

FROM REGIONAL TO GLOBAL – THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION STRATEGIES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The 21st century has surprised, after 2001, metamorphoses of the Russian Federation, both internally but especially at the external level, from a strategic regional identity towards a desired global identity. Identity and identification of power for the Russian Federation became a target centered on the recovery of the state’s major power and to restore the greatness of power. In the global context of geopolitical transformations, we can identify a new regional approach versus globalization – as a response reaction, in which new centers of power, and the powers print its presence in a world that tends toward structural changes of multipolar system. Thus, a strategic identity in the multipolar context is what wants and the Russian Federation.

The present article, it is focused to debate the new dimensions of international theory and practice and aims to analyze a few aspects of defining social – political and cultural identity, which allow us to point out the extent to which, both geopolitical and geostrategic policies, identify and mobilize the meanings of evolution on post-Soviet Russia. In a context on the multidimensional system of international relations, the proposed research was aiming at the theoretical and methodological issues focused on an interdisciplinary approach, specific geopolitical analysis, combining the meanings of identity perspective historical, political, social, economic and cultural.

Keywords: *International relations, globalization, regional security, geopolitics, identity.*

Introduction

The beginning of the evolution of the modern international state system was also the beginning of the geopolitical projections because geopolitics represents by translation a national, regional, or global space, governed by a state or a system of states, which is in a relationship dependent on the valences of power and identity and offers us the

opportunity to observe and reflect on the manifestation and evolution of power relations in a certain historical period.

At the end of the last millennium, post-Soviet Russia lost its status as a great power, the adventure of the greatness of the "Russian Idea" and messianic traditions declined in the "Great Russian Question", which subsequently manifested itself in the numerous attempts at identity-national retrieval.¹

The structural transformations involved for the Russia of the XXth century, quantitative losses through territory, resources, population, qualitative and identity losses through the normative crisis and the renunciation of the imperial identity of power in the context of new criteria for reporting in the system of international relations.²

The positioning between a strong European identity and the vastness of the Asiatic continent has created a force of geopolitical and geostrategic tension for the Russian Federation, which has continuously supported its identity matrix as well as its political discourse as an ideological support of various regional and global projects and strategies³.

Thus, the present article aims to analyze its aspects of identity, socio-political and cultural definition, which would allow us to identify to what extent its geopolitical and geostrategic conception supports and mobilizes the meanings of the Russian space of current international evolution.

We will note that post-Soviet Russia represents an important space-time framework, from the point of view of the evolution of ideology and the exercise of power, so that a geopolitical analysis regarding the internal functional structure of this important state, as well as the foreign policy regarded as geopolitics, its relations with the former union states, with the United States, the European Union but also the reference to the system of international relations, makes that, indeed, the study of the pragmatic actions of the Russian Federation, to be particularly relevant for understanding the Eurasian geopolitical projections, as an identity vision in the multidimensional context of the current globalization.

¹ Trenin, Dmitri, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the border between geopolitics and globalization*, Carnegie Moscow Center, Washington DC, 2001.

² Tsygankov, Andrei P., *Russia and the West: From Alexander to Putin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.

³ Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Great ChessBoard*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000.

Geopolitics – a model of knowledge of international processes

In order to understand and know the processes and phenomena that take place in the system of international relations, implicitly of the different current geopolitical situations, we must correctly understand what geopolitics is, regarded as an instrument of study and analysis, in the context of the new world order and of the processes of globalization, which necessarily support the redefinition of international relations approaches.

Today, geopolitics is perceived as an academic discipline and a field of political-strategic action at the state level, with an "integrative, visionary and planning character"⁴.

As a field of academic research, geopolitics has a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary character, and thus becomes a field of study of the combinations between geographical and political factors by determining the positioning of a state towards its neighbors, and in the regional or international context, towards the other actors of the system.

The need for methods and techniques of geopolitical analysis is dictated by the radical transformations that have happened and are happening in the world, both regionally and globally. The research of international relations with the help of geopolitics has led to the change of the image and representation of the system of international relations.

Geopolitics and geostrategy have a different object of study and must have their own methods, but they investigate the same reality, the one that makes possible the mixing of the methods used, depending on the concrete situation. Through geopolitical methods, the interests of the actors in a region can be deciphered, and through geostrategic methods we find out how and by what means these interests will materialize⁵.

The knowledge of the geopolitical space of action must be aimed at a set of characteristics: economic, political, military, ideological, because the geopolitical value of a space is given by its dominant characteristic. The indicators of the geopolitical space are the power potential of each actor, the interest and perception of the geopolitical field,

⁴ Parker, Geoffrey, *Geopolitics. Past, Present and Future*, Pinter, London, 1998, p. 11.

⁵ Hlihor, Constantin, *Geopolitics and geostrategy in the analysis of contemporary international relations*, Carol I University, Bucharest, 2005, p. 23.

they are associated with the analysis of political, social, demographic, religious, ethnic values⁶.

From my point of view, without a deep knowledge of the political realities, geographically related to the global economic and social landmarks, the geopolitical analysis of the international political phenomena, with the support of maximizing the representation of the internal state policy, even viewed through the prism of a spatial unfolding and not only temporal, can only be the object of a "geopolitics without substance".

Redefinition of power – global strategy and domination

The phenomenon of power, in terms of its role in the functioning of the international system, reveals a special, constant interest and creates debates and controversies among specialists in the field of political science, international relations, materialized in various theoretical approaches, according to its importance and an analysis of power and its distribution in the international system is required, especially at a time when power is undergoing important transformations after the breakup of the Soviet Union, by relating it to the global dimension.

For the Russian Federation, the option of realistic transition, the pragmatic realism of the early twenty-first century was the right response in difficult times, even if the subsequent motivation of unilateral geopolitical actions and projects no longer had real coverage in accepting hegemony but manifested itself fervently at the level of regional political discourse and practice.

The Russian Federation has challenged the American model because it imposes its *pattern* of solving the legitimacy dilemma caused by the anarchic nature of the international system, as well as the American responsibilities for the national interest and for the international liberal order that involves the use of military, economic and financial power, which the United States has⁷.

Thus, the Russian Federation supports the need for "American unilateralism" to be replaced by an "ideological multilateralism", pragmatic, which supports international

⁶ Herod, Andrew, Gearóid Ó., Tuathail, Roberts, Susan M, *Unruly World? Globalization, Governance and Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 5.

⁷ Collins, Alan, *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, p. 12.

institutions and respects international law⁸. Contemporary Russia must rethink its role in the international system, through the perspective of recalibration as smart power capable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century and through actions that do not cause damage either to themselves or to the other actors with whom it collaborates, a difficult mission in the offensive conditions of the Kremlin's current power policy.

In the international arena, there are continuous debates on the global character of the world and on the new global geopolitical architecture. Political processes and the effects on international life led to a new vision of a balance of power in the world, of the roles imprinted on the main actors who must manage the opportunities of the new world order⁹.

Current international relations are characterized not only by a sharp dynamic, but also by complexity and multidimensionality. From a bipolar system existing during the Cold War, today we have a system with several poles of power of a different nature: economic, ideological, political.

The actions of states are determined by the existing relations between them, relationships that are determined by the characteristics of these states, from the exercise of influence to cooperation or to dependence and domination. Thus, we note that as factors of the international state of the states, the economic potential, the technological development, the legitimacy of the political regime are increasingly affirmed, besides the size of the territory and the number of the population, resources, the military potential, and the geopolitical position¹⁰.

The changes in the status of power at the beginning of the twenty-first century changed not only the importance of military power, but also the resources allocated to it. Economic resources can produce military power, as well as a specific soft power behavior, an example of success such as the United States or the European Union¹¹.

For the Russian Federation, the option of realistic transition, the pragmatic realism of the early twenty-first century was the right answer for that historical moment, even if the subsequent motivation of unilateral geopolitical actions and projects no longer had real coverage but manifested itself fervently at the level of regional political discourse and practice.

⁸ *Idem*, pp. 14-15.

⁹ Krahmann, Elke, *Conceptualizing Security Governance*, in *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 38, no. 1, p. 7.

¹⁰ Williams, Paul D., (ed.), *Security Studies. Year Introduction*, Routledge, London & New York, 2008, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Nye, Joseph Jr., *Soft Power. The path to success in world politics*, European Institute, Iași, 2009, p. 37.

The Russian Federation – from regional to global

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in December 1991, fourteen independent states emerged, resulting from the former Union Republics and the Russian Federation, part of these independent republics formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Since post-Soviet Russia, by population, territory, industrial capacity, economic power, and armed power was superior to the other former union republics, it became the rightful successor in the foreign affairs of the former USSR and took its place in international organizations.

The formation of the Russian Federation was achieved with a territorial decrease that led to a geostrategic rebound. According to statistical data, a geographical contraction of about 17 million km² was achieved, and "today Russia holds about 50% of the Soviet population, 60% of the industrial capacity and 70% of the surface", mentions Dmitri Trenin¹².

Although it retained the atomic arsenal and continued the position of the Soviet Union as a world nuclear power, comparable to that of the USA, Russia's role on the international stage was greatly diminished compared to that of the former USSR. The Russian Federation did not have the same economic, military, and political power as the USSR. In Trenin's view, it remained, however, "a basic piece in international relations through its territorial and human weight, through its nuclear weapons, through its economic potential, through its leading role for the Slavic world"¹³.

But is Russia a great power? When, in the early 1990s, in the environment of the system of international relations, the Russian Federation was not considered a power as great as the former USSR, Russia's response was that "it is impossible... Russia must be a great power." This phrase is considered an axiom in the politics of Russian identity and power, visible throughout history and to which Vladimir Putin in his speeches often makes references such as *derjava* or "great power" revived¹⁴.

Russia's preoccupation with having the status of a great power has been permanent and dates back historically, since the time of Tsar Ivan III and especially Peter the Great, who has permanently linked the security policy to the recognition of the status of great power by the other important states of Europe in different periods of history. This

¹² Trenin, Dmitri, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 31.

¹⁴ De Tigny, Anne, *Moscow and the world. The ambition of Grandeur: an illusion?*, Minerva, Bucharest, 2008, p. 16.

concern was of great importance to Russia because it places it at the center of Russian identity politics, and in this way, Russian nationalism has historically coalesced around this issue.

Currently, the Russian Federation is not a great world power, if we consider that the way of governing, the type of regime and its efficiency are key factors for the great powers, but it can be considered a great power in the sense of Max Weber, according to which prestige is obviously linked to military and economic factors, power and spheres of influence¹⁵.

The Russian Federation relies in thought on the concepts of state and sovereignty, while the great European powers rely more on the concepts of civil society and integration, it also seeks to be recognized as a great power from a traditional point of view, but it visibly stands out that it is "another player"¹⁶. With a Eurasian geohistorical, the current Russia tends to conceive and achieve an effective national security policy, its objectives being: ensuring the security of the state, maintaining strategic nuclear parity with the United States, the need to act as a dominant power in the "near abroad" and facing the continuous global economic crises.

Russia cannot be compared to the United States, France, or The United Kingdom, where liberal values have deep traditions. For Russia, the state, with its institutions and structures, has always played an important role, exclusively in the life of the country and its people. For the Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly, something they must contend with, but, on the contrary, a source and guarantee of order, an initiator, and the main force of movement in any change¹⁷.

The Russian Federation has made regional efforts to restore its international prestige. First of all, maintaining the leading role among the ex-Soviet countries is a matter of prestige for Russia, as the successor of the USSR and also, a way to ensure stability in the "near foreign" in which it has national security and economic interests, exercises a classic *Realpolitik* policy, but "pragmatic" in order to diminish Western and NATO influence in the ex-Soviet territories¹⁸.

¹⁵ Poede, George, *Dominance and power in Max Weber's thinking*, Tipo Moldova, Iași, 2010, pp. 94-95.

¹⁶ Hednskog, Jakob, Konnander, Wilhelm, (ed.), *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of security under Putin*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 19.

¹⁷ Tsygankov, Andrei P., *op. cit.*, pp. 56-61.

¹⁸ Secieru, Stanislav, *Russia after empire: Between regional power and global custodian*, European Institute, Iași, 2008, pp. 156-157.

Also, the Russian Federation has reaffirmed itself as an important global actor, both at European and world level, deftly using for its own benefit the political-military and economic external conjunctures. The international opportunity that opened up as a consequence of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11 and the Iraq war, led to different manifestations of force at the regional level and its own sphere of interest, Transnistria, Ossetia, Abkhazia, such as the intervention in Georgia in 2008, annexation of Crimea in 2014 and now Ukraine in 2022.

The Russian Federation wants *to become a great power again* in a multipolar world due to the geopolitical, geoeconomics and geostrategic situation in Eurasia as well as the fact that it is a nuclear power and also possesses a classically functional arsenal. Russia is an influential power in terms of its political importance, through its involvement in world affairs, a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It can also be said that Russia remains a great power from a traditional point of view, having its own national specificity, with its own economic development and its own conception of democracy.

Conclusions

Global transformations have led to a relativization of identities, both individual and collective, whether they are national, political, ethnic or religious identities, and at the same time generated adverse reactions to these identities or attempts to rebuild new identities.

Geopolitics, through its methods of analysis, can give answers to the systemic questions "why" a state enters into rivalry relations, in a geographical space, with other states or "why" shows a relative interest in states or regions in supporting the equation of power or affirmation on the stage of international relations.

The presented work aimed to qualitatively analyze the security and cooperation strategies in the Eurasian space starting from the concept and foreign policy of the Russian Federation, as an expression of the regional and global vision by objectifying the translation from the status of a regional power to a status of a global power, practically recovering the "greatness of power" of imperial substance.

In the global context of geopolitical transformations, of the gap between regional and global as a reaction-counter-reaction approach, new powers and centers of power imprint their presence in a world that tends towards structural changes of a multipolar

type. A "strategic identity" in a multipolar context is what the Russian Federation also wants, promoting cooperation in different disciplines, in order to give it and sustain an identity of great power, both in the Eurasian space and globally.

From my point of view, I believe that the multidimensional transformations at the political-social and identity-cultural, ethnic and religious level have implicitly induced structural changes from a geopolitical point of view, which we could interpret as geosystemic, by redefining the factors contributing to the generation of power and influence policies, in order to maintain some advantageously positioned geographical supports and imperatively necessary for the construction and recognition of the power status in the new world order, as is the case with the Russian Federation.

All the data presented above reveals that the Russian Federation does not yet have all the items of a great power in the conventional sense, but all the actions of this state consistently support its objectives to maintain its regional influence in the former Soviet states, to limit the "losses" in the Eurasian space and to promote the conditions that allow the redefinition of the current Russia, so that, in the long run, it regains, through geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomics dimensions, its role as a great power in a multipolar world.

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