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RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS AFTER 2000 AND ITS CONCEPT OF SECURITY IN THE EURASIAN AREA

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Russia is usually considered a partner obsessed with security (Thom 2002; Thom 2022), and therefore easily explainable in terms of the realistic paradigm. However, Russia does not necessarily prefer this IR model: her behavior is determined by historical and doctrinal experience. According to Tsygankov (2022) Russian realism, focused on preventing external encroachment can be explained by Russia's semi-peripheral position in the world system, which makes Russia preoccupied with national survival. In its historical upbringing Russia experienced longitudinal periods of despotism and short, destructive intervals such as the 1917 revolution, WW2, or the Perestroika, which left a permanent imprint on the Russian political culture, with its most conspicuous pattern of siege mentality. Another opinion about Russian political state of mind is its obsession with geopolitics, therefore it seems useful to consider in what way Russian geopolitical concepts in the period between 1991 and 2024 perceive security in the Eurasian area. The main objective of this article is therefore to list the most important postulates of contemporary Russian geopolitical theories concerning the security of the Russian Federation. The analysis aims to answer two basic questions:

1. To what extent these theories are convergent at the level of diagnosing the geopolitical situation of Russia?
2. What are the most practical conclusions resulting from these concepts and how much can they affect Russia's *Realpolitik*?

The analysis is mainly based on primary source material consisting of books and articles published by most prominent representatives of the leading geopolitical schools in contemporary Russia.

Russian geopolitics has been studied by several research centers but because of its "adaptive" nature it was difficult to work out a convincing developmental scheme.

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The so far most coherent classification of the geopolitical thought in Russia was provided by Tsygankov (2003: 110–125) who abstracted five schools: Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasianist expansionism (Dugin, 1997; 2000), Dmitri Trenin's (2001) Westernism, Vladimir Kolosov and Nikolai Mironenko's (2001) geoeconomic doctrine of cooperation, Kamaludin Gadzhiyev's (2000) geopolitics of stabilizing the politically volatile region through collective security and Gennadiy Zyuganov (1999) and Nikolai Nartov's (1999) Civilizationist school. The doctrines are placed on a continuum from Expansionists through Civilizationists, Stabilizers, Geoeconomists to Westernizers. What can be concluded from this review is Russia's shift from pro-Westernism toward a shorter menu ranging from expansionism to civilizational isolation.

NEO-EURASIANISM

Neo-Eurasianism appeared in Russia immediately after the death of the only "Soviet Eurasianist," Lev Gumilev in 1992. The considerations of Aleksandr Dugin, the founder of this trend, are rooted in the interwar tradition of Eurasianism but even more in radical German conservatism and classic geopolitics, which resulted in such books as *Conservative Revolution* (1994) and the dichotomous, radically anti-Atlanticist *Foundations of Geopolitics* (1997).

In April 2001 Dugin initiated the Pan-Russian movement "Eurasia." As Dunlop (2004: 41) mentions, this could only happen with the help of Honor and Dignity Club, which grouped some veterans of the special services such as Vladimir Revsky or Pyotr Suslov. This step was followed by the establishment of the "Eurasia" Party in 2002. Dugin and his adherents, were forced to seek an ally and finally joined Sergey Glazyev's nationalistic bloc. However neither of the Eurasianists, was offered a place on the election list, which resulted in Dugin's withdrawal (Stepanov, 2003). In 2003 Dugin founded the International Eurasian Movement, which aimed at saving Russia-Eurasia as a full-fledged continental geopolitical entity to protect native cultures against liberal oppression imposed by the "world government," a secret representation of the "golden billion" (MED, 2001).

The most influential activists were the members of the "Eurasian Committee" – the executive body of the IEM: Chairman Dugin, vice-chairmen: Mikhail Gagloev, and Valery Korovin (Head of the Information and Analytical Department), Nataliya Melentyeva, Dugin's wife, and Dmitry Furtsev, a theologian. Gagloev, former pre-manager of Tempbank, after more than a decade became infamous being charged with multi-million embezzlement and ruled on the arrest in absentia (Soer, 2023). As Clover (2016: 241, 259, 275–276, 279, 281) remarks, Dugin and Gagloev were brought together by a radical Jewish nationalist, Avigdor Eskin. The alliance was mutually beneficial: the banker, through Dugin, gained contact with the Kremlin whereas Dugin received funds for his organization. The Kremlin benefited as well: it got a patriotic youth project which met the expectations of the elite.

After Dugin it is Korovin, the founder of the Eurasian Youth Movement, who keeps the consistently hard line of Eurasianism. In 2014 he became member of the Civic Chamber of Russia. The other important figures were such people as Leonid Savin the

Editor-in-Chief of the Geopolitics.Ru Analytical Center and Geydar Dzemat (1947–2016), a Russian-Azerbaijani thinker, the head of the Islamic Committee of Russia (1993–2016), who proclaimed the actual unity of “Abrahamic religions” i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam confronting godless America, the progressive New World.

The Eurasianist approach to security assumes at least three important issues. Firstly, Neo-Eurasianists basically refer to the security of the whole post-Soviet area desiring its urgent reunification. Secondly, technical issues seem less important than defining the enemy. This is clearly evidenced by Dugin’s interview from July 2021, where he expresses satisfaction with the fact that subsequent presidential decrees straightforwardly outlined this vision of the foe as the main enemy of Eurasia has always been the US, imposing its doctrine of Atlanticism on the rest of the world (Dugin, 2021). Thirdly, security in this doctrine goes beyond the military sphere and includes defense against ideological pressures from materialistic liberalism that denies traditional obligations. Good relations with NATO countries lead to strategic failure, and Korovin wildly criticized Medvedev’s declaration of rejecting confrontation with any foreign partner: this could only result in the return of the Western NGOs’ disastrous activities within Russia (Korovin, 2018: 77).

Korovin claims that the West had already started WW3 through its actions in Libya and Syria, but Russia has shown itself unprepared to defend its own interests. The West accuses Middle Eastern regimes of abusing their citizens, but turns a blind eye to the victims of its own “humanitarian bombings.” The new war, however, is of a hybrid, post-modern character, pursuing a clash of civilizations scenario, and is a result of the necessity to provoke a war in order to avoid a total meltdown of American finances. This is the proper motive for bombing Serbia and other interventions (Korovin, 2018: 92–96). A similar position is represented by Savin, who mentions such examples as the US “Reparations Strategy,” designed to form a unified network of global control and strike, the Operation Atlantic Resolve, launched under the auspices of NATO in April 2014 in the three Baltic countries and Poland at the initiative of the US, the preparations for new technologically modern conflicts, non-conventional and network-centric strategies, non-military devices such as insurgencies or terrorism (Savin, 2016).

ISLAND RUSSIA

A different proposal concerning security was put forward by Vadim Tsymbursky (1957–2009), a linguist and philosopher, who emphasized both the visionary and practical aspects of geopolitics (Ilyin, 2015: 128).

Tsymbursky understands Russia in three ways: (I) as the ecological niche of the Russian ethnic element, (II) as vast Eastern territories, an area difficult to develop but opened for Russian expansion in the 16th century, and (III) as a land separated from the West and other civilizations by the Grand Limitrophe, a kind of rimland or geopolitical buffer zone (Tsymbursky, 2007: 7–8, 187).

The Limitrophe consists of Eastern Europe, Transnistria, Transcarpathia, Southern Caucasus, Central Asia, the Turkic and Mongol regions between Russia and China, including Xinjiang and Mongolia. In Europe the Limitrophe is formed by Hungary,

Poland, Czechia, and the Baltic states. This territory is by the West usually described as genuinely European and Russia's barbarian encroachment into this area is condemned. However, the history of this belt prompts that the transitional area did not generally participate in the West European transition from feudalism to a modern capitalist system and even in terms of culture is a civilizational blend (Tsymbursky, 2007: 187).

Russia is treated by Tsymbursky as a "land behind the Grand Limitrophe," a gigantic island surrounded by a transitional zone. This concept of security, radically critical about Eurasianism, leads to the idea of blessed passivity and avoidance of external shocks. Tsymbursky refers to the history of Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. As he points out, "limitrophic" Poland broke out of political obscurity and grew to reach the German provinces of Silesia and Pomerania and the Russian provinces of western Ukraine and Belarus. In response, after 20 years, both powers attacked the limitrophic state. As a result, one of these states suffered revenge in 1941 and the other in 1945 (Tsymbursky, 2007: 196).

For Tsymbursky the policy of expansion toward the Limitrophe, is risky and poses a threat to the security of Russia; the "Russia in Eurasia" option is safer than "Russia-Eurasia." Moreover, Tsymbursky also realizes how dangerous it could be for Russians to be swallowed up by the southern Eurasian underbelly. As Aleksandr Zinoviev suggested in the 1980s, Russians might be forced to start an uprising against their own South someday (Tsymbursky, 2007: 194).

That is why, similarly to Solzhenitsyn, Tsymbursky prefers Russia to focus on its northeastern territories. As Tsygankov points out, Tsymbursky was a statist, and this made him call for focusing on internal consolidation. He also emphasized the need for Russia to have a long period of policy based on flexible alliances in order to create the necessary external conditions for internal recovery (Tsygankov, 2015: 16–18).

THE GEOECONOMISTS

Russian geoeconomics may be perceived as a variant of geopolitics or a separate, economic field of speculation. Tsygankov (2003: 115) correctly points to Kolosov and Mironenko (2001) as the ones who underestimated the military determinant of IR and turned to geoeconomics with its assumption that the structure of economic flows is prevalent (Tsygankov, 2003: 115).

According to Kolosov and Mironenko, after WW2 the emergence of nuclear weapons combined with the intercontinental means of delivery, and the possibility to use space for military purposes changed the position of all regions, equalizing the strategic forces of powers. Therefore, they claim that nowadays it is the geo-economic arguments that create the only rational arena for competition. The decent bipolar system of global security did not collapse after the end of the Cold War because of the largest powers' military potential. Rather, it simply changed and some regional centers (Turkey, India or Brazil) began to speak with their own voice. This position is close to Joseph Nye's, who claims that the coming decades will not develop according to the paradigm of American hegemonism as the US cannot monopolize world's economy (Kolosov, Mironenko, 2001: 20, 216–218).

The authors drew three scenarios of Russia's development. One is an authoritarian empire, suggested by National Bolsheviks and Communists, another one is the split of Russia into conflicting parts; finally the most desirable option proposed is the construction of a federal democratic state offering conditions for an open civil society. The imperial option, promoted by such activists as Dugin, is most insecure and will provoke anti-Russian movements and blocs in the international environment and finally lead to a long period of isolation and technological backwardness (Kolosov, Mironenko, 2001: 221).

Another version of geoeconomics is represented by Aleksandr Neklessa, an economist and political scientist. Neklessa is very critical about Russia's political evolution. He claims that his country was facing a long-term lack of security not from the unfavorable configuration of international relations but from the elites' belief that Russia's "right to history" results from great past or large spaces (Neklessa, 2006).

For Neklessa the slogans of the Putin era such as "sovereign democracy" look disappointing, and the Russian elite's state of mind resembles a risky game with unclear rules. The "directorate of the national corporation," willy-nilly or not, is obliged to satisfy this desire. As a result, a scam that lifts the spirits is most likely to be used to free the soul from the burdens of everyday life (Neklessa, 2010: 7). While America is drawing its own cartography of security zones, Europe is extending its free economic space, and China becoming world's main producer, Russia should turn to pluralism rather than to the imperial model (Neklessa, 2010: 37–38). Politicians often succumb to illusions when assessing threats, and security is threatened not necessarily in the way one could expect: Russia can be considered a problem for the US – but only in the military sphere, and "thermophilic" China does not seem to be a monster devouring the eastern part of Russia's icy provinces (Neklessa, 2019).

Russian geoeconomics remains in clear opposition to radical anti-Western concepts, especially Eurasianism. It sees threats mainly in the ignorance of global economic processes, rejects the idea of geopolitical conspiracy and prefers a sober analysis of economic flows instead.

A SURPRISING MILITARY REALIST

An important part of Russian geopolitical thought is associated with the ultra-nationalistic and imperialist Izborsk Club created in 2012. Among its members colonel general Leonid Ivashov (born 1943) is an influential "painted bird." In his long career he was the President of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, Head of the Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation of the Russian Ministry of Defense (1996–2001), or the chairman of the All-Russian Officers Assembly. In a 2001 book, Ivashov tried to outline most important geopolitical determinants of national security and suggested that in Russia geopolitical circumstances simultaneously create centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. The impossibility to pursue a strictly centralist policy, however, may destabilize the territorial administration and breed separatism (Ivashov et al., 2002: 339). Therefore, Ivashov's plan of building security assumes first a series of legislative acts, starting from a concept of Russia's geopolitical development, then

a shift toward the vertical scheme of decision, strengthening the position of domestic companies, focusing attention on consolidating the post-Soviet areas and reforming the armed forces, especially the nuclear potential (Ivashov et al., 2002: 400–406).

In later years, Ivashov's considerations caused surprise becoming critical about the Russian ruling team. In 2021 he stated that the path to security is through abandoning rampant materialism in social and international relations (Ivashov, 2021a: 506). Another of his geopolitical 2021 books sees the sources of threat to Russia's security in the disastrous unipolar international order. What he proposes instead is the Chinese model with a multipolar globe but unipolar Asia (Ivashov, 2021b: 731).

In January 2022 Ivashov initiated a scandalous address of the All-Russian Officers Assembly to the President and citizens of Russia. The document is highly critical about a possible military conflict with Ukraine, suggesting that Russia is on the verge of ending its history and that the real reasons for degradation lie in the dysfunctionality of the state model, the lack of professionalism in management. Ivashov's association does not ignore external threats, but they are not considered critical as strategic stability is maintained, nuclear weapons are under control, NATO force groups are not being built up and are not showing threatening activity. Ivashov supposes that the use of military force against Ukraine may call into question the existence of Russia as a state, making the Ukrainians her bitter enemies for centuries and letting thousands of young men die. Moreover, Ivashov expects Russia's confrontation with military personnel and equipment from many NATO countries. Russia's may become subject to severe sanctions and a pariah of the world community (Ivashov et al., 2022). These opinions were even strengthened by Ivashov in an interview in March 2023, where he said that the situation was even worse than he predicted. Russia may now be "defeated by intellect" as Ukraine mobilized the best brains whereas in Russia "people are twisting arms, intimidating, and imprisoning" (Ivashov, 2023).

DELYAGIN'S VISION OF SECURITY IN THE NEW GREAT GAME

Another manifestation of anti-Westernism bred within the Izborsk Club is the geopolitical anthropology of Mikhail Delyagin, who claims that the "collective West" is constantly striving to annihilate Russia, and attempts to appease the aggressor are pointless and rather increase the level of threat. A special platform for these destructive activities is Ukraine, where "the Nazis" are committing actual genocide of Russians. However, according to Delyagin, the Kremlin's policy was too lenient, which led to escalating aggression. Therefore, the only way to avoid this mortal danger is to "liberate Ukraine" (Delyagin, 2015: 200–225).

Delyagin's position is anti-Western in the human and technological aspect: he claims that the IT revolution is destructive, creating the category of *unnecessary people*. The middle class underwent pauperization as the native population of the West is being replaced by foreign cheap labor. The decline of the middle class leads to the withering of democratic culture and to another Great Depression due to falling demand. To prevent a collapse of the American securities market, the Shock Doctrine tactics is being applied, causing permanent threat (Delyagin, 2019: 116–128).

He also perceives Russia's security in light of China's growing importance and believes that its technological progress will incite aggressive patriotism, which needs to be cooled down, as the grassroots processes may become uncontrollable and then the affiliation of Siberia to Russia will become less obvious (Delyagin, 2016: 64–68).

Delyagin's considerations, sharing some common features with Neo-Eurasianism, do not strictly belong to geopolitics, but are structurally close to geoeconomics. However, his perception of threats is still oriented on confrontation whereas geoeconomists call for a security policy based on drift towards safe and wealthy economic zones.

KARAGANOV: FROM CO-OPERATIVE WESTERNISM TO NUCLEAR HELL

An interesting case of an expert suspected of being even more influential in the Kremlin than the Eurasianists is Sergey Karaganov (born 1952). As a specialist in Western affairs, he worked for the Institute of Europe of the RAS. He held many positions, being a member of a consultative team of the Security Council, or chair in World Economy and International Affairs at the HSE. In the recent years he has been focusing mainly on the activities of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy.

In the 1990s and early 2000s he presented a pro-Western position and tried to work towards a rational arrangement of Russia's relations with the US and European states. Over time his views changed and he saw the greatest threat in the Occident. His new zeal manifested itself in a striking way leading to the idea of a possible nuclear preventive attack on European countries.

In 2020 Karaganov published an essay concerning promotion of policies reducing the threat of war between nuclear-armed countries suggesting that the new concept be defined as “the state of relations between nuclear countries, in which the threat of any direct military clash between them and the threat of escalation of this conflict at the nuclear level are absent or low” (Karaganov et al., 2020: 44–45). However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Karaganov abandoned any hopes for a peace with the West. In April 2023 he stated that to avoid further victims and remove enemies from Ukraine it is necessary to use nuclear weapons and save the world from a “global disaster” as the West, losing the ability to suck wealth from the rest of the world created the conflict in Ukraine to tie the hands of Russia. Karaganov does not believe in the determination of American leaders: only a madman in D.C. could decide to launch a nuclear response to an attack in Europe (Karaganov, 2023).

In two articles published in 2024 Karaganov tried to present the challenges of today's world crisis and a way out. He mainly criticizes the wrong model of capitalism, based on financial profit without real benefits but also the climate change, the unjust redistribution of wealth, the war-like propaganda against competitors, the disappearance of the fear of war, a new qualitative arms race (Karaganov, 2024a). To become a secure country Russia should leave its previous Western orientation and turn to itself creating a reliable Siberian strategy and cooperate with the World Majority (Karaganov, 2024b). In this way Karaganov (and the Kremlin with him) turned to the postulate once put forward by the frustrated early Eurasianists: the Exodus to the East.

CONCLUSIONS

Our short insight into Russia's geopolitical state of mind allows to two regularities:

1. Russia's new geopolitics worked out conceptually different diagnoses of threats and challenges. While Neo-Eurasianism or Karaganov assume that the collapsing West is the world's greatest trouble, some concepts see the problem in internal deficiency and mistakes.
2. Different diagnoses led the thinkers to diverse conclusions. When the Eurasianists and Karaganov promoted aggressive military confrontation, Tsymbursky handed down the idea of a quiet den to protect the nation against losses, Ivashov warned Russia against heading toward a dead end, and the geoeconomists called for the intuition of exploiting global processes.

The likelihood of the Kremlin's real policy being adjusted to either of these conclusions in the coming years depends on the proximity of the particular pressure group to the Security Council of Russia and the presidential administration, on the one hand, and on the development of military operations in Ukraine as well as the overall geopolitical situation in the post-Soviet area, on the other. Therefore, a thorough observation of the rapprochement between any of the described ideologies (especially the Neo-Eurasianist and Karaganov's) and the Kremlin as well as the military sector might be applicable in creating a relevant response to the current challenge.

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ABSTRACT

The article raises the issue of understanding security in selected contemporary Russian geopolitical theories. The subject of the analysis is the neo-Eurasianist doctrine, the concept of Vadim Tsybursky's Island Russia; geoeconomic conceptions; the patriotic geopolitics of General Leonid Ivashov, surprisingly critical about the Kremlin's policies, especially about the invasion of Ukraine; the considerations of Mikhail Deliagin and the evolving views of Sergei Karaganov, who ultimately aimed at a nuclear attack on targets in Europe. A review of these concepts indicates that we are dealing with views that make different diagnoses and therefore lead to different recommendations.

Keywords: geopolitics, Russia, politics, security

GEOPOLITYKA ROSYJSKA PO 2000 ROKU I JEJ KONCEPCJA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA NA OBSZARZE EURAZJATYCKIM

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł porusza kwestię rozumienia bezpieczeństwa w wybranych współczesnych rosyjskich teoriach geopolitycznych. Przedmiotem analizy stała się doktryna neoeurazjatycka; koncepcja Rosji-Wyspy Wadima Cymburskiego, koncepcje geoeconomiczne; patriotyczna, lecz jednocześnie sceptyczna wobec polityki Kremla oraz inwazji na Ukrainę geopolityka gen. Leonida Iwaszowa; koncepcja Michaiła Deliagina oraz zmienne poglądy Siergieja Karaganowa, zmierzającego ostatecznie do nuklearnego ataku na cele w Europie. Przegląd tych koncepcji wskazuje, że mamy do czynienia z poglądami inaczej stawiającymi diagnozy, a przez to prowadzącymi do odmiennych rekomendacji.

Słowa kluczowe: geopolityka, Rosja, polityka, bezpieczeństwo