
THE GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMISM OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This paper examines the contemporary geopolitical dynamism of the Russian Federation, identifying the structural and actionable factors that define its strategic revisionism. The analysis investigates the ideological matrix centered on Neo-Eurasianism and the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) concept, the pivot away from the Western liberal order toward multipolarity, and the deployment of hybrid instruments within the post-Soviet "Near Abroad." This research argues that Russian foreign policy is governed by a perceived necessity to secure strategic depth and project power as a distinct pole in the international system. While increasingly decoupled from the West, Russia maintains its capacity to disrupt and reshape regional and global orders through asymmetric methods, challenging liberal principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.*

Keywords: *Russian Geopolitics, Strategic Revisionism, Eurasia, Multipolarity, Near Abroad, Hybrid Warfare, Eastern Pivot.*

Introduction: The Evolution of Russian Strategic Thought

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the former Soviet republics declaring their independence one by one, which meant that the territories and strategic benefits they provided to Moscow passed into the jurisdiction of the capitals of the new independent states. The metropolis of the former Soviet empire intended to regain its influence in these areas by

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various means, some of which were at the limits of legislation and international law (for example, by establishing bilateral economic relations and offering financial support in the form of loans), while others clearly exceeded this limit (the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to the Russian Federation).

Thus, local conflicts arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the successor states. In 1988–1989, war broke out in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, which lasted until 1994, when the Russian Federation's mediation efforts brought the hostilities to an end. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025) This was followed a year later by the outbreak of a short war in South Ossetia, Georgia, which lasted two years until a ceasefire, also mediated by Moscow, ended active hostilities for a time. The end of the violent clashes in South Ossetia in 1992 was immediately followed by a second civil conflict in Georgia, this time in Abkhazia. This new Georgian conflict ended in 1993–1994 as a result of mediation by the Russian Federation and the United Nations (UN). (German, 2006) Elsewhere in the region, a minor conflict between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the authorities in the Transnistrian region escalated into a civil war in March 1992, which lasted until July of that year. The year 1992 also brought civil war to Tajikistan, which lasted until 1997 and was resolved through a comprehensive peace agreement with the assistance of the Russian Federation, Iran, and the UN. (United Nations, 2000) Before the 21st century, the final major conflict in the former Soviet region was the war in Chechnya, which began in 1994, was suspended in 1996, resumed in 1999, and continues at a low level to this day.² (Gutkin *et al*, 2024)

At first glance, we can see how Moscow has mediated or participated in the ceasefire process in every conflict on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Further on, we will see that the Russian Federation has helped to accentuate ethnic segregation in those territories, and we will analyze these facts as elements of the hybrid toolkit used by Moscow to regain its former sphere of influence.

It should be noted that, with the exception of Tajikistan, none of the above-mentioned conflicts has been resolved through a lasting peace

² For an in-depth reading on the conflicts in the former Soviet sphere, the author recommends Janusz Bugajski, *Pacea Rece, Noul Imperialism al Rusiei*, Casa Radio Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005.

agreement. The conflict situations in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh have continued to exist in a state of uncertainty, characterized by the absence of active hostilities but without any obvious progress towards peace. The exceptions to the above are the five-day war in Georgia in 2008 and the resumption of fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016, events that underscore the fact that, in the absence of lasting peace, the possibility of violent clashes escalating and potentially spreading to neighboring countries cannot be ruled out. Karabakh in 2016, events that underscore the fact that, in the absence of lasting peace, the possibility of violent clashes escalating and resuming exists, with serious consequences for both the country concerned and the international system.

This raises the question: why have some of these conflicts become "frozen"? We can answer this question by looking at the objectives of the Russian Federation at the time, which remain relevant today, namely to restore Moscow's sphere of influence throughout the former Soviet region. And we can already see how a hybrid means was used, which consisted of triggering conflicts by using the administrative autonomy structure of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a structure that was completely unclear. Subsequently, in order to defuse the conflict, the Russian army would intervene in the conflict territories, thus laying the foundations for bridgeheads through which to exercise its power in the area, both militarily and politically and also economically. As mentioned, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are such cases, frozen conflicts, to which we add the still-hot events in Ukraine—Donbas and the ongoing war, the rekindling of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (although Russia is not a belligerent actor), the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and key territories in western Syria, such as the port of Tartus. All these examples are part of Moscow's neo-imperial logic of controlling bridgeheads in countries in its immediate or nearby neighbourhood, through which the Russian Federation can exert strategic regional influence.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not merely signal the end of a bipolar era; it initiated a profound ontological crisis for the Russian state. After a decade of domestic instability and a failed rapprochement with Western institutions under the Boris Yeltsin administration, the ascent of Vladimir Putin marked a decisive shift toward the restoration of "Derzhavnost" (Great Power status). (Kyle, 2026)

Contemporary Russian geopolitical dynamism is not a random series of tactical responses but a coherent strategic effort to revise the post-Cold War settlement. According to Mearsheimer (2014), the behavior of great powers is dictated by the pursuit of regional hegemony and the exclusion of rival powers from their immediate periphery. (Mearsheimer, 2014)

For Moscow, the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU is perceived not as a spread of democracy, but as a "containment" strategy designed to relegate Russia to a secondary tier of global influence. (Ibid) This research utilizes a qualitative approach, analyzing strategic documents and scholarly discourse to dissect how Russia integrates classical realism with 21st-century hybridity to assert its role in a multipolar world.

Faced with Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Russia has accelerated its "Pivot to the East," seeking to solidify an anti-hegemonic bloc – especially with China, India, and regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS. (Baunov, 2024) Through these forums, Russia promotes frameworks that exclude or marginalize the West while advocating for alternative financial systems, such as de-dollarization and local currency trade.

Moreover, the aforementioned aspects also have an impact on the ideological foundations of the Eurasianism and the "Russian World". Thus, Russian dynamism is deeply rooted in a unique synthesis of geography and destiny. Unlike Western maritime powers, Russia views itself as a "Land Power" (Tellurocracy) with a mission to organize the vast Eurasian landmass. (Lough *et al*, 2025)

Neo-Eurasianism and the Contestation of Thalassocracy

The intellectual framework provided by Aleksandr Dughin has significantly influenced the Kremlin's strategic corridors. Neo-Eurasianism posits that Russia is a distinct civilization, neither European nor Asian, but a unique synthesis of both. This ideology frames the geopolitical struggle as an existential conflict between the "Atlanticist" world (led by the United States and United Kingdom) and the "Eurasianist" pole (Dughin, 2012). From this perspective, Russia's dynamism is a defensive necessity to prevent the "maritime powers" from encircling the heartland. This ideology justifies the formation of continental axes—such as the Moscow-Beijing partnership—to counterbalance Western hegemony.

In this context, Moscow uses the "Russkiy Mir" concept as Soft and Sharp Power. The concept of *Russkiy Mir* (The Russian World) provides the ethno-cultural justification for intervention beyond Russian borders. By defining the nation not by citizenship, but by language, religion (Orthodoxy), and shared history, the Kremlin claims a "special responsibility" to protect compatriots in Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and Moldova. As Orzechowski (2020) argues, this concept transforms cultural affinity into a geopolitical weapon. When "compatriots" are perceived to be under threat, it serves as a *casus belli* for military or political intervention, effectively blurring the lines between domestic policy and international aggression.

In this context, Marcin Orzechowski refers to the justificatory narrative for the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine: a claim that Russia has an inalienable right to protect people who declare Russian origin or identify with Russian culture and history, and that military action is a defensive, corrective measure — framed as "denazification," "demilitarization," and "defense of traditional values." (Orzechowski, 2024)

"Russkiy Mir" operates as a hybrid instrument that converts cultural affinity into geopolitical leverage. By redefining compatriots as a Russian responsibility, it supplies a rhetorical and institutional toolkit the Kremlin uses for influence operations and, when expedient, coercive intervention. Countering that strategy requires a mix of domestic integration, information resilience, legal clarity, multilateral coordination and calibrated deterrence to limit the doctrine's ability to justify interstate aggression.

The "Near Abroad" and the Doctrine of Strategic Depth

A central pillar of Russian dynamism is the maintenance of a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space, termed the *Near Abroad*. (Huasheng, 2021) This is driven by a perennial insecurity born from the lack of natural geographic barriers on the North European Plain.

To prevent its neighbors from integrating into Western structures, Russia has perfected the use of protracted or "frozen" conflicts. In Transnistria (Moldova), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), and previously in the Donbas (Ukraine), Moscow has supported separatist enclaves that serve as permanent anchors against NATO or EU accession. International law generally prohibits the entry of states with unresolved territorial disputes

into NATO; thus, by maintaining these "grey zones," Russia exerts a de facto veto over the sovereign choices of its neighbors.

In this context, one can argue that the current Ukrainian Crisis represents „a Geopolitical Rubicon” as the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine represents the most violent expression of Russian strategic dynamism. (Temerko, 2022) Beyond territorial gains, the objective is the neutralization of Ukraine as a functional pro-Western state. Trenin (2016) suggests that for Moscow, a Western-aligned Ukraine is an "unacceptable vulnerability" that would bring NATO's military infrastructure within striking distance of the Russian heartland. The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent full-scale invasion are attempts to rewrite the rules of European security, moving from a rules-based order to a "Yalta 2.0" logic where great powers dictate the fate of smaller nations within their spheres of influence.

Nevertheless, the dynamism of the Russian state is perhaps most evident in its mastery of asymmetric warfare. The "Gerasimov Doctrine," named after the Chief of the General Staff, emphasizes that the lines between war and peace have become blurred.

Gerasimov (2016) noted that the ratio of non-military to military measures in modern conflict is 4:1. This includes cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns and the weaponization of energy. Russia utilizes these tools to exacerbate internal divisions within Western societies, targeting the "fault lines" of democracy. By supporting populist movements on both the left and right in Europe and North America, Moscow seeks to weaken the internal cohesion of the West, thereby reducing its capacity to project a unified response to Russian actions in the East. (Ibid)

Another important leverage of power consists of Russia's role as a major energy exporter, which is inextricably linked to its geopolitical goals. For decades, the construction of pipelines like North Stream was not merely an economic endeavor but a strategic attempt to create "energy dependency" in Europe's industrial heartland. (Zhang *et al*, 2024) This leverage allowed Moscow to influence the political discourse in states like Germany, complicating the European Union's ability to impose sanctions or provide military aid to Ukraine. The "energy weapon" is a prime example of how Russia utilizes its natural endowments to achieve strategic outcomes without firing a shot.

The Moscow-Beijing Axis and projections in the Global South

The relationship with China has evolved from a "strategic partnership" into a deep, albeit asymmetric alliance. While China provides Russia with an economic lifeline and a market for its hydrocarbons, Russia offers China military technology and diplomatic support in international forums. Tsygankov (2016) argues that this partnership is the cornerstone of Russia's vision for a multipolar world. By aligning with Beijing, Moscow ensures that it is not isolated and that the "Global South" sees an alternative to the Washington-led consensus.

Russian dynamism is also increasingly visible in Africa and the Middle East. Through the use of private military companies (PMCs) and arms sales, Russia has positioned itself as a "security provider" for regimes that are shunned by the West. From Syria to Mali, Moscow offers regime survival in exchange for access to strategic minerals and naval ports. (Katz *et al*, 2020) This projection demonstrates that despite being pressured in Europe, Russia remains a global disruptor capable of challenging Western interests across multiple continents.

The Russia–China alignment and Moscow's active footprint in Africa and the Middle East form complementary pillars of a strategy that preserves Russian relevance and creates alternatives to Western influence. The arrangement is mutually beneficial but asymmetric, and Russia's global reach is constrained by resource limits and growing dependence on China. External actors can respond by offering credible alternatives, disrupting exploitative modalities and strengthening regional resilience to transactional security offers.

Although China and Russia have different political cultures and differ in their assessments of one another's motivations, "they are fundamentally unified by a similar perception of international relations and their approach to foreign policy," according to a 2021 OSW report on the Beijing-Moscow axis. (Le Corre, 2023)

Conclusion

The geopolitical dynamism of the Russian Federation is a multifaceted phenomenon driven by a combination of historical grievance, geographic necessity and ideological conviction. Moscow's transition from a post-Cold War partner to a revisionist challenger marks a turning point in global

history. While the West continues to emphasize the principles of the liberal order, Russia operates within a realist framework of power blocks and spheres of influence. The future of global stability depends on the ability of the international community to balance Russian ambitions while managing the risks of a protracted, hybrid confrontation that transcends traditional battlefields.

The ideological foundation of Russian policy rests on several key assumptions: the belief in Western decline and moral decay, the need to restore the "historic Russian space" and the call for equal cooperation among civilizations in a polycentric world. Russia portrays itself as a guardian of international law and UN legalism, while reinterpreting these principles to legitimize its own expansionist actions. (Piekara, 2025)

The geopolitical trajectory set by Russia's revisionist turn creates a durable, hybrid contest that will shape global affairs for years to come. Managing this contest requires a balanced mix of deterrence, resilience, multilateral cooperation and selective engagement that preserves stability while limiting the space for prolonged, destabilizing confrontation.

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