazan and the Middle Volga region (Srednee Povolj’e, modern-day Mordovia and Tatarstan, regions of Penza, Samara, Oul’yanovsk).

1556: Annexation of the region of Astrakhan, gaining an access to the Caspian Sea.

1581-1585: Conquest of Siberia.

1654: Beginning of expansion into Ukraine.

1702-1721: Expansion towards the Baltic Sea, the battle against Sweden and Poland.

1707-1727, 1747-1756: Key stages in the gradual colonization of Siberia, expeditions into Central Asia, annexation of Kamchatka.

1731: Beginning of expansion into Kazakhstan.

1772-1775: Annexation of Polish territories following the partitions of Poland.

1774-1791: Progressive expansion into the region of the Black Sea, construction of naval bases in Crimea, annexation of territories in the south.

1779: Colonisation of the Kuril Islands.

¹⁷ BERDYAEV Nicolas, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, The University of Michigan Press, 1960, p. 8.

¹⁸ MITROFANOVA Anastasia, “La géopolitique dans la Russie contemporaine”, *Hérodote*, 2012/3 no. 146-147, p. 183.

<p>1783: Beginning of the annexation of Georgia and the founding of Sebastopol, Russian naval base on the Black Sea.</p> <p>1809: Annexation of Finland after the war with Sweden.</p> <p>1812: Annexation of Moldova (Bessarabia).</p> <p>1813: Annexation to Russia of modern-day Dagestan, Azerbaijan and Georgia following the Russo-Persian war 1804-1813.</p> <p>1828: Annexation to Russia of the eastern Armenian territories following the Russo-Persian war 1826-1828.</p> <p>1865-1885: Gradual annexation of the territories of Central Asia that are modern-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan by creating protectorates.</p> <p>1891-1903: Construction of the Trans-Siberian railway line, creating stable ties with Siberia and the Russian Far East.</p> <p>1896-1903: Annexation of territories in the Far East.</p>
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Table 1: *Building the Empire. Key dates in the expansion of Russia between the 15th and early 20th century.*

In reality, underlying this doctrine was the “orientalisation of the Empire¹⁹”. In the 19th century, a trend of “local orientalism” began to develop, centred on the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea region and the Russian Far-East. The concept of Russia’s “civilization mission” in the east, creating a bridge between Europe and Asia, became a reality in the conquest of Central Asia around 1850²⁰. The founding metaphor of the Eurasian Empire as a “bridge between civilizations” is based on a particular image of Russia as “a European Asian and an Asian European”, formulated in a series of texts, particularly in the words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky:

“In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, while in Asia we shall be the masters. In Europe we were Tarats, while in Asia we can be Europeans. Our mission, our civilizing mission in Asia will encourage our spirit and draw us on; the movement need only to be started²¹”.

¹⁹ De MEAUX Lorraine, “L’Orient russe. Représentations de l’Orient et identité russe du début du XIXe siècle à 1917”, *IRICE / Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 2008/2 – No. 28, pp. 116.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ DOSTOYEVSKY Fyodor, *A Writer’s Diary*, cited in FIGES Orlando, *Natasha’s Dance. The Cultural History of Russia*, New York, Picador Edition, 2003, p. 415.

Russia's colonial plans were justified by the perceived image of the "wild steppe" and the "exotic Caucasus", which were in a primitive state and therefore posed a threat to the Russian police state. The colonized "tribes", including the peoples that had already been introduced to Christianity long before Russia – such as the Armenian people – were referred to in diplomatic discourse as "Asians" (*aziaty*) or "Tartars" (deformed version of the word "Tatar"), to stress the contrast between the natural state and civilization, in the sense of a police State, that Russia was to bring as a European State²².

4. *The concept of Western decline and Russia as the "third alternative"*

The third element that significantly shaped Russian strategic thinking is rooted in the debate on Russian identity that divided Russian intellectuals all throughout the 19th century. The early 19th century – a defining period for structured historical thinking – saw the emergence of a cultural conception of history developed by Johann von Herder. Arguing against the idea of the progress and superiority of Western civilization, he posited that every culture is unique and is "an end in itself". The Herderian ideas reignited the debate on Russia's place in Europe, a debate launched during the reforms instituted by Peter the Great. The intelligentsia of the 19th century in Russia witnessed two lasting schools of thought: "Westernist" and "Slavophile", which were opposed on the issue of Russian identity and the development path to follow. Though the Westernists believed that Russia should follow the path laid out by Peter, closely following the Western model which alone represented modernity and progress – economically, technologically, politically and intellectually speaking – the Slavophiles (or "romantic nationalists", according to Iver Neumann²³), fostered the idea of Pan-Slavism and the Messianic role of Russia, highlighting the unique character of the "Russian soul"²⁴ in contrast with Western Europe, presented as rationalist and individualist, having paid for material and technological progress by becoming estranged from the "free Christian community with the one God as its leader"²⁵, which would lead to its imminent downfall.

The debate on Russia's place within or outside Europe was reignited once more after the debacle of the Crimean War (1853-1856). The intellectual and strategic turnaround was due to Russian defeat by the Ottoman Empire supported by an alliance of Western powers. Though military defeat was a bitter pill to swallow, the symbolic aspect was even worse: Russia felt humiliated and betrayed by the fact that the Christian European powers, England and France, took the side of the Muslim Ottoman Empire in "the battle for the Lord's cradle". Fyodor Dostoyevsky baptized the Crimean War as the "crucifixion of the Russian Christ", illustrating how Russia from that point on lost all belief in her place in Europe and how she must seek her own way forward:

²² FIGES Orlando, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

²³ NEUMANN Iver B., *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. 253 p.

²⁴ More on the "Russian soul" in FIGE Orlando, *op.cit.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 312.

“Europe will never believe in our promises (...) and will always regard us with distrust. It is difficult to imagine how afraid she is of us. And if she is afraid, she must also hate us. Europe does not love us (...) and has never loved us; never did she count us amongst her own, among the Europeans, but only as a bothersome new arrival²⁶”.

The famous little phrase uttered by Alexander Gorchakov, Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1856 to 1882 – *“Russia is not angry, she is focusing”* – and the strategic concepts of Tsar Alexander III (1845-1894) summarized in the sentence *“Russia has two allies in the world: it’s Army and its Navy”*, depict this realist turnaround in strategic terms. From then on, Russia relied only on herself when pursuing her interests, rejecting Western Europe as a political reference. However, the acceleration of modernization in a country where war revealed its weaknesses²⁷ required her to borrow western technology, while refusing all political reform. The Russian Empire, at the beginning of the 20th century, remained the only absolute regime in Europe, following the path to modernization in its own way. This was characterized by the dominant role of the authoritarian central State and a continually growing gap between economic progress and a fossilized political system, a context that would reappear during the Soviet era.

Slavophile ideologies were revived once more among the Russian expatriate community following the revolution of 1917. The “Eurasianist” movement sparked enthusiasm for the unique path of Russia and her remarkable fate as part of the European continent. According to one of the founders of the Eurasian ideology, Piotr Savitski, Russia corresponded to Eurasia in that it was an empire, and not a nation State²⁸. The Eurasianists saw Russia not as a peripheral European country, but on the contrary, a unique geographical entity within the Eurasian continent, a totality defined by its unique territorial and geopolitical aspects, as well as its linguistic and ethnological characteristics. Russia was “a world apart, different from the countries to its west and south and south-east [...] The Eurasian space is not divided into two continents; Russia is the third”, wrote Piotr Savitsky in 1925²⁹.

Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) is another key figure of the Eurasianist intellectual movement. A specialist of the Turkish nomad world, he used the theory of ethnogenesis to highlight the link between policy and the landscape of a country. In his most famous work, *“From Rus’ to Russia³⁰”*, the author gives an overview of over a thousand years of Russian history, presenting the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union as the natural successors to the empires of the steppe. The author himself does not position himself as a historian, but rather an “ethologist”, applying the methods of the natural sciences to Russian history. The concept of “passionarity” is one of Gumilev’s theoretical models,

²⁶ DOSTOYEVSKY Fyodor, *Nechto o politicheskikh voprosah (On questions of politics) Sobranie sochinenii v 15 tomah/Collected works in 15 volumes*, t. 13, pp. 119-120 (Citation translated from Russian by the author)

²⁷ LIMONIER Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

²⁸ MITROFANOVA Anastasia, “La géopolitique dans la Russie contemporaine”, *Hérodote*, 2012/3 no. 146-147, p. 183.

²⁹ Quoted in De Tinguy Anne and Facon Isabelle, “L’ouverture sur l’Asie et le monde arabo-musulman: la Russie “quitte-t-elle l’Occident”?”, in FACON Isabelle et al., *Moscou et le monde*, Paris, Autrement “Mondes et Nations”, 2008, p. 170.

³⁰ GUMILEV Lev, *Ot Rusi do Rossii: otcherki etnitcheskoi istorii / From Rus’ to Russia; essays on ethnic history*, Moscow, Youna, 1992, 272 p.

wherein all human activity is the fruit of genetics passed down within the ethnos and the reason why men can “die for their ideas”. Historic figures are divided into “passionarians” (the “great men”) and “sub-passionarians” (the rest). For Gumilev, Russians have a higher level of “passionarity” than other European peoples, which explains their permanent desire for imperial expansion. This “passionarity” is intrinsically linked to religion: “*Russian people have growing passionarity guided by Orthodoxy with the unique goal of building a Holy Russia*³¹”.

II. THE SOCIALIST EMPIRE

Russian messianism, that was to bring emancipation to the ethnic, religious and social groups, did not disappear with the change of regime in 1917. As one of the cornerstones of Russian strategic thinking, providing a legitimate cause for the territorial expansion of Russia and for her strategic interests, it was reappropriated and reformulated by the Bolsheviks, as were a series of other ideologies rooted in Russian political culture.

1. *Russian messianism rethought*

Although the revolution of 1917 brought stark change in the political and social regime, the power model established by the Bolsheviks reproduced and reinforced centuries-old Russian traits. State control and centralization, the expanding of the bureaucratic system and authoritarianism were all defining characteristics of the Soviet regime, while Tsarist absolutism and Orthodoxy were replaced by the absolutism of the single-party system and Marxist dogma. This paradoxical dialectic, midway between the proclaimed split and what was essentially the continuation of previous ideologies, was the very essence of the Soviet regime; while it wanted to make a clean break with the past, it also strengthened the old ways of thinking that long underpinned Russian political culture and influenced her strategies.

The revolution of 1917 marked the beginning of the ideological clash with the capitalism of the western world, breathing new life into the idea of Russian otherness while simultaneously rethinking it. The notion of Russia’s unique role became fully clear, highlighting the teleological nature of Soviet ideologies. Indeed, in Leninist dogma, Russia was no longer a peripheral region to “global imperialism”, but rather a country that would bear the future of humanity, a “laboratory for a new society”, for which the ultimate goal would be “the establishing of communism throughout the world³²”. “*Belonging to the Russian kingdom was determined by confession in the Orthodox faith. It follows, then, that belonging to Soviet Russia and the communist Russian kingdom is determined by the communist Orthodox faith*”, wrote the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev in 1951³³. This vision – which proclaimed the economic, political and moral superiority of Soviet socialism, solidarity between Soviet

³¹ LARUELLE Marlène, *La quête d’une identité impériale. Le néo- Eurasisme dans la Russie contemporaine*, Pétra, 2007, p. 59, 60, 66.

³² ROMER Jean-Christophe, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³³ BERDYAEV Nicolas, *op. cit.*

peoples and the general emancipation that the Soviet Union would bring – gave rise to the establishment of the “Third International” (1919), following on from the “Moscow – Third Rome” doctrine. The instigators of the Third International wanted to “ensure, through worldwide revolution, Russian domination of the planet³⁴”. The goal to restore the Empire – a civilization based on the idea of Orthodox unity – was replaced by the goal to create the Empire – a civilization based on the unity of the world’s proletariat. The eschatological image of the future influenced the tactics adopted by the Bolsheviks to ensure Russia’s unilateral withdrawal from World War I; Russia’s economic and military depletion was as significant as the Bolsheviks’ conviction that the imperialist war would inevitably become a civil war between the proletarians and the bourgeoisie, resulting in a global socialist revolution with Russia as its guide. As such, Lev Trotsky, head of the Russian delegation, drew out the negotiations in 1917 for peace with Germany, (his motto was “neither war nor peace”), hoping for an imminent revolutionary awakening of the German working classes that would prevent the country from continuing its “imperialist war”.

While Soviet strategy in the 1920s and 1930s was dominated by the idea of imminent global revolution³⁵, the Spenglerian notion of Western decline lost none of its influence. Since Stalin’s accession to power, the messianic elements within Soviet strategic reasoning grew stronger: capitalism was “condemned by history” and regeneration would come from the “first socialist State”. The victory of the USSR in the Second World War was demonstrated as the perfect proof of the economic, political and moral superiority of the Soviet model and the fall of “German fascism”, as the first step in the collapse of the “imperialist capitalisms”. The geopolitical order changed after 1945. Victory raised the USSR and the United States to the ranks of world superpowers, and the traditional system of several powers controlling the international stage was replaced by a bipolar system, with the world divided into two entirely opposing “poles”, both claiming superiority in the clash of ideologies. Though the expansion of the USSR after the Second World War did not go beyond the area traditionally considered to be “Pan-Slavic”, the messianist rhetoric was inherent to the strategic interests of the USSR. Following the “liberation of Europe” from the fascist “plague”, the USSR’s goal was to fight for the freedom of all oppressed peoples (“the Soviet Union’s international duty”). This rhetoric justified the direct or indirect intervention of the USSR in every region of the world in order to support “the fight for freedom” of colonized peoples, the financing of patron-client relationships with the newly-formed socialist regimes and the supporting of various armed groups (see Table 2 below). The forming of the system of satellite countries, who followed the USSR’s strategic doctrine and adopted the same political and social model, was the main method of territorial, military and political expansion used by the USSR in the post-war period.

1917: The October Revolution and the beginning of the establishment of Soviet power in the former Russian Empire territories.

1922: Creation of the USSR.

1939: Annexation of Ukraine and West Belarus and Bessarabia, following the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the USSR and Germany.

³⁴ MALIA Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³⁵ ROMER Jean-Christophe, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

1940: Annexation of the Baltic States.

1945: Socialist regimes under tutelage of the USSR are established in Eastern Europe (“the people’s democracies”). Eight European countries were part of the “Socialist bloc” or “Eastern bloc”: Yugoslavia (1945), Albania (1946), Bulgaria (1946), Romania (1947), Hungary (1949), German Democratic Republic (East Germany) (1949), Poland (1952), Czechoslovakia (1960).

1946: South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (Far East) are annexed to Russia.

1961: The Berlin Wall is erected.

1960-1980: Several Third World countries declare themselves socialist after the victories of the Marxist and Leninist socialist and worker parties, siding with the USSR and adopting the communist ideology, receiving financial and military aid from the USSR (Republic of Guinea (1958), People’s Republic of the Congo (1969), Somali Democratic Republic (1969), People’s Republic of Angola (1975), People’s Republic of Mozambique (1975), People’s Republic of Benin (1975), Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978), People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (1967), People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979) etc.).

1989: Fall of the Berlin wall, withdrawal of the Group of Soviet Forces from East Germany.

1992-1994: The Western Group of Forces and the Northern Group of Forces are disbanded. Since the Potsdam Agreements (1945), these forces represented the political and military interests of the USSR in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States.

Table 2: *The rise and fall of the Soviet Empire. Key dates in the political and territorial expansion of the URSS from the early 20th to early 21st centuries.*

2. The Cold War mentality

Though messianism continued to be the key constant of Russian strategic thinking, the Soviet era gave rise to ideologies that formed not only the bases of self identification for the Soviet people, but the cornerstone of its strategic doctrine. These were, for example, the teleological opposition to an abstract Western world, symbolized by the United States; the division of the world into “us” and “them”; the opposition between bourgeois and socialist values and a bipolar image of the world. The Cold War would cause the West to be permanently seen as the enemy, furthering the “bloc”-oriented way of thinking and bringing the confrontational rationale between Russia and the west to extremes. Though the official strategic doctrine adopted after the death of Stalin proclaimed peaceful coexistence between the capitalist and socialist regimes, the West nevertheless continued to be seen as the villain. For several generations, the Soviets accepted the confrontation model fuelled by propaganda while sharing a feeling of invincibility after the Red Army’s victory in the Second World War. This was also the period when the military-industrial complex took on significant proportions for the economic development of the USSR. The Soviet economy was thoroughly militarized and centred on heavy industry, seen as the key to development, at the expense of light industry. The “strategic”

industries of the economy (energy, mining, metallurgy, mechanical construction, chemicals, building materials, etc.) played an increasingly significant role. In 1928, they represented 40% of the economy, reaching 61.2% in 1940 and 74.4% in 1966 until 1980³⁶.

III. THE EVOLUTION OF THE STRATEGY DEBATE AFTER THE FALL OF THE USSR

The structure of modern-day strategic thinking is inextricably linked to Russia's identity crisis experienced at the fall of the Soviet Union. Though the collapse of Soviet dogma facilitated the destruction of the "real" or "developed" socialism system within the country, it also led to the dismantling of the old strategic order.

1. "Enchantment with the West".

In 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev evoked his famous notion of a "common European home" before the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly³⁷, calling for a break from the Cold War mentality that considered Europe as "an arena of confrontation divided into 'spheres of influence' and someone else's 'forward-based defences', as an object of military confrontation – namely a theatre of war³⁸", but also with "the vicious circle of 'action-reaction' in East-West relations³⁹".

The debate on strategy during the *glasnost'* (transparency) era must be considered in the light of the political context of the time. At the end of the 1980s, Soviet society had a rude awakening to the Western way of life, which resuscitated the old debate about Russia's path to development and its proper place in the global balance. In the heated discussions in press publications – the print runs of which rose abruptly – the Russian intellectual establishment was divided in two, one group defining itself as "liberal", and the other as "patriotic". Inspired by the decisions of the Helsinki conference in 1975, the "liberal" branch was made up of those personalities who proclaimed their adhesion to human rights and political and civic freedom associated with the West, those who supported radical political, economic and social reform and saw political pluralism, a market economy and the respect for individual freedom as a return to Russia's western self, obscured by the Bolsheviks. The "patriotic" wing rallied a mix of conservative movements, from pure Marxists to nationalist and even anti-Semitic Slavophiles, who hoped to preserve the Soviet system and believed Western democracy would weaken Russia by weakening its uniqueness. The conservatives rejected the ideas of the *perestroika* (reconstruction) either because they truly believed in the potential of socialism or due to a personal

³⁶ LE DIASCORN Yves, *L'expérience soviétique*, Paris, Ellipses, 2002, p. 78.

³⁷ Council of Europe – Parliamentary Assembly. Official report. 41st ordinary session. 8-12 May and 3-7 July 1989. Volume I. Sittings 1 to 9. 1990. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. "Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev", p. 197-205. Text available at http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_mikhail_gorbachev_to_the_council_of_europe_6_july_1989-en-4c021687-98f9-4727-9e8b-836e0bc1f6fb.html

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

interest in maintaining the Soviet system as it was. In the institutions, this branch was represented by the technocrats within the Party machinery and the Soviets, the military-industrial complex, business executives and senior military dignitaries.

In 1991, following the failed putsch by the conservative communists, Russia appeared to have definitively broken with its Soviet past in order to embrace the movement towards western democratic development. In the minds of the new elites, during the Cold War Russia acted against its own interests, repressing its European identity and bleeding the country's economic and human resources dry for the sake of the "Marxist utopias". The fall of the USSR gave it the opportunity to become a "normal country" again and to join the "family of civilized countries". Within the country, there appeared an idealist aspiration to rapid "westernization" of Russian society through the establishing of western institutions. The new elites believed in the "invisible hand of the market" and in good solutions that could be applied in Russia to put it back on the "right track". At the strategic level, this optimism resulted in a "pro-western euphoria"⁴⁰, and the idea of the common European home went hand in hand with the idealist aspirations of Russia to rejoin Europe. The West was declared a "natural ally" of Russia. This idealist approach was shared by a large part of the population, tired of the constant confrontation with the West and the militarization of daily life that resulted. According to one poll, at the end of the 1980s, 87% of Russians believed that Russia quite simply had no strategic enemy⁴¹, showing the extremely vague perception of threat.

The first strategic doctrine of post-Soviet Russia, dating from 1993 and known as the "Yeltsin-Kozyrev doctrine" conveys these ideas clearly. For Andrei Kozyrev, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, post-Soviet Russia had to be the natural ally of the West, give up its status as the sole power capable of resisting "global capitalism" and join the ranks of the other democratic countries⁴². Russia's strategic priorities were evident in its rapprochement to the great powers of the industrialised West – the US primarily⁴³ – and its attempts to develop new mechanisms in handling Russia-NATO relations. Russian strategy was therefore redefined in such a way that Russia's positions were in line with those of its western partners (a policy defined alternately as "solidarity between democracies" or "blind pro-Western conformity"⁴⁴). No clear definition of Russia's strategic interests emerged from the 1993 Strategy. It was drafted as though they were the same as the "universal values of the community of democracies"⁴⁵. The absence of a Russian reaction to a redefining of American strategy in the post-Soviet area, i.e. a movement from "containment" to "democratic enlargement" declared in 1993, is a perfect illustration of the new approach. The rapid rise of American influence in Central and Eastern Europe through economic and institutional support provided to the "new democracies" was not seen

⁴⁰ TRENIN Dmitri, "Stratégie russe: une difficile naissance", *Politique étrangère*, no.1, 1997, p. 61.

⁴¹ SHIRAEV Eric, *Russian Government and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 57.

⁴² *Otcherki istorii ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossii. 1802-2002/Essays on the history of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1802-2002, vol. 3, Biographies of ministers of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, OLMA-Press, 2002, 432 p.*

⁴³ FACON Isabelle, "Moscou-Washington, la coopération dans la conflictualité", in FACON Isabelle (dir.), *Moscou et le monde*, Autrement "Mondes et Nations", 2008, pp. 86-117.

⁴⁴ DAVID, Dominique, "Fin d'un siècle, fin d'une Russie", in BOYER Yves, FACON Isabelle (dir.), *La politique sécuritaire de la Russie. Entre continuité et rupture*, 2000.

⁴⁵ The key aspects of the "Kozyrev doctrine" can be read in his work KOZYREV A.V., "Strategiia partnerstva" / "The strategy of partnership". *Foreign policy and security in modern-day Russia, 1991-1998*, vol. 1, Moscow, MONF, 1999, pp. 150-166; cited in BOGATOUROV Alexei, "Three generations of Russian foreign policy doctrine", *International processes*, vol. 10, no. 2 (29), May-August 2012. <http://www.intertrends.ru/thirteen/005.htm#note2>

as a threat to Russia's interests⁴⁶. This "facsimile of western positions" that replaced an autonomous strategy⁴⁷ was also a sign of both the population's weariness of the confrontational model of the Cold War and Russia's hopes to become a fully-fledged member of Europe.

This "enchantment with the West" did not last long: in the mid-1990s, it became obvious that the "equitable partnership" with Europe could never exist, mainly due to the demographic, economic and social downturn experienced in Russia after the fall of the USSR. Though nuclear forces continue to represent the "equalizing factor⁴⁸", all other elements of power have been weakened. In the space of a few years, the State that was once a superpower was now part of a group of countries commonly referred to as the "Third World". The defence sector, military industry, the armed forces and other structures fell into a state of anarchy⁴⁹. While Russia "watched powerlessly as it grew weaker⁵⁰", the attitude of its western partners only worsened its sensation of humiliation. Though "the expansion of democracy" in Eastern Europe gave rise to solid economic assistance programmes, Russia was only marginally concerned by western aid. The expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe was seen by the Russian strategic establishment as a betrayal to the promises made to Mikhail Gorbachev during the unification of Germany and as "western arrogance", merely "the reflection of Russian humiliation, the result of American unilateralism⁵¹". The failure of the "common European home" was the source of disillusion and frustration among the population, and turned Russian strategy in a more realist direction and a clearer definition of its interests.

2. *The "realist turning point" of the "Primakov doctrine".*

In 1996, Andrei Kozyrev, unpopular due to accusations that he blended Russian interests with those of the United States, was replaced by Yevgeny Primakov as Minister for Foreign Affairs. A former KGB chief mastering several Oriental languages, including Arabic and Farsi, he replaced Russian interests at the heart of its strategic doctrine, while redefining them in a less ideological and more rational manner. A partisan of the Eurasian ideology, he began to build a counterweight to the American power, based on the idea of a multipolar world⁵². Meanwhile, in the intellectual milieu close to the governing power, an alternative ideology of the national identity was being constructed. The result was the ambitiously titled "Otherness", a work in four volumes intended to cover the key aspects of Russian identity, its theses defending a break with the Westernist vision of Russia and, in line with Slavophile ideas, stressing its fundamentally unique identity⁵³.

"The Primakov doctrine" was based on three key elements. First of all, it called for "selective partnerships" with the West. It broke with the belief in the West as a "natural ally of Russia", the

⁴⁶ LAKE Antony, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, "From Containment to Enlargement", Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C., September 21, 1993, available at <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>

⁴⁷ DAVID, Dominique, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ TRENIN Dmitri, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁰ RUCKER Laurent, "La politique étrangère russe", *Le Courrier des pays de l'Est*, 2003, no. 1038), p. 24.

⁵¹ DOMINIQUE David, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵³ FILLER André, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

notion of selectivity in choosing its partners rendering Russia's international policies more flexible. Furthermore, Russia began to play on the dissensions between the European Union and the United States, constantly trying to strengthen its own positions. Secondly, it promoted a counter-balancing policy against American dominance by developing its ties with Asia and the Middle East. This policy was particularly evident in its efforts to build a flexible strategic triangle between Moscow, New Delhi and Beijing that could offset the American influence. In 1996 Russia began to commit itself symbolically to a "strategic partnership" with China. However, this policy was mainly for show, as although official declarations and meetings with Asian leaders gave a good impression of the emergence of a power hub capable of standing up to the United States, no real common policies were drawn up during this period between Russia and its eastern neighbours. Lastly, it aimed to construct a "red line" in the west of the country, corresponding to the former USSR border. The "Primakov doctrine" reaffirmed the notion that the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) formed a historic Russian interest area and any expansion by NATO across these borders, including into the Baltic States, would be perceived by Russia as a sign of hostility and would have political consequences⁵⁴.

3. *The impact of the Kosovo traumatism.*

The war in Kosovo in 1999 was a political event and symbolic point of reference that increased the perception of the West and the United States as Russia's main enemy. Operation "Allied Force"⁵⁵, which demonstrated the dysfunction of the Russia-NATO partnership, was seen as failure of the "Primakov doctrine"⁵⁶. The Alliance showed that it "*can strike unilaterally and impose its own vision of State sovereignty*"⁵⁷, with no regard for Russia's opinion. Though the government condemned outright "*the violation of international regulations*" and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, describing the strikes as "*genocide*", declared a freeze on NATO relations, the majority in Russia called for protection of the "*Serb brothers*", reawakening the idea of a Slavic union and anti-Americanism⁵⁸. The marginalization of the UN Security Council, highlighted by the conflict, was interpreted in Russia as an attack on its position as permanent member of the Council and its right to veto.

Not only did this crisis significantly modify the vision of the international relations system and the perception of immediate threat, but it reinforced the refusal of the Russian elite and society towards NATO's expansion. In June 1999, the Russian armed forces executed a strategic exercise "ZAPAD 99" ("West 99"), during which the Russian troops successfully fought back a NATO forces offensive in the Baltic region⁵⁹. Russian strategic doctrine was urgently reoriented. In the new version

⁵⁴ FEDOROV Yuri E., "*Boffins' and 'Buffoons': Different Strains of Thought in Russia's Strategic Thinking*", Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2006, p. 4.

⁵⁵ NATO's role in relation to the conflict in Kosovo, 13 juillet 1999, [HTTP://WWW.NATO.INT/KOSOVO/HISTORY.HTM](http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm)

⁵⁶ FISK Robert, "War in the Balkans: Primakov Fails to End the Bombing", *The Independent*, March 31, 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/war-in-the-balkans-primakov-fails-to-end-the-bombing-1084079.html>

⁵⁷ DOMINIQUE David, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ RADVANIY Jean, Guerre dans les Balkans. Tempête politique en Russie, *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 1999, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1999/06/RADVANIY/12117>

⁵⁹ FIODOROV Iouri, "La pensée stratégique russe", in BOYER Yves, FACON Isabelle (dir.), *La politique sécuritaire de la Russie. Entre continuité et rupture*, 2000, pp. 73-74.

approved in 2000⁶⁰, for the first time since 1993, external threat was a reality; Russia reaffirmed its right to the use of nuclear weapons in response to threats to the country's security as well as resorting to external deployment of its armed forces to protect its interests. The new doctrine highlighted the destabilizing effect of Western, in particular American, circumvention of existing mechanisms within international institutions – and, consequently, of Russia's opinion – on the political and military situation. The text denounces foreign interference under cover of humanitarian interventions without the approval of the Security Council⁶¹.

The particular aspects of the strategic policy, broached in the President's yearly address to the Parliament, a programmatic speech that sets out the main elements of Russian policy⁶², are another sign of this turnaround. At the beginning of the 1990s, Boris Yeltsin stated that "global confrontation is over" and that "for the first time in a long time, Russia has no military adversaries⁶³"; however, from 1997 onwards the issues of dignity and a multipolar world, along with a challenging of American domination, began to be perceptible. The 1998 address created a new image of Russia as a great power (*velikaia derjava*). "Today", said Boris Yeltsin, "everybody has understood: without Russia, it is impossible to effectively resolve critical international issues, whether they may be the problem in Bosnia, Arab-Israeli relations or the situation in the Middle East⁶⁴".

Firmly condemning "the unilateral use of force" and circumventing international institutions, Boris Yeltsin presented NATO as an "attacker⁶⁵" of an "independent [Yugoslavia], that threatened no-one". NATO's attempts to replace the international institutions and impose military-based decisions on Europe were described as a "tragic error by American authorities⁶⁶", and the arguments for its ambition as a great power began to be clearly shown.

⁶⁰ "Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi federatsii"/ "The military doctrine of the Russian Federation", *Nezavissimaia Gazeta*, 22 April 2000, available at http://www.ng.ru/politics/2000-04-22/5_doktrina.html

⁶¹ Les mutations de l'Armée russe, *Cahier de la recherche doctrinale*, CDEF-DREX, 1991-2005, pp. 16-18.

⁶² All yearly addresses, from 1994 to today, can be consulted at <http://www.intelros.org/> (in Russian).

⁶³ Translated by the author – E.M. *Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Eltsina Federal'nomou Sobraniiou RF: "Ob oukrepelenii Rossiiskogo Gosoudarstva/Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Parliamentary Address "On the strengthening of the Russian State"*, February 24, 1994, available at *Intellectoual'naia Rossiia/Intellectual Russia*, <http://www.intelros.org/lib/elzin/1994.htm>

⁶⁴ Translation by the author – E.M. *Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Eltsina Federal'nomou Sobraniiou RF "Obschimi silami – k pod'emu Rossii"/ Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Parliamentary Address "Agregating forces for progress in Russia"*, February 17, 1998, http://www.intelros.ru/strategy/gos_rf/psl_prezident_rf_old/75-poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_borisa_elcina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_obshhimi_silami_k_podemu_rossii_1998_god.html

⁶⁵ Translation by the author – E.M. *Poslanie Prezidenta Rossii Borisa Eltsina Federal'nomou Sobraniiou RF "Rossiia na rubezhe vekov"/ Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Parliamentary Address "Russia on the eve of the 21st century"*, March 30, 1999, http://www.intelros.ru/2007/02/05/poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_borisa_elcina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_rossija_na_rubezhe_jepokh_1999_god.html

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

➤ **PART TWO: THE INSTITUTIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE MODERN DEBATE**

This section of the study will look at the terrain on which the current strategy debate lies and identify the main actors and institutions who continue to contribute to Russian strategic thinking today. Here, we will show how the ideas on strategy that developed after the fall of the USSR are limited to the classic debate between Westernists and Slavophiles. The tensions between the “liberals” and the “conservatives”, visible from 1991, were but an avatar of the centuries-old debate between partisans of the vision of a Westernised Russia and those who believed in the Russian alternative.

I. STRATEGIC DECISIONS ARE MADE IN RUSSIA

Although the strategy debate has evolved since the fall of the USSR, the strategic landscape has grown more complex, with several actors and influence groups playing a part in decision-making, the process remains nonetheless practically inalterable. The Kremlin continues to establish the core definition and impetus of Russian strategy. The official procedure for drafting Russian foreign policy comprises two key components: the presidential power (embodied by the presidential administration) and the Foreign Ministry (MID) and its network⁶⁷. The executive order of November 8, 2011 assigns the Ministry with the role of coordinator in establishing a “*uniform foreign policy of the Russian Federation*”⁶⁸. Despite the growing number of actors wishing to participate in defining Russian strategy, it is the Ministry’s role to ensure that “Russia speaks with a single voice”. In practice, this coordination involves directing political and social initiatives in this domain, reducing the variety of interpretations. For example, Ministry experts actively participate in parliamentary work in specialised commissions, “*helping members of parliament formulate their position according to the common policy in order to protect Russian interests during parliamentary assemblies of the CIS, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and other international fora*”⁶⁹. Interaction between the MID and political parties is limited to «practical and informative assistance in the creation and development of ties with foreign partners”, which in practice means assistance with visas. Furthermore, political parties with no representation in the Parliament are not seen by the Ministry as valid representatives.

⁶⁷ BARANOVSKY Vladimir, “La fabrique de la politique étrangère russe”, in FACON Isabelle (dir.), *Moscou et le monde*, Autrement “Mondes et Nations”, 2008, pp. 15-54.

⁶⁸ Executive order “On coordinating role of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation in Conducting a Uniform Foreign Policy”, no. 1478, November 8, 2011, available on the Kremlin website <http://kremlin.ru/acts/13398>

⁶⁹ *Vnechnepolititicheskaya i diplomaticheskaya deiatel'nost Rossiiskoi federatsii v 2011 godou*/ Foreign and diplomatic activities of the Russian Federation in 2011, Foreign Ministry Report, March 2012.

1. *Assisting in decision-making and promoting Russian interests abroad: the Foreign Ministry's representatives.*

The actors directly involved in Russia's geopolitical decision-making process do so through collaboration with the Foreign Ministry. These actors are primarily the community of experts linked to the Ministry, mainly represented by the Scientific Committee of the Foreign Ministry and the research structures close to or under the authority of the Foreign Ministry, such as MGIMO (*Moskovskii Gogoudarstvennyi Institut Mejdounarodnykh Otnoshenii/ Moscow State Institute of International Relations*) or the Diplomatic Academy. Collaboration is through the financing of research projects chosen by the MID that always aim to promote Russian interests. Researchers work on "*promoting our initiatives abroad, strengthening the scientific and theoretical bases of Russian approaches and positions on the international agenda*"⁷⁰. This collaboration is also sought within the research and analysis centres of the Russian Academy of Sciences, whose aims are to study international relations and foreign policy (*Institut Mirovoi Ekonomiki i Mejdounarodnykh Otnoshenii* (IMEMO)/Institute of World Economy and International Relations, the Institute for the U.S. and Canadian Studies, the Institute of Europe, the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Institute for African Studies, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Centre for International Security, etc.).

Secondly, there are networks of NGOs created at the Ministry's initiative by executive order and strictly supervised by the State. Characteristic of the State's desire to promote its policies by imitating "bottom-up" initiatives, these NGOs are officially "recognized" by the Foreign Ministry at annual meetings as instruments of Russian influence abroad. For example, the "*Russkii Mir*"⁷¹/*"Russian World"* and "*Politika*"/*"Politics"*⁷² foundations created by order of Vladimir Putin in 2007 at the initiative of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for Education and Science, which promotes Russian language and culture throughout the world. The Gorchakov Foundation is another of these projects: created in June 2011 by the Foreign Ministry, this NGO is extremely active and in its first year organized 80 fora and international conferences focusing on collaboration with neighbouring countries (for example, one forum brought together young people from the CIS countries (*Dialog vo imia budoushego/Dialogue for the future*)).

Thirdly, there are independent organisations that spread the government's official ideologies and strategic discourse beyond the country's borders. Let us take, for example, the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy (*SVOP/Sovet po vnechnei i oboronnoi politike*). This organisation brings together Russian intellectuals and positions itself as independent of the ruling power and political parties. Though it is difficult to assess its real influence in the strategic decision-making process, the fora and discussions organised by the Council often make a significant public impact, attracting highly-positioned authorities and receiving major publicity in the media. The Valdai Club, a well-known think tank, is another example of an arena where foreign policy experts gather for discussion, while simultaneously giving a voice to Russia's official stance. Think tanks such as the "National Laboratory for Foreign Policy", an NGO that provides expertise in strategy and its development, and the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation founded by Natalia Narochnitskaya, which aims to promote Russian interests abroad, both work along similar lines. The Russian Orthodox Church, one of the Ministry's

⁷⁰ *Vnechnepolititicheskaya i diplomaticheskaya deiatel'nost Rossiiskoi federatsii v 2011 godou, op. cit.*

⁷¹ <http://ruskiymir.ru/>

⁷² <http://www.polity.ru/>

traditional representatives, is another institution that is responsible for promoting Russian interests abroad, mainly through a number of international fora and working groups that aim to protect Orthodox communities in the world. A series of fora between 2010 and 2012 targeted the problems of “Christianophobia” in the Middle East and Northern Africa and Russia’s place in Central Asia. Furthermore, the Orthodox Church is considered the main link in the “inter-civilisation dialogue” through which Russia asserts its role as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

2. Lobbies

Alongside the structures that make up a part of the Ministry’s network – both those that fall under its authority and those who are independent of it – there is a network of informal but significantly influential that is formed around the armed force structures and the military-industrial complex. Characterised by the remarkable continuity of the elites and practices within institutions that were only partly reformed after the fall of the USSR, the military-industrial complex – including factories, construction offices and research institutions – represents a part of the legacy of the militarised Soviet economy.

The impact of attempting to demilitarise the Russian economy, reorienting the military-industrial complex towards civilian production and imposing civilian and fiscal control over the defence industry undertaken by the federal power throughout the 1990s remained limited⁷³ and ⁷⁴. The armed forces and the defence industry showed formidable resistance to the reforms, maintaining their former institutional and ideological core. After the crisis of the 1990s and the drastic reduction in military spending and jobs in the military sector, the military-industrial complex saw clear recovery in the years after 2000, which went together with the transposition of a series of Soviet practices and institutions. In 2006, unified State command for armament and technology was restored through a specially created federal agency and the defence industry turned towards the domestic market. The Military-Industrial Committee, tasked with coordinating and handling the military industry centrally, was also reformed⁷⁵.

The significant growth in the defence industry during this time led notably to the increase in State control over large companies in the military-industrial complex, which became “integrated structures” that belong to the State. The lack of distinct functions between the Defence Ministry, the General Staff (*general’nyi shtab*) and the Armed Forces and the absence of transparency and monitoring by representative institutions is another legacy of the Soviet past. The Armed Forces, an institution directly inherited from the USSR, was particularly resistant to reform throughout the 1990s and in the years after 2000, in particular in terms of its operating mode: the Joint Staff, made up of conservative generals, successfully opposed the introduction of contractual employment in the forces,

⁷³ BLANK Stephen, “Contending With Russia’s Military Machine”, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, no. 1, Winter 1993, http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/02-1_Blank.pdf

⁷⁴ GLOAGUEN Cyrille, “Le complexe militaro-industriel russe. Entre survie, reconversion et mondialisation”, *Le Courrier des pays de l’Est*, 2003/2 no. 1032, pp. 4-17.

⁷⁵ BYSTROVA Irina, “Russian Military-Industrial Complex”, *Papers Alexanteri*, University of Helsinki, 2011, http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/julkaisut/tiedostot/ap_2-2011.pdf

defending the old model based on conscription, despite the fact that the demographic situation of the country could no longer support it⁷⁶.

Though the influence of the military-industrial lobby is difficult to assess due to the impenetrable nature of these institutions and the lack of recognition of lobbyism in Russia, its power can be estimated through a number of key events that were significantly mediated. For example, the dismissal of Defence Minister Anatoli Serdyukov, a “civilian minister” who for several years had attempted to reform the industry and tighten the control of weapons purchases by the State, as well as to “humanise” the Armed Forces by combating the violent “hazing” procedures, was allegedly caused by the military lobby⁷⁷.

⁷⁶ *Obretenie budouschego. Strategia 2012 / Attaining the Future, Institut Sovremennogo Razvitija (INSOR)/Institute of Contemporary Development, Strategy 2012, Moscow, INSOR, 2011, available at [http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR Attaining the Future final.pdf](http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR%20Attaining%20the%20Future%20final.pdf)*

⁷⁷ WEITZ Richard, “Global Insights: Russia’s Defense Industry Purges Reformers”, World Politics Review, 13 Nov 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12495/global-insights-russias-defense-industry-purges-reformers>

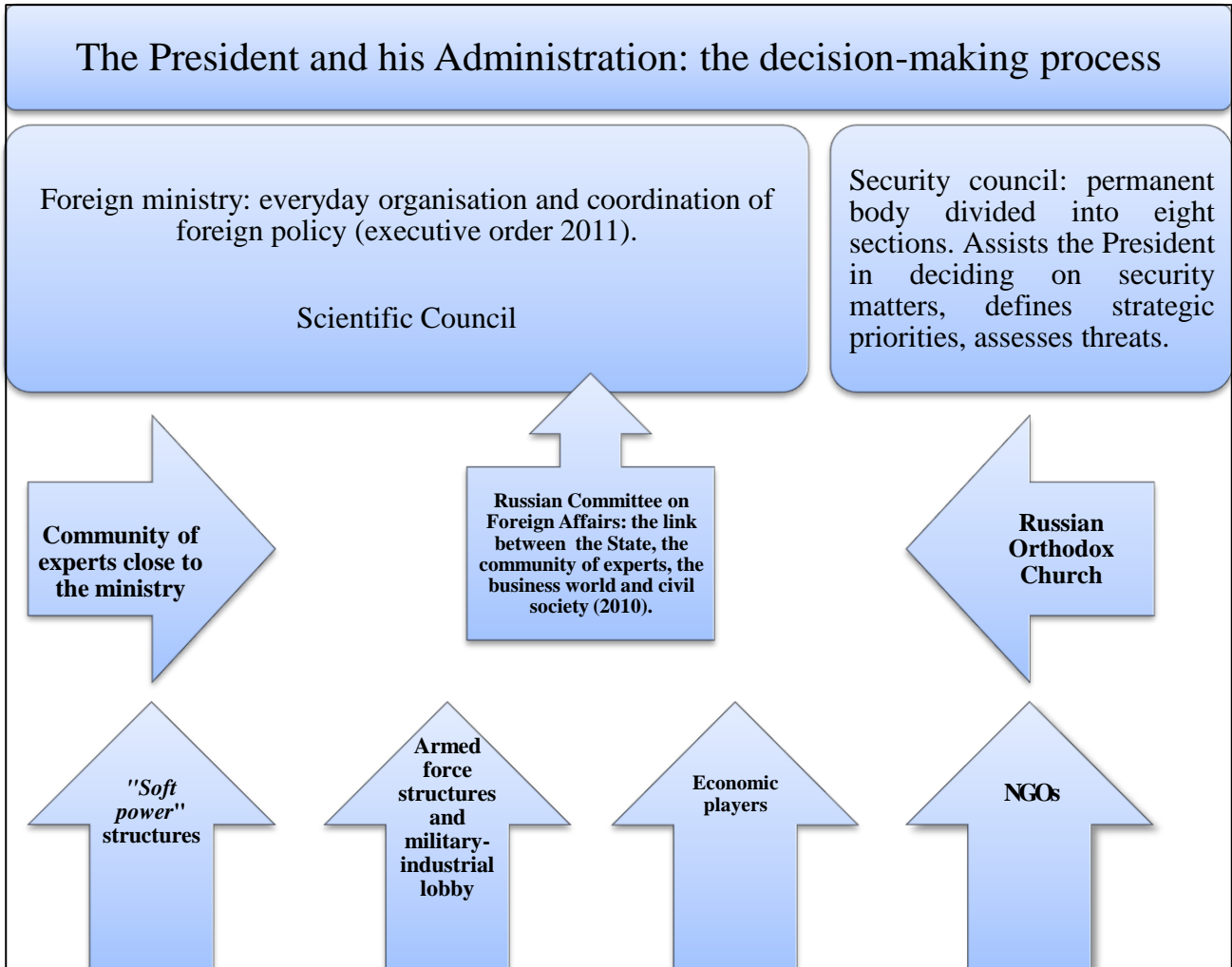


Figure 1. *The main actors within the strategic decision-making process.*

Military groups, such as the Russian Federation Club of Military Leaders⁷⁸ or the Academy of Military Science, created with direct presidential support⁷⁹, are a perfect example of the continuity of the military elite within newly created structures that take the form of “independent associations”. These bodies, which unite the old generation of strategists and superior military officers, continue to strive “for the country’s defence interests and the education of civilian society”, in particular taking an active role in implementing the patriotic education curriculum of Russian citizens. They work together with schools to implement the government curriculum for patriotic education of the youth.

⁷⁸ The Club’s website: <http://www.kvrf.org/>

⁷⁹ Executive order no. 173 of February 20, 1995, “On the Academy of Military Science”, available at <http://giod.consultant.ru/page.aspx?1;1141771>

The Academy of Military Science⁸⁰ brings together Soviet professional service members, all from the same generation, each with a military rank and academic title: the President of the Academy, Makhmut Gareev, born in 1923, is a doctor of military science and history, professor and army general; Varfolomei Korobuchin, doctor of military science and colonel general, born in 1923; Vladimir Slipchenko, doctor of military science and major general, born in 1935; Nicolay Turko, doctor of military science and major general, born in 1923, etc.⁸¹.

II. MAIN SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

The current strategic debate is structured by an ideological fragmentation that has roots in the 19th-century debate between Westernists and Slavophiles, opposing those who supported the confrontational model with the West and the partisans of a European Russia. Several schools of thought can be identified in the modern strategic debate: the remnants of the idea of a “the Russian third alternative”, neo-Eurasianism and the liberal trend. Though the latter, which is a reinterpretation of Russian Westernism, is growing increasingly marginalised, the first two – conservative and messianic – which evoke, in different ways, the idea of the Russian otherness compared to the western world, are beginning to resonate more and more within Russian society.

1. *Conservatism revived: the sovereign democracy doctrine.*

The first ideological movement that structured Russian strategic thinking was the doctrine for a sovereign democracy that was part of the conservatism revival of the years following 2000. This doctrine was drafted by the President’s administration and accompanied the recentralisation of the State government that some deemed to be a “return of the Leviathan⁸²”. The doctrine presupposes complete independence for Russia in its choice of institutions, paying no heed to foreign standards, particularly Western democracies, which no longer served as models⁸³. This key element recalls the traditional idea of a “*third Russian alternative*”, neither eastern nor western. Not only did the Russian state need to be strong in order to institute effective policies by “repairing” the “errors” of the 1990s, but it also had to rediscover national pride and international influence, by demanding “*recognition*” by the West and by becoming a great continental power once more. The aggressive speech given by Vladimir Putin in 2007 in Munich was a perfect illustration of Russia’s determinism to regain the

⁸⁰ *Akademiya Voennykh Naouk Rossiskoi federatsii*/Academy of Military Science of the Russian Federation, official site <http://www.avnrf.ru/>

⁸¹ Presidium members of the academy: <http://www.avnrf.ru/index.php/prezidiumavn/dejstvuyushchij>

⁸² GELMAN Vladimir, “Le retour du Léviathan: la politique de recentralisation en Russie depuis 2000”, *Critique internationale*, no. 34, 2007, p. 103-125.

⁸³ MALFLIET Katlijn, “Peut-on parler de l’Etat de droit dans la Russie actuelle?”, in MERLIN Aude (dir.), *Où va la Russie ?*, Bruxelles, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2007, p. 26.

position it lost after the fall of the USSR⁸⁴. While the enlargement of NATO was decried as a “factor of serious provocation”, the OSCE was criticised as an organisation that was at the service of “a single country or group of countries⁸⁵”.

The power of Russia would depend on the capacity of strong, authoritarian rule to strengthen the country⁸⁶. In the vision of this “imperialist” intellectual tradition, “all throughout [her history], Russia has been surrounded by hostile neighbours. In this context, the only way to survive as a nation and a State was to strengthen her resources in the hands of the powerful central authority. This authority should follow the policies of preservation of the whole and ensure the country’s survival. The unified Russian state (and, by extension, the Russian Empire) is an example of power and stability⁸⁷”. As such, Vladimir Putin, in his speeches, regularly alludes to Russia’s “enemies”, who “won’t allow her to work and develop peacefully”. Translated into strategic terms, this idea puts forth the idea that Russia’s main threats come from the West and NATO. The preservation of the Soviet military potential and the reinforcement of the armed forces were seen as the only way to protect against the loss of Russia’s national sovereignty. To guarantee her stability, averting outside threats was not enough: at the national level, this doctrine mainly resulted in the emergence of a new “State patriotism” based on a reinforcement of the armed forces and secret services, patriotic labour on the back of Russia’s youth and the hunt for domestic enemies⁸⁸. At the social level, a movement for “historical optimism” began. In contrast to the mood of the 1990s when “national humiliation, fatality and defeat were felt strongest, along with the syndrome of a lost motherland⁸⁹”, the concept of a “nationwide rebirth” became the buzzword of the political agenda and public discourse in the years following 2000⁹⁰.

Several other elements are a part of the new “national idea” created under Vladimir Putin in the first decade of the 21st century⁹¹:

- Patriotism, considered the highest value, was not for the happiness of “all humanity”, but to allow the motherland to flourish;
- Anti-Westernism, or a hostile attitude towards the West (mainly the United States) and the rejection of its political values;
- Imperialism, expressed in the desire to unite the former Soviet republics (or at least the Slavic republics) around Russia

⁸⁴ PUTIN Vladimir, “Vystoupenie i diskoussii na Munchenskoj konferentsii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti” (Speech and discussion on security policy issues at the Munich conference), February 10, 2007, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/10/1737_type63374type63376type63377type63381type82634_118_097.shtml

⁸⁵ GUENEC Michel, “La Russie face à l’extension de l’OTAN en Europe”, *Hérodote*, 2008, no. 129, pp. 221-246.

⁸⁶ SHIRAEV Eric, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸⁸ NIKONOV V.A. “Front istoritcheskikh optimistov”/“The front of history’s optimists”, *The Russian Gazette*, June 14, 2013.

⁸⁹ NIKONOV Viatcheslav, *La tentation d’un Occident non occidental*, p. 91.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Table partially reproduced and completed from “Le projet national, contours idéologiques”, POLIANNIKOV Timour, “Russie, la logique de l’autoritarisme”, *Le Courrier des pays de l’Est*, no. 1049, May/June 1995, p. 81.

- Clericalism, or the desire to fortify the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church in society and strengthen the influence of religious hierarchy in State affairs;
- Militarism, i.e. the desire to rebuild a “military superpower”, the renouncing of a disarmament policy and the aspiration to restore the military-industrial complex;
- Authoritarianism, with a rejection of liberal democracy, a preference for “strong rule”, leaders who rule with an “iron grip”, hope in a charismatic leader and the intention to rebuild a country where order and discipline reign;
- Cultural uniformity, criticism of individualism and egoism, encouragement for collectivism (a community spirit), the condemning of “immorality and depravity” in the media;
- Economic leadership, underpinned by State intervention in the economy, the nationalisation of strategic industry, the protection of Russian producers against foreign competition and a paternalist social policy.

Figure 2: *The ideological bases of the “sovereign democracy” doctrine*

This ideology allowed the Russian government to impose its own rules within the country – rules that were “adopted to suit Russia’s unique situation” – and reject any attempt by the West to criticize them. There was no denying that this doctrine was supported by the armed forces, the military-industrial complex and the partisans of a strong State, be they classed as “neo-conservatives” (“*okhraniteli*”), “hard traditionalists”, “Statists” (“*derjavniki*”) or those who took advantage of the confrontation (“*conflict profiteers*”⁹²). While the armed forces feared the budgetary cuts, the Statists were opposed to liberal reforms under the pretext that they would weaken the State. The opinion of the military establishment can be seen in the multiple stances taken by General Makhmut Gareev, president of the Academy of Military Science: in his view, the gradual exhaustion of natural resources (energy, drinking water, etc.) means that international conflict to control these resources is inevitable. Russia, rich in natural resources, would then be particularly coveted both by the United States and China, who aspire to “*military-political and even economic intervention*” in Russia⁹³. The “forced export of democracy”, American interventionism in the Middle East, the wave of “colour revolutions” in the CIS countries, the “Arab Spring” and the weakening of international institutions (seen as the tools with which America ensures her interests are protected) place Russia in the position of a citadel under siege. From this perspective, Russia must multiply – via economic modernisation – its military power in order to become a power hub like China. Russia’s nuclear potential should be strengthened and weapons for strategic dissuasion modernised. Emphasis is being placed on the development of spatial technologies and anti-missile defence; it goes without saying that reducing Russian military potential is out of the question.

⁹² FEDOROV Yury E., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹³ GAREEV Makhmout, “Na poroge epokhi potriasenii” (On the threshold of the era of upheaval), *Voennopromyshlennyi kour’er / Military-industrial newsletter*, no. 3, January 23, 2013, <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/14094>

2. *Neo-Eurasianism: a new beginning for Russian messianism*

The neo-Eurasianist trend that bore messianic ideas may be considered as another variation of the classic idea of Russian “otherness”. It is based on three key affirmations: “1) *Russian history is unique and her experience renders Western models inapplicable. 2) Russia’s destiny is to remain true to her Eurasian roots and to reject an imitation of Western models. 3) The development of Russia can be explained by external factors: climate, geographic position and geopolitical situation*”⁹⁴. Eurasianism, inspired by the Slavophile and geosophical ideas of the “unique Russian path”, was born in the early 1920s in Russian émigré circles in Paris (see above); neo-Eurasianism, however, began to gain ground and grow increasingly visible in the media from the turn of the 21st century, in parallel with the growing nationalist rhetoric.

The most elaborate ideology of the different conservative schools of thought that emerged in the 1990s in Russia⁹⁵ is based on the idea of historic antagonism between Eurasia (the Russian Empire corresponding to the Eurasian continent) and the West (which was in fact represented by the American continent), which would explain why the Western world (United States and Western Europe) aspired to destroy Russia/Eurasia by any means possible⁹⁶. Reaffirming the traditional ideologies intended to show Russia’s intransigent uniqueness next to Europe and the natural character of its empire, it is the most suitable method of handling its post-imperial trauma and a way of “reflecting on catastrophe”⁹⁷. It is an ideology to explain the world and its identities, thereby touching on the “sensitive spot in many intellectuals and politicians that were shaken by the disappearance of the Soviet Union and its ideology”. Those who supported this perspective base their reasoning on a geographic reality to declare the “third way”: Russia is “a world apart” which cannot reconcile with the Western model.

Philosopher Aleksandr Dugin continues to be the leading figure in Eurasian ideology, who developed the Eurasian theories in his “*Foundations of Geopolitics*”, opposing the Atlantic world centred on the United States (“sea powers”) with the Eurasian world centred on Russia (“land powers”). “*Dugin presents the final victory of the land powers over the sea powers as the “conservative revolution” to come*”⁹⁸. A guest lecturer in Moscow’s greatest universities and research director in the “Centre for Conservative Studies”⁹⁹ at the State University of Moscow (MGU), Aleksandr Dugin also initiated the socio-political “international Eurasian movement” (2005), which comprised the “Eurasian Youth Union”¹⁰⁰, whose members call for “a new analysis of the legacy of the Eurasianists and conservatives, taking into consideration (...) the new challenges” to give rise to an “ideology of Eurasian conservatism” that Russia would carry forth¹⁰¹.

Aleksandr Dugin is not alone in his dissemination of Eurasian, conservative ideas. The activism of Natalia Narotchnitskaya, president of the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation, follows the same

⁹⁴ SHIRAEV Eric, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁹⁵ LARUELLE Marlène, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁹⁶ MITROFANOVA Anastasia, *op. cit.*, pp. 185.

⁹⁷ LARUELLE Marlène, *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 167.

⁹⁹ <http://konservatizm.org/>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.rossia3.ru/>

¹⁰¹ http://www.rossia3.ru/ideolog/friends/evr_konserv

lines. It highlights the image of Russia as the sole bastion of the identity and traditional values of “white Christian civilisation”, lost by the West. The colloquia organised by the Institute spread ideas of the indispensable role of Russia within the Eurasian continent and raise the issue of preserving the traditionalist values endangered by the West¹⁰². Alexander Prokhanov, another neo-Eurasianist intellectual and prolific author of a number of socio-political bestsellers, disseminates conservative, anti-Western and anti-liberal ideas, as well as the restoration of the Empire, “the great Russian state, the great Russian values and the creation of a powerful civilisation¹⁰³”. For Prokhanov, “*Russia can be an Empire, or it can be nothing*”. The author of several successful fantasy novels, he is editor in chief of the newspaper *Zavtra* (“Tomorrow”), which brings together “patriotic intellectuals”, spreading conspiracy theories and the theory of a “secret world government” of the “*Western bloc, headed by the United States*”. His conception of history, evidenced in his numerous articles, interviews and in particular his latest book, “The Fifth Empire”, presents Russian history as “the history of several empires”: the Kievan Rus empire, the empire of the principality of Moscow, the Romanov empire, the Petersburg empire and lastly the Stalinian empire. According to Alexander Prokhanov, the current plan for Eurasian integration is none other than an attempt to create the Fifth Empire, an “immanent” process, inscribed in the Russian historical matrix.

If these theories have become highly popular in Russia, it is not simply because they are deemed the heritage of the geosophical ideas of the 19th century, and the only eminently national intellectual movement. On a number of points, this ideology brings almost total consensus within the Russian elite. On the one hand, it strengthens the doctrine of the “sovereign democracy”: aside from the shared perception of threat originating mainly in the West, they are united in their rejection of the Western model. This undoubtedly explains the much stronger positions of neo-Eurasianism than its small number of declared supporters would allow us to believe¹⁰⁴. The “imperial novel” thereby became a recognised literary genre in the years after 2000¹⁰⁵. On the other hand, neo-Eurasianism provides the theoretical bases to the idea of confrontation between Russia and the West, which explains its popularity among the military establishment. The newspaper *Krasnaia Zvezda* (red star), an official publication of the Defence Ministry, disseminates Eurasianist ideas without making express reference to Dugin. One article, published in a recent issue, lists the signs of the “decline” of Westernist civilisation: massive Islamic immigration, legislation allowing same-sex couples to marry, and support for “radical Islamists” in Syria are all signs of “a rejection of the cultural and historical roots¹⁰⁶” of Europe, leading to its downfall. But the partisan circle of this trend is much greater and more diverse: a “one-for-all” ideology “that provides points of reference to a society who had lost its bearings¹⁰⁷”, it unites conservatives alongside tenants of the strong State, anti-Westernists alongside

¹⁰² For example, the theme of a colloquium in July 2013, organised just after the adoption in France of the law allowing same-sex couples to marry, was “Family Values”; the speaker was Deputy Mizulina, the main author of the law criminalizing the “propaganda of homosexuality” in Russia.

¹⁰³ “*Seichas rojdaetsia piataia imperiia*”/“The fifth Empire is rising”, interview with Alexander Prokhanov, *Vzgliad*/Points of view, August 23, 2012, available at <http://vz.ru/politics/2012/8/23/594683.html>

¹⁰⁴ MITROFANOVA Anastasia, *op. cit.* p. 186.

¹⁰⁵ ANDERSON Perry, “La Russie de Poutine ou la démocratie à l’ombre de l’autocratie”, *Le Débat*, no. 149, March-April 2008, p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ MININE Dimitri, “*Kolokol zvonit po Evrope*”/“The bell tolls for Europe”, *Krasnaia Zvezda* / Red Star, June 6, 2013, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/2011-07-25-15-55-34/item/9536-kolokol-zvonit-i-po-evrope>

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Anne Tinguy and Isabelle Facon, “L’ouverture sur l’Asie et le monde arabo-musulman: la Russie, “quitte-t-elle l’Occident”?”, in FACON Isabelle (dir.), *Moscou et le monde*, Autrement “Mondes et Nations”, 2008, p. 170.

partisans of “traditional values”.

3. *The liberal movement: marginalised Westernism*

Though Westernism appeared to be the dominant ideological trend in the first half of the 1990s, this school of thought grew increasingly less popular towards the end of the decade and became marginalised at the turn of the millennium. When Vladimir Putin was elected, he made a clean break with the “legacy of Yeltsinian neoliberalism”, including from the ideological point of view. Nonetheless, though the “liberal” influence in the sense of partisans of Western ties and the adoption of a Western liberal democracy model steadily declined throughout the 1990s, their voices remained audible both in the public space and in the academic world. Carried by a party made up of intellectuals, academics and also bureaucrats that saw the benefits of openness towards the West, globalisation and strengthened cooperation, these ideas were the main counterweight to the conservative doctrines.

The liberal tradition of critiquing provided arguments against all the classic theories of the conservative tradition: *“Russia wasn’t always surrounded by hostile powers in her past; authoritarianism is not the only reasonable means of governing. History shows that the democratic route produces the best conditions for the country, its people and its relations with the other States. The concentration of power in one hub is damaging to economic and political development”¹⁰⁸*.

Between 2008 and 2012, when Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the official successor designated by Vladimir Putin, temporarily replaced him as President, we saw what some refer to a “liberal turning point” in politics: though the absence of Medvedev’s political autonomy was obvious to observers and to public opinion, the new president managed, at the very beginning of his mandate, to acquire a certain degree of freedom from Vladimir Putin.

This “liberal turning point”, which showed its limits during the conflict in South Ossetia in August 2008, could be felt through a number of programmatic documents drafted by the liberal think tanks at the newly-elected President’s orders and marking the beginning of his mandate. The report *“Attaining the future. Strategy 2012”¹⁰⁹*, produced by the Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) puts forth the main guidelines for Russian policy in the years to come, illustrating the theses of the Westernist liberal wing that gravitated around the new President.

The report discusses the classic idea of Russia’s delayed development, posing a modernisation imperative before the country, which could only be realised through structural reforms, bringing Russia closer to the Western model. The change in values (the deconsecration of the State and development of individualism) must be accompanied by global changes in institutions, democratisation and the establishment of a State based on the rule of law. Furthermore, innovation in the economy and in particular its diversification are presented as the only way to face the challenges of the 21st century. This “modernisation ideology” is opposed in the report to conservatism, just like the opposition between “liberalism” and ‘Statism”, thereby distinguishing the ideological positioning of the authors.

¹⁰⁸ SHIRAEV Eric, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁹ *Obretenie boudoushego. Strategie 2012/Attaining the Future, op. cit.*

Setting out the main reference points of Russian strategy and foreign policy, the report maintains that the military component and especially the nuclear element are no longer the main sources of power; nuclear weapons are even considered a hindrance to the modernisation of Russia. *“The possession of the remaining nuclear potential seriously damages Russian modernisation”*, creating an illusionary sentiment that the “nuclear shield” will protect the country whatever happens, delaying the moment for determining reform. The first line that the report takes for the proposed strategy redefines the threats: contrary to the conservatives, for whom the West personified in the United States is the major threat, the report postulates that Russia and the West both face the same threats, which are regional instability, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism as well as a number of “mild threats”, such as drug and weapons trafficking, etc.¹¹⁰ Insofar as “the common threats to both countries are more dangerous than the issue of confrontation that each have created about the other¹¹¹”, it is essential that a “new philosophy for Russian-Western relations” be conceived. The theory of a “modernising alliance” between Russia and the West is inspired by the centuries’ old notion that modernisation will only be possible for Russia through the appropriation of Western experience: *“Without cooperation with the United States, Russia cannot provide strategic and military security at the global level (...), nor can she become truly modernised¹¹²”*.

This new definition of threat results in the rejection of a confrontational policy, replaced by a “cooperation agenda” with the main actors of international relations. The idea is to build a “positive” strategy, because in a situation of isolation and confrontation with the main actors, the modernisation that Russia needs would be impossible. The gradual improvement of relations and the creation of lasting alliances with the countries of the OCDE are in Russia’s own interests. As for NATO, the relationship needs to be transformed from a “reluctant partners” to one of “loyal friends”. This vision presupposes the rejection of the confrontational model with the West and the military system left by the USSR should be thoroughly reformed, starting with the armed forces. The report advises the reduction of staff and a contract system in order to render the forces more mobile for local conflict and to increase its combat value.

The third pillar of Russian strategy suggested in the report is the improvement of its image abroad. Contrary to the conservatives who deny the West any say on Russian institutions, the “liberals” consider that the capacities to make the country attractive to investors are one of the ways in which Russia can be modernised. The notion of grandeur is also redefined: “The country’s grandeur is not limited to its specific position or its natural resources”, opposing the Eurasianist theories. The moral and political – and not only technological – dimension of Russian grandeur should be highlighted. The greatest resource for Russian strategy is the improvement of Russian’s image abroad¹¹³. Though the report does not aim for a return to the “blind Western conformity” of the “Kozyrev/Yeltsin doctrine” of the early 1990s, it nonetheless follows the pro-Western trend of Russian liberalism.

¹¹⁰ FEDOROV Yuri E., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Obretenie boudoushego. Strategia 2012/Attaining the Future, op. cit.*

¹¹² *ibid.*, pp. 292-293 (French version).

¹¹³ *ibidem.*

➤ **PART THREE: MODERN RUSSIAN STRATEGY. A LEGACY OF “STRATEGIC REFLEXES” AND THE UNCHANGING CONSTANTS**

Having explored the roots and the institutional and ideological framework of Russian strategic thinking, we will now move on to the analysis of its application by the current Russian authorities. In this section, we will show that although Russian strategic thinking is intended to be pragmatic, and provide rational solutions to actual conflicts of interest, the intellectual context and ideological considerations continue to play a determining role in the definition of Russian doctrine, which remains dominated by a number of reflexes from the past. Russia’s economic development in the years after 2000, which reduced the chasm between its ambitions and its resources, is just as important a factor in the reorientation of Russian strategy as the swing towards a conservative ideology.

I. REJECTION OF THE WESTERN MODEL

Underlying the position that Russia adopted from the year 2000 onwards was the idea that a new world order governed by several power centres (in the multi-polar world) was imminent. Each country could choose its own development model, Western democracy was not a universal, interference in the domestic affairs of other countries was inadmissible and Russia then took on its active role in the “*dialogue between civilisations*”.

1. The “historic stalemate” with the West

In his address to Parliament in 2007, the President highlighted Russia’s opposition to the “*imposing of development models*” and attempts to force “*the natural progression of history*”. “*Contemporary Russia, restoring her economic potential and aware of her capacities, aspires to egalitarian relations with every country and does not behave arrogantly. We are simply protecting our economic interests and are using our competitive advantages, as every country does without exception*¹¹⁴”. In spring 2012, in the article «*Rossiiia sosredotachivaetsia*” (“Russia is focusing”), Vladimir Putin, announcing the strategic programme for his next mandate, declared that the Western model was in a state of historic stalemate: “*The power centre of old can no longer guarantee global stability, while new influence centres are not yet ready to take over*¹¹⁵”. He declared that a unique geopolitical destiny is part of the “genetic code” of Russia: “*...Russia can and must honour the role she*

¹¹⁴ Parliamentary address by President Vladimir Putin, April 27, 2007 http://www.intelros.ru/2007/04/27/poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_vladimira_putina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rossii_iskoj_federacii_2007_g.html

¹¹⁵ PUTIN Vladimir, “*Rossiiia sosredotachivaetsja: vyzovy na kotorye my doljny otvetit*”/“Russia is focusing: the challenges to be met” *Izvestia*, January 16, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/511884#ixzz2UPqswvuE>

has been given through her civilisation model, great history, geography and cultural genetic code, within which the fundamental aspects of European civilisation are mixed with centuries of experience and interaction with the East, where new centres of economic power and political influence are currently developing rapidly¹¹⁶". In practice, this means holding the West in check, along with its influence not only on Russia, but across the entire post-Soviet region.

Though the Conception of foreign policy – a programmatic document setting out the key directions for Russian strategy – adopted in 2013 highlights the “contemporary forms of the work of foreign policy” (soft power, economic diplomacy, the integration of Russia within the global digital network), it continues to follow the traditional concept of the imminent decline of the West:

“The possibilities for the historic West to dominate the world economy and politics continue to decline. The potential for power and global development are less concentrated and are shifting towards the east, towards the Asian and Pacific region primarily. The entrance of new actors onto the forefront of the world’s political and economic stage in a context where the Western powers wish to hold on to their traditional positions is tied to the increase in global competition, which can be seen in the rising instability in the field of international relations¹¹⁷”.

“In a context of accumulating crisis elements in the global economy, the financial and economic challenges are becoming greater. The unresolved structural issues and the prolonged depression in the West’s major countries have a negative influence on global development¹¹⁸”.

Despite the fact that Europe, and Germany in particular, continue to be an essential economic partner to Russia, Russia still doesn’t see Europe as a strategic partner, preferring bilateral relations. Iver Neumann speaks of “*institutional paralysis and political shutdown*” in the relations between Russia and the EU, despite considerable bureaucratic activism that include the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and various “common strategies”, such as the Common strategy for the EU and Russia (EU, 1999), “Russian strategy for EU relations” (Russia) along with a number of “roadmaps”, which are in reality a way to avoid real political engagement¹¹⁹. The difference in their positioning models does not bring them closer: for Russia, who is firm on the principle of the “uniform foreign policy”, Europe does not speak with a single voice, and Russian leaders are very clear on this topic: “*I do not wish to offend anyone*”, said Vladimir Putin in 2010, “*but today, Western Europe does not have a uniform foreign policy. Russia cannot and will not function in this system of relations. However, we want normal partnership relationships¹²⁰”.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, on February 12, 2013, document no. 303-18-02-2013, available for consultation on the Department of Foreign Affairs website http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ NEUMANN Iver B., MEDVEDEV Sergei, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹²⁰ Meeting between Vladimir Putin with the members of the Valdai International Discussion Club, September 11, 2009, full transcript available at <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/4990/>

2. *The role of Russian civilisation*

In this vision of Russia, its strategy follows its historic role as mediator in the dialogue between civilizations and cultures, while opposing the principle of intervention in the domestic affairs of other States. This is the *“unique role our country has been playing over centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global civilization¹²¹”*. Russia is particularly suited to this role because, faced with the “decline of the West”, she is a haven of stability and an alternative “civilization” that can offer her values to the world. The notions of “culture” and “civilization” are particularly evident in the text of the Strategy, reflecting the ideological turning point. Today, global competition transcends the economic and the political to take on a “civilisational” dimension that can be seen in *“the competition between different values and development models”*. Promoting Russia’s role in the “dialogue among civilizations” is one of the main lines of official Foreign Ministry policy¹²². Since *“cultural and civilisational diversity of the world becomes more and more manifest”*, “imposing one’s own hierarchy of values can only provoke a rise in xenophobia, intolerance and tensions in international relations leading eventually to chaos in world affairs¹²³”, states the 2013 strategy concept, explicitly targeting the notion of promoting democracy.

“There are instances of blatant neglect of fundamental principles of international law, such as the non-use of force, and of the prerogatives of the UN Security Council when arbitrary interpretation of its resolutions is allowed. Some concepts that are being implemented are aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian populations¹²⁴”.

II. IMPERIALIST AMBITIONS

Another “strategic reflex” from the past is the resuscitation of plans for an imperial Russia. More than just an end in itself, however, the vision of Eurasian integration and the defence of Christianity are powerful instruments in guaranteeing the internal stability of the regime.

1. *The Empire’s phantom pain: “near abroad” relations*

Although the Eurasianist rhetoric has roots in Slavophilia and the vision of Russia as a geographic individual whose destiny on the continent is unique, Russian strategy is nonetheless dominated by its legacy of Soviet imperialism. While the Eastern European countries – former satellites states of the

¹²¹ Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation 2013, op.cit.

¹²² *Vnechnepolititicheskaya i diplomaticheskaya deiatel’nost Rossiiskoi federatsii v 2011 godou*/Foreign and diplomatic activities of the Russian Federation in 2011, Foreign Ministry Report, March 2012.

¹²³ Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation 2013, op.cit.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

USSR – saw the fall of the Soviet bloc as liberation from the communist yoke, the Russians saw it as a loss of power. When Vladimir Putin described the fall of the USSR as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century¹²⁵”, he was referring to the severe shock to the national consciousness caused by the collapse of the single Russian area and the end of the Empire. For several centuries, Russia’s national identity lived on and was shaped by a sense of belonging to the empire and a great power¹²⁶. The shock caused by its fall in peacetime encouraged the spread of theories that appealed to the sentiment of national dignity and the nostalgia of a lost power. According to a 2010 poll, 65% of Russians consider that Russia deserves a greater role on the international stage, while only 26% think that Russia has the position it deserves¹²⁷.

Several experts define Russia’s post-Soviet situation as «post-imperial». The director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow, Dmitri Trenin, introduced the “*post imperium*” concept in his latest book of the same name. It is “an historic transformation, that requires much more time than a simple transition - generations, rather than years or even decades), and the end point is not defined at the outset”. As a social order, the state of “*post imperium*” means that the Russia’s internal system is limited to the small number of institutions and practices rooted in its imperial Soviet past: authoritarian rule, strict control of political and economic competition, administrative control as the main method of ruling and privileges for the elite. The concept of post imperium also shows the internal rationality of Russia strategy, often criticized for its unpredictability. This policy does not aim to restore the Soviet empire, a project deemed too costly and outdated by the elite, but maintains authoritarian order within the country, ensuring Western interference in Russian affairs is kept to a minimum¹²⁸.

2. Orthodox diplomacy¹²⁹ : a new version of the “Third Rome”?

As one of the fundamental institutions of the current regime¹³⁰, orthodoxy is one of the traditional vectors of Russian diplomacy. On July 25, 2013, Vladimir Putin received the leaders of the fifteen national orthodox churches to celebrate the 1,025th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity

¹²⁵Parliamentary address by Vladimir Putin, April 25, 2005. http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml

¹²⁶ YASINE Evguenii, “*Fantomnye boli oushedshei imperii*”/ “The phantom pains of a past empire”, in KLYAMKINE I.M. (dir.), *Posle Imperii / After the Empire*, Moscow, Liberal Mission Foundation, 2007 p. 6.

¹²⁷ “*Kak vy schitaete, Rossiia zanimaet seichas v mire to polojenie, kotoroe zasloujivaet...*”/“In your opinion, does Russia currently occupy the position it deserves in the world...” Poll on Russia’s position in the world?” <http://www.levada.ru/archive/strana-i-mir/kak-vy-schitaete-rossiya-zanimaet-seichas-v-mire-polozhenie-kotorogo-zasluzhiva>

¹²⁸ RYABOV Andrei, *Postimperskaya Rossiia : sviaz vneshnikh i vnoutrennikh problem*, review of TRENIN Dmitri, *Post-imperium : evraziiskaia istoriia/Post-imperium: A Eurasian story*, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2012, 326 p., published in *Voенno-Promyschlennyi Kour’er*, no. 9, March 7, 2012.

¹²⁹ Expression coined by Dmitri Trenin. See TRENIN Dmitri, “Orthodox Diplomacy”, July 26, 2012, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=52501>

¹³⁰ See RICHTERS Katja, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: political, culture and greater Russia*, London, New York, Routledge, 2013, 212 p. ; BASTIAN Jean-Pierre, CHAMPION Françoise, ROUSSEET Kathy (dir.), *La globalisation du religieux*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2001, 282 p.

in Russia, a moment defined by Vladimir Putin in his opening address as “Russia’s choice of civilization”: “*The moral foundations of the Orthodox faith played a major role in the formation of our national character and the mentality of Russia’s peoples, revealing the best creative qualities of our nation, helping Russia hold a dignified place among the European and global civilisations*”¹³¹. The adoption of Christianity acted as a shield against “universal” values and norms under the pretext of the uniqueness of each culture, and it also helped expand Russian influence in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe. The “shared history of civilizations” is evoked as a possible basis for special relationships. During the meeting, both the Russian President and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia mentioned the fate of Christians in the Middle East, in particular in Syria and North Africa : for them, the supplanting of Christianity in these regions would be “catastrophic for civilisation”¹³². Concerning Eastern Europe, Orthodoxy is seen as a way to bring the Ukraine into the Eurasian fold. In the inaugural speech, Vladimir Putin specifically highlighted how Orthodoxy has “united Russia, Ukraine and Belarus through strong bonds of brotherhood”¹³³. The original site of the “baptism of Rus”, Kiev, provides another opportunity to stress the common historic and spiritual heritage of the two peoples. For the anniversary, an organizational committee was created in three countries, under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. On July 27, Vladimir Putin visited Kiev to celebrate the occasion alongside the Ukrainian and Belorussian presidents. As highlighted by political scientist Dmitry Trenin, the stakes are not merely economic and political: Vladimir Putin sees himself as the protector and promoter of a millennium-old Orthodox civilization.¹³⁴

3. *The movement towards a strategic Eurasian area*

The creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, directly inspired by the model of the EEC, is another instrument in the creation of Russia’s geostrategic role in the Eurasian area. While the preservation of USSR-created economic ties resulted in a number of bilateral trade agreements between Russia and its neighbours in the 1990s, at the turn of the millennium the movement to build a Eurasian union intensified. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 further sped up its creation, showing that Western democracy was not synonymous with good governance or economic progress. Since 2008, interest in the European model continued to fall, to be replaced by a union with the country who “with the same cultural history and legacy of civilization” in the post-Soviet area.

“Russia sees as a priority the task of establishing the Eurasian Economic Union aiming not only to make the best use of mutually beneficial economic ties in the CIS space but also to become a model of association open to other states, a model that would determine the future of the

¹³¹ *Vstretcha v predstaviteliami pomestnykh pravoslavnykh tserkvei/Meeting with representatives of different Orthodox Patriarchates and Churches, July 25, 2013, full address available (in English) on the Kremlin website <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/5758>*

¹³² TRENIN Dmitri, “Orthodox Diplomacy”, *op.cit.*

¹³³ *Vstretcha (...), op. cit.*

¹³⁴ TRENIN Dmitri, “Orthodox Diplomacy”, *op. cit.*

*Commonwealth states. The new union that is being formed on the basis of universal integration principles is designed to serve as an effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.*¹³⁵

While the authors of the project consider integration within the Eurasian area as an instrument for modernising the economies of its Member States (“pragmatic Eurasianism”), it is difficult to separate this pragmatism from the ideological component of the project, insofar as Eurasianism is well and truly an ideology: the architects of its construction freely quote Lev Gumilov during public speeches, stressing that the building of a Eurasian space is a natural and predetermined process¹³⁶. Vladimir Putin stresses the sovereign right of Russia to defend its project for the construction and development of the Union: “we will not halt the integration of the post-Soviet area”, the head of state declared in 2013.

2007: Creation of the Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (completed in 2011).

2009: Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan adopt a common approach towards the World Trade Organisation.

2011: Creation of the single economic area implying free circulation of goods, labour and service, the adoption of single customs tariffs, the harmonization of labour and immigration legislation. Creation of the Eurasian Economic Commission. Bilateral agreements become multilateral agreements. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan apply for membership.

2012: The single economic space comes into effect for the member states.

2013: Armenian president Serge Sargsian announces the decision of Armenia to join the Customs Union.

2015 (project underway): The single economic space comes into effect: 260 State functions relating to economic regulation and control to be transferred to the supranational entity of economic regulation. Establishing of grants, creation of a common market of financial, energy and transport services, harmonizing of anti-monopoly regulation, establishing of a single tariff system, conclusion of agreement protecting the rights of migrants¹³⁷.

Figure 3: Key milestones in the construction of the Eurasian Union.

¹³⁵ Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation 2013, *op. cit.*

¹³⁶ GLAZ'EV Serguei, “La Grande Europe des Nations, une réalité pour demain?” Colloquium held at the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation, June 10, 2013, Assemblée Nationale, Paris. Author’s personal archives.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, created in 2001 and which joins Russia with five oriental States (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) and the special partnership with China reflect the other axis of Eurasian orientation in Russian strategy, with a possible basis being the sharing of non-liberal values. However, the experts are sceptical about the real perspectives of the strategic Moscow/Beijing alliance. Though the partnership allows China to extract raw materials in Russia and increase its influence in the region, it remains asymmetrical, because the only benefits for Russia as yet are symbolical, in the rhetoric on a multipolar order. Furthermore, the fact that Russian policy focuses on keeping the Americans in check in Asia – as evidenced, for example, by the active lobbying of Kyrgyz authorities to force the American military out of Bishkek – tends to further Chinese influence in the region¹³⁸.

III. RENEWED CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

The rejection of the Western model and the resuscitation of the imperialist development rhetoric went hand in hand with the Americanocentrism of Russian strategy, which would influence a number of irrational decisions. The attitude to the United States is a clear indication of this change of heart: from the second half of the 1990s, both political declarations and common perception designated the United States as Russia's main adversary; certain experts spoke of a "truly anti-Western turning point" in Russian policy¹³⁹. At the strategic level, this "American obsession" consisted in challenging American interests and influence in every possible domain, with the cold war rationale resulting in considerable costs. The reduction of Russian participation in peacekeeping operations was another indication of the reorientation of Russian strategy towards confrontation and rivalry with the United States and NATO. In the 1990s, the Russian military took part in fifteen UN missions; after 2000, Russian participation in international peacekeeping was drastically reduced. Today, Russia occupies the 48th position in the world in terms of involvement in peacekeeping operations (in 1990, the USSR was in 18th place; in 1995, Russia was 4th, and in 2000 it was 20th¹⁴⁰).

This turning point in Russian strategy that some described as "irrational" was to be conditioned by the Russian elites' perception of real and imaginary threats. While real military threat to Russia came from the possible destabilization in regions of South and Central Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus, the Cold War imaginary maintained by the elites oriented defence policy and industry towards confrontation with the United States. The analysis of the main expenses of the Russian military budget is a perfect indication: whereas the declared objectives of the Strategy 2013 is an increase in the country's defence capabilities in the event of regional conflict, the lion's share of

¹³⁸ KOTKIN Stephen, "The Unbalances Triangle. What Chinese-Russian Relations Mean for the United States", *Axis of convenience : Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, Brookings Institution Press, 2007, 277 p., Foreign Affairs, Sept Oct 2009, no. 5, vol 88, pp. 130-138.

¹³⁹ PETERSSON Bo, "Coveted, detested and unattainable? Images of the US superpower role and self-images of Russia in Russian print media discourse", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2011, no. 14, pp. 71-89.

¹⁴⁰ ARBATOV Alexey, "Real and Imaginary Threats: Military Power in World Politics in the 21st Century", *Russia in Global Affairs*, April 15, 2013, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 5.

Russian military budget is earmarked to finance the building of a new generation of fighter jets and submarines, as well as developing costly aerospace defence programmes that target the bilateral strategic balance with the United States, challenging its strategic superiority¹⁴¹.

The “asymmetrical responses” mentioned by Vladimir Putin during his speech in Munich in 2007, i.e. a show of ability to challenge the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe, follows the same logic. In 2007, after American Missile Defence elements were set up in the Czech Republic and Poland, Russia unilaterally suspended its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. According to the Foreign Ministry, this decision “*is not an end in itself, but a means for the Russian Federation to fight for a new monitoring regime of the conventional forces in Europe*”¹⁴². However, the deployment of the antimissile protection system against NATO does not provide protection against missiles and air strikes from irresponsible regimes (Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan) and terrorist attacks from the south. Russia is acting as if the expansion of NATO’s infrastructure next to Russian borders is considered a greater threat than the proliferation of nuclear weapons, terrorism and the vulnerability of Russia’s southern borders. Furthermore, maintaining the Soviet military model (too many service members, conscription system) that may be of use in the event of a great regional war in Europe decreases Russia’s strategic mobility, a crucial element in the event of spontaneous local conflict, given the vastness of the Russian territory and areas of responsibility next to the CIS¹⁴³.

The limits of the “*Perezagruzka* Diplomacy 2011” (the term used for the period of détente, which literally means “to restart”, an attempt to start afresh) is another illustration of the persistence of reflexes inherited from the past that prevent the country from advancing to a constructive agenda. Paradoxically, while the declared goal of *perezagruzka* launched in 2011 was the suppression of “Soviet reflexes” and bitterness dating back to the Bush administration in Russian-American relations, it ended with a “war of lists”, an exchange of diplomatic swipes and the cooling of relations between the two countries. The adoption of the “Magnitsky Act”, also known as the “*Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal // Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012*” by the United States Congress in December 2012 sparked the deterioration of relations between Russia and the United States and the suspension of the “restart” period. This act forbid sixty top Russian functionaries from entering the United States, due to suspicions that they were involved in the death of Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer condemned for tax fraud who died in a prison in unclear circumstances, after revealing information about corruption within the current regime. This revelation of the malfunctioning of the rule of law in Russia resulted in immediate reaction by Russia. Vladimir Putin, calling this act “hostile”¹⁴⁴, gave the green light to the legislator: a few weeks later, the Russian

¹⁴¹ BLOOM Oliver, “Russia Plans 60% Increase in Defense Budget by 2013”, July 30, 2010, CSIS.ORG, <http://csis.org/blog/russia-plans-60-increase-defense-budget-2013>

¹⁴² “*Dovogor ob obychnykh vooroujennykh silah v Evrope (DOVSE). Kontrol nad obychnymi vooroujeniiami v Evrope*”/ “Treaty on the Conventional Forces of Europe. Control of the Conventional Forces of Europe”, Statement issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 27, 2013, <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-dvbr.nsf/6786f16f9aa1fc72432569ea0036120e/432569d800226387c32570430031541a!OpenDocument> (in Russian)

¹⁴³ ARBATOV Alexey, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ “*Putin prizval ‘adekvatno otvetit’ na zakon magnitskogo*”/ “Putin calls for an ‘adequate response’ to the Magnitsky Act”, BBC Russia, December 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2012/12/121213_putin_magnitsky.shtml

Parliament adopted a law concerning the famous “asymmetrical response” of Russia¹⁴⁵. It firstly established a “blacklist” of United States citizens “implicated in violations of the rights of Russian citizens” who were now banned from entering Russia; the second provision bans American citizens from adopting Russian orphans.

1. *Anti-Americanism: a shared sentiment*

While anti-Americanism is borne by the Russian political and military elite, it is nevertheless supported by the majority of Russians¹⁴⁶. Surveys show that the West continues to incarnate the potential enemy in the eyes of the Russian people. For a large majority, the United States, NATO and “Western political forces” constitute the main threat to the security of Russia, alongside Chechen separatists. 40% of Russians believe that Western criticism of Russia is an attempt to weaken it strategically.

USA	56%
Chechen separatists	39%
NATO	35%
Certain Western political powers	27%
Fundamentalist Islamists	20%
Former Soviet republics/ Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia	14%
Oligarchs	14%
China	10%

Figure 4. *Who, in your opinion, are Russia’s enemies? 2012 survey*¹⁴⁷.

American foreign policy continues to be negatively viewed: 75% of Russians describe the United States as an “aggressor aspiring to control all the countries in the world”, whereas only 8% see the US as a “protector of peace, democracy and world order”. 67% declare American policy to be “hypocritical”; 68% believe that the United States puts pressure on Russia and does not treat it as an equal partner. While the term “European Union” has positive connotations for 62% of Russians, the

¹⁴⁵ Law of December 28, 2012, no. 272-Ф3

¹⁴⁶ SHIRAEV Eric, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁷ VOLKOV Dmitry, “Russian Public Opinion 2012”, Levada Center report, <http://www.levada.ru/books/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-2012-eng>

term “NATO” has negative associations for 67%¹⁴⁸. Furthermore, the “American obsession” which causes Russians to see the “hand of America” in every international event is widespread among the population: most Russians believe that the colour revolutions in Eastern Europe and the “Arab Spring” were both orchestrated by the Americans. This revolutionary wave is a source of “concern¹⁴⁹” for 45% of Russians.

Despite the hopes placed by observers in the Russian youth born after the fall of the Soviet Union to “replace the vestiges of the KGB” and “gradually reshape the mentalities of the Russian elite¹⁵⁰”, recent studies show that the Cold War mentality and particularly anti-Americanism are solidly rooted in the minds of young Russians who cherish the restoration of their superpower. “Despite the fact that today’s young Russians have adopted iPods and other Western technological goods, their political attitudes are neither pro-Western nor pro-democracy¹⁵¹”, concludes the study carried out by Sarah Mendelson and Theodor Gerber in 2008. This generation, according to the study, has “absorbed Putin’s ideas: a super-sovereign State, outside the Euro-Atlantic community, clearly reticent (...) to international norms¹⁵²”. Nostalgic for the Soviet era although they didn’t live through it, they hold the imperial dream dearly and are convinced that Russia does not need to be taught any lessons¹⁵³.

2. The “Five Day War” and its symbolic implications

Russia’s lightning intervention in the conflict in South Ossetia in August 2008 revealed the lack of trust in international multilateral institutions (Security Council, OSCE) and a return to the traditional action model, based on realism, nationalism and a preference for brute force as the cornerstones of international policy. This conflict provided an opportunity for Russia to test its ability to impose its influence beyond its borders and stand up to the United States at the country’s borders, on this occasion in the Caucasus, unilaterally changing the rules established for conflict resolution¹⁵⁴. While the “Five Day War” “brought the relations between Russia and the United States to their lowest point since (...) the Cold War¹⁵⁵”, it received widespread acclaim within the country, raising the popularity of the Putin-Medvedev “duo” to an all-time high. It was seen in Russia as a first step towards a true reassertion of its position in the post-Soviet area. Whereas the international media compared the

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 207-210.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁰ “Russia’s young generation,” writes Zbigniew Brzezinski, “which will replace the vestiges of the Soviet-era KGB over the next ten years, is well-educated and has been exposed, virtually or directly, to the Western world. They have a much more democratic mentality than the previous generation. [...] Whatever their current political ideas may be, in a short time this explosion will produce an effect that will gradually reshape the mentalities of the Russian elite. This reshaping is essential for the future of Russia.” BRZEZINSKI Zbigniew, “Le choix de Poutine”, *Commentaire*, no. 122, 2008, p. 444.

¹⁵¹ MENDELSON Sarah, GERBER Theodore P., “Us and Them: Anti-American Views of the Putin Generation”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 2008, n. 31, pp. 131-150.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ MORENKOVA Elena, “(Re)creating the Soviet Past in Russian Digital Communities: Between Memory and Mythmaking”, *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*, n. 7, 2012, pp. 39-66.

¹⁵⁴ KING Charles, “The Five Day War. Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis”, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov – Dec 2008, no. 6, vol. 87, p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3.

conflict to the crushing of the Prague Spring, the majority of Russian media presented it as a symbolic revenge for Russia against the United States, highlighting the fact that the Georgian armed forces were trained by NATO. Meanwhile, public opinion of the United States and also the European Union fell to a historic low since 1991¹⁵⁶. This situation was not a result of Kremlin propaganda, which was noticeably absent throughout the conflict, but had taken root in deeply engrained ideologies: in Russian eyes, the United States wields the notion of democracy as it pleases, aiming to further expand their influence¹⁵⁷. The yearly Presidential Address given by Dmitri Medvedev to the Parliament in 2008 illustrates this rhetoric: *“In practice a qualitatively new geopolitical situation has been created. We really proved – including to those who sponsored the current regime in Georgia (Translator’s note: highlighted by the author) – that we are able to protect our citizens (...) and our national interests (...)”*¹⁵⁸. This regional conflict resulted in measures taken to increase the Russian capacity to resist the United States, such as maintaining the antimissile defence division in Kozelsk, the reinforcement of the Kaliningrad division, the deployment of the “Iskander” ballistic missile system, etc. Although the President was careful to stress that “these measures were forced”, the 2008 conflict and the return to the confrontation model nevertheless showed that Russia no longer feared a cooling of relations with the West, *“giving a clear sign to the West that there are lines that are not to be crossed”*¹⁵⁹. To sum up, the stance taken by Russian on the Libyan intervention in 2011, the Edward Snowden affair in 2013 and more recently, Russian policy towards the civil war in Syria, are all signs that this neo-archaic strategy persists.

➤ IS RUSSIA SUITED TO LIFE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?¹⁶⁰

In this article, we traced the origin of certain “reflexes” of Russian strategic thinking which, in our eyes, continue, in many aspects, to influence strategic decisions. Despite its supposed rationality, strategic thinking continues to be dominated by the legacy of the past, which means a return to the Soviet beliefs in the confrontation of the two civilizations, the hunt for enemies and the anti-American rhetoric that guaranteed the internal stability of the regime. Even if so-called liberal opinions are starting to be heard, Russian strategy is dominated by conservatism, the Eurasian concept and the idea that reclaiming former glory is essential. Though some believe to observe the «inability of Russia to start living in the 21st century¹⁶¹”, a large majority of the elites and the Russian people welcome this

¹⁵⁶ *Rezkoe uhoudchenie otnosheniia rossii k SSchA, ES, Ukraine i Grouzii* / The drastic change in Russian opinion towards the United States, the European Union, the Ukraine and Georgia, survey by the Levada Center, September 25, 2008, http://www.russiavotes.org/security/security_usa_nato.php

¹⁵⁷ KING Charles, “The Five Day War. Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis”, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov – Dec 2008, no. 6, vol. 87.

¹⁵⁸ Address to the Federal Assembly by President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, 5 November 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/11/05/2144_type70029type82917type127286_208836.shtml

¹⁵⁹ GIBLIN Béatrice, “Éditorial: Vingt ans après...”, *Hérodote*, 2010/3 no. 138, p. 3-7.

¹⁶⁰ The question could politely be asked of the other powers. What the 21st century is remains to be seen. We know that the 20th century only began with the global conflict of 1914. The new century is far from providing the keys to its knowledge. Did it begin with September 11 for example?

¹⁶¹ SHEVTSOVA Liliya, “Voina spiskov” / “War of the lists”, *Den’/Day*, April 16, 2013, <http://www.day.kiev.ua/ru/article/mirovye-diskussii/voyna-spiskov>

aggressive turning point, seen as the recovery of power after the “humiliation” caused by Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

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THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

Since the first decade of the new millennium, as Russia began to reassert itself purposefully on the international stage, Russian strategic thinking once again became a topic of concern for the experts. Is it “*open, predictable and pragmatic*”, if we are to believe the strategic doctrine adopted in 2013? For others, it is suffering from the “phantom pain of the Empire”, or perhaps it is simply non-existent. Its specificity appears to reside in the persistence of certain “strategic habits” inherited from the Soviet Union and particularly the Cold War. Numerous experts declare Russian strategic policy to be “irrational”: they believe the decisions made “in the face of all common sense” to be the echo of internalized reflexes from the confrontation era. However, though Russia has continued to position itself as the strategic heir to the URSS since 1992, the origins of its strategic thinking are much older.

The aim of this study is to decipher Russian strategic thinking, by bringing to light the key elements of its unique nature, while going further than the limiting context of the Cold War.

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