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The Eurasianist Appeal: How Neo-Eurasianism Justifies Putin’s Foreign Policy

1. Introduction

In the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, identity has proved to be a difficult concept to formulate.¹ While the state-building process—the defining of internationally accepted state boundaries and the creation of functioning political institutions within these boundaries—has achieved varying degrees of success in the former Soviet republics, the nation-building process—the fostering of a national identity for the people within those borders—remains complicated, especially in the multi-ethnic Russian Federation. Traditionally the center of a vast empire, Russia has existed within its current borders as a modern nation-state only since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a configuration that in retrospect is widely “considered to be an imperial entity or as having significant imperial characteristics.”² Moreover, the combination of Russia’s imperial heritage and the continued residence of Russian-speaking and ethnically Russian minorities in neighboring independent countries that have historically been included in the “just borders” of that empire further complicates Russia’s identity as a nation-state.³ Questions about where the Russian Federation sees itself in the “pantheon of nations” and what identity paradigm should shape that answer not only characterized this transition period but also left the idea of a national philosophical framework open to interpretation and manipulation for political purposes.⁴

¹ See Teper, 380.
² Ibid.
⁴ Schmidt, 87.
In the context of the identity issues characterizing the post-Soviet era, the concept of “Eurasia” emerged among scholars of the region as an acceptable designation for the geographic area of the former Soviet space.\(^5\) The term “Eurasia” is first and foremost associated with a “group of brilliant and original [Russian] interwar émigré intellectuals” from various fields, including geography, linguistics, Oriental studies, and Orthodox theology.\(^6\) In order to make sense of the violent and chaotic years of revolution and civil war in Russia after 1917, this group of thinkers developed an ideology called Eurasianism.\(^7\) At its core, Eurasianism posits the existence of a Eurasian continent that is neither East nor West. It “supports the idea of an organic unity of cultures born in this zone of symbiosis” between the Russian, Turkic, Muslim and Asian worlds.\(^8\) Neo-Eurasianism, the modern interpretation of this interwar ideology, entered Russian political discourse in the 1990s among various other conservative movements. Based on the politicization of an “ideology with a total, global ambition […] around the concept of Eurasia,”\(^9\) neo-Eurasianism attracted the attention of intellectuals and politicians because it offered a specific national idea for Russia as the heart of an organic Eurasian empire.\(^10\) Less a structured movement and more a social, political and economic project propagated by some of Russia’s public figures, neo-Eurasianism incorporates feelings of imperial nationalism and traditional pan-Slavist ideas of Russian messianism.\(^11\)

In the first decade of the 2000s, neo-Eurasianist ideology differed among individualized movements depending on the political goals of a particular movement’s leader. Today, however,

\(^{5}\) See von Hagen, 446.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., 454.
\(^{7}\) See ibid., 454-455.
\(^{8}\) Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism,” 115.
\(^{10}\) von Hagen, 455.
\(^{11}\) See Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism,” 115.
one strain of neo-Eurasianist thought has come to dominate the field; it is articulated most zealously by Aleksandr Dugin, who successfully politicized his ideas and presented them to the Russian public as a cohesive worldview.\textsuperscript{12} Formerly a fringe publicist, Dugin has become an increasingly influential public spokesman for the ideology, advocating the belief in an ongoing struggle between the “heartland,” or Eurasian civilization with Russia at its center, and Atlantic civilization, the part of the world that embodies democratic principles.\textsuperscript{13} These ideas narrativize Russia’s struggle with the West, particularly with America, and the desire for a Eurasian region unified under Russian influence. Neo-Eurasianism, in essence, articulates a national identity that satisfies Russia’s desire to reclaim a great power status and justifies some amount of aggression and militancy in pursuit of that goal. Accordingly, in its pragmatic, politicized form, neo-Eurasianism can justify certain actions in foreign policy that the liberal world order would condemn.

Despite the growing popularity of an ideology that encourages imperial expansion, most of the existing literature on neo-Eurasianism casts doubt upon its potential to influence foreign policy. Mark Bassin et al. acknowledge Eurasianism as a paradigm for the organization of the Russian Empire’s political space and as a geopolitical ideology that “spatializes” Russian identity.\textsuperscript{14} Marlene Laruelle posits that Dugin, as the predominant neo-Eurasianist, may be responsible for Putin’s successful rhetoric about the integration of the Eurasian region.\textsuperscript{15} Although these scholars offer thorough analyses of Eurasianism’s and neo-Eurasianism’s roles in shaping Russian identity, they do not scrutinize the modern political ramifications of the latter’s rise to prominence. Writing just before the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Matthew Schmidt and

\textsuperscript{12} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 127–28.
\textsuperscript{14} See Bassin, Glebov, and Laruelle, 11.
\textsuperscript{15} See Laruelle, “The Paradoxical Legacy of Eurasianism in Contemporary Eurasia.”
Paul Pryce both analyze the rhetoric of Putin’s “Eurasianist slant” but conclude that Dugin’s policy ideas are unlikely to be implemented.\textsuperscript{16}

Russia’s recent foreign policy actions complicate and even contradict these conclusions because they indicate its desire for prestige in, and influence over, a unique geographic area as defined by neo-Eurasianism.\textsuperscript{17} Putin’s successful push for the formation of a major international economic entity called the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), comprised of Russia and four other post-Soviet states, has been touted as a counter-measure against the trans-Atlantic community and demonstrates an aggressive foreign policy preoccupied with the Eurasian space.\textsuperscript{18} The annexation of Crimea in 2014 also fits this pattern. The discourse used to justify the annexation includes neo-Eurasianist geopolitical and philosophical constructions of Russian identity, and Putin’s irredentist rhetoric utilizes Dugin’s terminology.\textsuperscript{19} The aim of this paper is to build upon earlier analyses by examining the strong presence of neo-Eurasianism in Putin’s foreign policy within the context of Russia’s “evolution towards a more nationalistic and […] consolidated authoritarian regime.”\textsuperscript{20} Putin has granted Dugin’s neo-Eurasianist ideas a more influential role in post-Soviet Russian politics, co-opting their overarching geopolitical view of Russia as the heart of a non-Western civilization in order to justify an increasingly aggressive foreign policy and, ultimately, to offer an alternative to Western dominance in the management of the global security architecture by establishing post-Soviet Russia as a key player.

\textsuperscript{16} See Schmidt; Pryce.
\textsuperscript{17} See Teper, 381.
\textsuperscript{18} See Pryce, 29.
\textsuperscript{20} Kuzio, 2.
2. History of the Eurasianist Intellectual Movement

Eurasianism emerged as a philosophical political movement in the 1920s in the wake of the diaspora following the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the subsequent Civil War.21 Developed by Russian émigrés in the intellectual circles of Prague, Berlin, and Paris, it combined philosophy, politics and ideation with geography.22 These émigrés’ discussions focused on “the catastrophic collapse of the imperial state and society” as well as the potential outcomes of the Russian Revolution and Civil War.23

Eurasianism can be summarized by three main postulates. First, it presupposes the existence of a Eurasian cultural unity as the unifying force of a presumed Russia-Eurasia continent. The Eurasian people—those with Russian or Slavic ethnic roots, as well as Turks, Mongols, and other Asiatic nomadic groups—are united “by a common historical fate, common work in the creation of one and the same culture or one and the same state.”24 Second, it argues that the world is divided into civilizations or cultural areas, which Eurasianists considered the main actors in history. They saw Europe as a unified entity and part of the civilization they identify as the Euro-American world, which is unique from Eurasian civilization. Finally, it proposes that the world is further defined “by a perpetual opposition between two civilization stereotypes,” the Orient and Occident, also referred to in classical Eurasianist literature as Atlantic and Eurasian civilizations, respectively.25 Eurasianism determines Russia to be not a

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21 See Bassin, Glebov, and Laruelle, 2.
22 See Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism,” 116
23 Bassin, Glebov, and Laruelle, 2–3.
common state but an entire civilization, one that effectively could be compared to “Atlantic Civilization” or the whole of Europe.26

Some of the basic tenants of Eurasianist thought have roots in pan-Slavism, especially the theories about the cultural historical bonds of certain peoples and about Russian civilization as a separate geographic entity. Like pan-Slavism, the movement sought to unite people of a common Slavic background in pursuit of cultural and political goals. The pan-Slavist naturalist and philosopher Nikolai Danilevskii (1822–1885) deeply influenced the Eurasianists as the first to define Eurasia geographically as a “vast unbroken landmass bounded on its edges by the high mountain ranges of the Himalayas, Caucasus, and Alps.”27 Danilevskii also proposed that the inhabitants of this geographic plain share the experience of subjugation under the Mongols and must therefore “unite under Russian leadership” to create a new society separate from Europe.28

According to the Eurasianists, Russia’s cultural affiliation with Asia is stronger than its affiliation with Europe, so they promoted positive discourse about the East that emphasized Russia’s Asian nomadic roots: “Our relation to Asia is warmer and more intimate since we have the same origin.”29 The Mongol Empire held a position of historical importance for the Eurasianists primarily because they considered it the first to unify the Eurasian landmass. Through the conquests of Chingis Khan and his successors, the Mongols created “a state tradition that embraced the entire continent,” and their empire-building “was deemed crucial in saving Russia and its Orthodox identity from the ever-aggressive Catholic West.”30 Here Eurasianism again draws from Danilevskii’s ideas about the way in which Russian

26 Pryce, 30.
27 Schmidt, 90.
28 Ibid., 91.
30 Bassin, Glebov, and Laruelle, 8.
expansionism, which he called an “organic and natural process” of gathering lands that were “predestined for Russian occupation and assimilation,” differed from European colonialism. In fact, the European idea of colonization as a “civilizing mission” did not necessarily motivate the encounters between Russian imperial explorers and the Bashkirs, Kazakhs, and Turkmen. Many Russians “displayed deep affinities with their eastern neighbors,” seeing themselves as similarly “uncivilized.”

Insofar as its affinity with Asia is concerned, the Eurasianist movement also offered an early critique of Eurocentrism. Rather than see Europe as “the most exalted expression of human social, cultural, and intellectual development,” Danilevskii identified the continent as fundamentally violent, individualistic, and materialistic. Ultimately, the Eurasianist intellectuals, reflecting on Russia’s colonial and cultural ties to the East, cited the country’s imperial character, geographic location, and ethnic make-up to conclude that Russia was more Eurasian than anything else. Staking out a “Third Way” between capitalism and communism and between monarchy and democracy, rejecting Europe, and anticipating the eventual collapse of the West, Eurasianism determined Russia to be an authoritative state that “leans on strong ideas, [but] does not seem painful nor retrograde” when it does.

3. Neo-Eurasianism’s Political Moment

Eurasianism was “rediscovered” as a term in 1990–1991 when it appeared in the Russian nationalist journal Den’. The term’s ideological revival occurred in the late 1990s, just as Russia’s brief fascination with the West, particularly with the United States, was coming to an

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31 Bassin, 11.
32 Maiorova, 13.
33 Bassin, 9.
end. Complicating the process of redefining national identity in the post-Soviet era, Russia’s economic crisis of 1998—and the subsequent massive devaluation of the ruble—drastically changed the political environment into one more accepting of conservative ideas. Many Russians identified the crisis as proof that attempts to successfully imitate the Western market system had failed. Russia was seeking a way to reclaim its status as a great power, and neo-Eurasianism offered the idea of empire as a solution. Neo-Eurasianists sought to justify Russia’s “largely rentier economic model and authoritarian proclivities” by combining “traditional Russian ideals with […] messianism to ‘rescue’ Russia from […] liberalization, Europeanization or Atlanticism, and the increasingly globalized economy.”

3.1 Alexandr Dugin’s Geopolitical Neo-Eurasianism

The neo-Eurasianism that surfaced in post-Soviet Russian political discourse “reverted to the primordial Russian ideal that combines Orthodoxy and conservatism as the national identity of the state.” Indeed, the predominant strain of neo-Eurasianist thought is a pragmatic one that draws upon classical Eurasianism’s intellectual richness but focuses on geopolitics. This version is championed by Alexandr Dugin, who perceives Eurasia to be not only a unique geographic region and civilization but also an ideological principle that is meant to “resist and fight the global unipolar dominance of the United States.” Credited with defining neo-Eurasianism in the post-Soviet Russian context and widely recognized as its spokesperson, Dugin is relatively well known in Russia as a “public political philosopher.” Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism aligns with

36 See Shlapentokh, 381.
37 See Pryce, 31.
38 Ibid., 117.
39 Stafford, 21.
40 Ibid.
41 Beznosiuk, 60.
42 Schmidt, 91.
other versions in its imperial conception of Russia but is distinguished by extreme right-wing elements, such as German geopolitical principles and occult discourses on Russia’s national mission.⁴³ His ideas have been heavily influenced by foundational geopolitical theorists such as Halford McKinder, Karl Haushofer, Alfred Mahan, and Nicholas Spykman.⁴⁴ Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism describes the renewed tensions between the United States and Russia in terms of McKinder’s geopolitics, which he also uses to explain the need to combat attempts by the West to diminish Russia’s role in the Eurasian space.⁴⁵ These unique elements and their potential practical applications have allowed Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism to influence mainstream politics beyond the ideological realm.

Dugin has successfully positioned himself as the successor to the theory’s founders, establishing some semblance of continuity between Eurasianism’s classical and modern versions.⁴⁶ He presents his neo-Eurasianist thesis in his book Osnovy geopolitiki [The Foundations of Geopolitics], which is now used as a textbook in some institutions of higher education.⁴⁷ The books implores modern Russia “to unify the Eurasian landmass under the unique cultural and civilizational values outlined by Danilevsky.”⁴⁸ The Russian people are only the core people of a vast empire, Dugin claims, and Russia “never made its goal the creation of a mono-ethnic, racially uniform state.”⁴⁹ Russian nationalists, therefore, “should not employ state but, rather, cultural-ethnic terminology” in recreating their “supranational empire.”⁵⁰

⁴³ See Laruelle, 126.
⁴⁴ See Beznosiuk, 63.
⁴⁵ See Shlapentokh, 381.
⁴⁶ See Pryce, 31.
⁴⁸ Schmidt, 91.
⁴⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, Osnovy geopolitiki (Moscow: Arktogeia, 1997), 190, quoted in Dunlop.
⁵⁰ Dugin, 251 and 255, quoted in ibid.
In an interview with Russian-American TV host Vladimir Pozner in April 2014, Dugin described what he calls the “War of the Water and Land.”\(^{51}\) His fascination with this theoretical conflict reveals his intellectual debt to geopolitics, which he identifies as a discipline created by the Anglo-Saxons, developed by the Germans, and adopted by the Russian Eurasianists and which he says “is all based on a conflictological scheme, that there are two incommensurate civilizations, two fundamental types of humanity: sea civilization—Atlanticism—today represented by America, and land civilization, traditionally represented by Russia, or ‘the heartland.’”\(^{52}\) Dugin proposes that Russia is ready “to announce a zone of geopolitical responsibility,” unifying the Eurasian landmass based on the “quite organic and understandable” zone of the Sea Civilization.\(^{53}\)

3.2 Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism in Politics

The politicization of Neo-Eurasianism in post-Soviet Russia is largely attributable to Dugin’s personal political influence. Between 1985 and 1993, he professed various extreme right-wing and even monarchic views associated with neo-Eurasianism alongside beliefs shared by the Communist Party. From 1998 to 2001, he distanced himself from the traditional opposition parties and deliberately shifted toward the political center with more specifically neo-Eurasianist discourse.\(^{54}\) During this period, Dugin attracted the attention of Lieutenant General Nikolai Klopotov, the chair of strategy at Russia’s Military Academy of the General Staff; began

\(^{51}\) “Борьба Воды и Суши.” Dugin, interview by Vladimir Pozner. All translations are the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

\(^{52}\) “И вся она основана на конфликтологической схеме о том, что существуют две несоизмеримые цивилизации, два фундаментальных типа человечества—цивилизация моря, атлантизм, сегодня представленный Америкой, и цивилизация суши, представленная традиционно Россией или Хартлендом—‘сердцевинной землей.’” Ibid.

\(^{53}\) “Объявить зону ответственности геополитической”; “достаточно органичны и понятны.” Ibid.

\(^{54}\) See Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism,” 126.
lecturing regularly at the Russian New University; and became the chief advisor on geopolitics to Gennadii Seleznev, the speaker of the Duma. Although he was not yet an official member of any party, Dugin influenced politicians on both the left and the right. The leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Vladimir Zhirinovsky, announced his “support for expansionism towards the southeast [...] because part of Russia’s destiny is in Islamic countries,” while Gennadii Ziuganov, the leader of Russia’s Communist Party who promotes Soviet nostalgia combined with a Eurasianist vision for Russia, proposed to restore Russia’s unique role as the “Eurasian continental block axis.”

Dugin announced the creation of his own political party, Evraziiia, following Putin’s election in March 2000, stating his desire “not to fight for power but to influence it.” At the party’s first conference, he declared that it would support Putin. To justify the disparity between his previous radical views and this alignment with Putin, Dugin ambiguously described his party as “radical-center,” highlighting the underlying pragmatism of neo-Eurasianist politics. Dugin has successfully established important ties with Russia’s political elites since 2000, with many officials in Putin’s United Russia party acknowledging his influence. Upon his appointment as the head of the Directorate for Ideological Work of United Russia’s Central Executive Committee, for example, Ivan Demidov professed his dedication to neo-Eurasianism.

Vladislav Surkov, the former deputy chief of staff to Dmitri Medvedev and Putin, and Sergei Karaganov, who served as presidential advisor to Boris Yeltsin and Putin, are two notable proponents of neo-Eurasianism in the current administration. In Putin’s first term Surkov

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55 See Stafford, 22, and Shlapentokh, 384.
58 Ibid., 127.
59 Ibid.
60 See Pryce, 30.
introduced the concept of “sovereign democracy,” which condones authoritarianism and embraces Russia’s distinctly Eurasian, non-European character. It dictates that Russians “should define their own democracy and protect themselves from values exported from” the liberal Atlantic. Activist members of the youth movement *Nashi*, a group with suspected ties to United Russia and Putin’s administration, have propagated sovereign democracy among the electorate by distributing campaign materials that promote neo-Eurasianism, criticize liberal democracy, and suggest that sovereign democracy and the “centralization of political authority in Russia can facilitate the orderly development” of other states in the Eurasian space. Sovereign democracy has become “a cornerstone of the neo-Eurasianist establishment in Russian political culture.”

The Karaganov Doctrine is the second important attempt at the implementation of neo-Eurasianism in political discourse by an administrative official. It states that that the Russian Federation should “position itself as the defender of ethnic Russian minority rights throughout the former Soviet republics, asserting its influence wherever ethnic Russians are subjected to perceived discrimination by the authorities of the state in question.” It identifies as compatriots not only citizens of the Russian Federation but also ethnic Russians and Russian speakers throughout Greater Russia. As defined by Dugin, “Greater Russia” refers to “the Russian world, Russian civilization [...]. [T]he territory of Greater Russia roughly corresponds (with some additions and subtractions) both to the territory of the Russian Empire and to that of the

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61 Ibid., 32.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 33.
64 Ibid.
65 See Ibid.
Soviet Union.”⁶⁶ Russia’s compatriot policy, introduced in 1999 in a piece of legislation entitled “On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad,” implemented the Karaganov Doctrine and allows it to shape further policies.⁶⁷

4. Putin’s Eurasian Economic Union

Together with the government’s promotion of sovereign democracy and the Karaganov Doctrine, the formation of a Eurasian Union exemplifies Russia’s growing interest in establishing dominance within the Eurasian region and best represents the Kremlin’s aggressive pursuit of Eurasia’s reintegration.⁶⁸ It is also the clearest manifestation of neo-Eurasianist influence on Putin’s foreign policy, even if the policy is ostensibly economic. The project, which former US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul called the number one foreign policy goal of Putin’s third term, came to fruition in 2015 as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).⁶⁹

Putin first announced his goal of establishing a Eurasian Union during his re-election campaign in 2011 and in doing so opened the door for neo-Eurasianism to enter the mainstream of Russian policy.⁷⁰ The origins of Putin’s October 2011 proposal, however, date back to the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷¹ The idea for this particular intergovernmental, supranational entity encompassing the Russian Federation and other states of the former Soviet Union was first proposed by Kazakhstan’s president Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1994 as a supplement to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. He envisioned a gradual process of integration that would

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⁶⁶ “Это русский мир, русская цивилизация…Территория большой России приблизительно совпадает, с некоторыми плюсами и минусами с территорией Российской империи, и с территорией Советского Союза.” Dugin, interview by Vladimir Pozner.
⁶⁷ See Pryce, 33.
⁶⁸ See Beznosiuk, 62.
⁶⁹ See McFaul, “A New Cold War?”
⁷⁰ See Cohen.
⁷¹ Ibid.
eventually transition a confederation of states into a union and facilitate cooperation among the newly independent states as they entered the post-Soviet economic and global order. The 1996 Treaty of Deepening Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Field signed by Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan catalyzed this process.72

Support for a Eurasian Union dwindled, however, with the dissent of other Central Asian states such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Only in 2000 was an agreement establishing the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) finally signed by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. The agreement created a free trade area but not a customs union, so each member state had a different tariff structure. The EEC also fell short of political integration because no member states displayed any willingness to cede sovereignty to a supranational structure.73 Additionally, a number of parallel inter-governmental agreements between the Russian Federation and other former Soviet republics already existed, including the Union of Two between Belarus and Russia, and the Customs Union of Five between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These sub-regional groupings impeded the realization of Nazarbayev’s Eurasian Union.74

Putin’s renewed attempt to promote economic and political integration in the Eurasian region differs from Nazarbayev’s idealistic goal of a friendly union in that Putin’s exhibits overtones of Russian geopolitical ambition.75 This ambition reflects a neo-Eurasianist influence because it envisions the Russian Federation remaining a powerful opponent of the West and establishing a dominant position among the states of the Eurasian “heartland” in Central Asia.76

72 See Pryce, 26.
73 Ibid., 27.
74 Ibid.
76 Cohen.
Over the last two years, for example, neo-Eurasianist ideas about the EAEU and Russia’s leadership role in the integration process have been included in Russia’s key foreign policy documents.\textsuperscript{77} Item 44 of the “Russian Foreign Policy Concept” adopted in 2013 lists the Eurasian Economic Union as a top priority and states the intention to carry out a complex integration model that would eventually include all the states of the CIS.\textsuperscript{78} The “Strategy on State National Policy of the Russian Federation to 2025” goes one step further by proclaiming the urgent need for Eurasian integration in order to counteract the US-dominated West.\textsuperscript{79}

While the EAEU is not ostensibly an attempt to rectify the perceived failure of the Soviet Union’s collapse, the project “flows from Russia’s preoccupation with influence and prestige” in the post-Soviet space.\textsuperscript{80} The union is therefore a geopolitical offensive designed to re-establish Russia as a strong Eurasian global player and should be acknowledged as a serious attempt to reconstruct a deeply integrated sphere of influence. Putin, driven by a belief that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century and a “tragedy for the Russian people,” made the EAEU a top priority while campaigning for his third presidential term.\textsuperscript{81} He envisioned “harmonizing domestic and external policies and legislation” among the former republics (except the Baltic states) in order to adapt to the changing international environment.\textsuperscript{82} Putin’s enthusiasm for a Eurasian Union represented an effort to institutionalize the increasingly dominant political philosophy of neo-Eurasianism in Russia.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{77} See Beznosiuk, 63.
\textsuperscript{78} See “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.”
\textsuperscript{79} See Putin, “Strategiia natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii do 2020 goda.”
\textsuperscript{80} Cohen.
\textsuperscript{81} McFaul, “A New Cold War?”
\textsuperscript{82} Cohen.
\textsuperscript{83} See Pryce, 29.
5. Putin’s Neo-Eurasianist Influence and Rhetoric on Crimea

One country noticeably absent from the EAEU is Ukraine, which has been unwilling to pursue a pro-Russian, neo-Eurasian agenda and has become a battleground in Putin’s “efforts to protect identity and kinship and to prevent Western dominance in the former Soviet Space.”

Putin used neo-Eurasianist ideas of Eurasian integration to justify the 2014 annexation of Crimea, subjecting Ukraine to political, economic, and military pressure when it refused to submit to Russia’s worldview. Following the Orange Revolution in 2004, Russian political commentator Stanislav Belkovskii suggested that a pro-Western Ukraine “means the collapse of Russia’s claim to the status of the post-Soviet space moderator.” Because Ukraine is an integral part of the Eurasian Civilization, its rejection of Russian paternalism disrupts Putin’s pursuit of neo-Eurasianist ethnic, geopolitical and civilizational goals.

Plans for the military seizure of Crimea were developed by the general staff as early as fall 2008, when President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko applied to join the NATO Membership Action Plan. After 2010 his successor, Russian-oriented Viktor Yanukovych, denounced the pursuit of Ukraine’s NATO membership in favor of “non-bloc” status. Moscow, still not satisfied, urged Ukraine to join the EAEU “at the expense of Ukraine’s association with the [European Union].” By August 2013, Putin had committed to a binary view of Ukraine’s integration options, considering a decision to “cede sovereignty to the EU” a threat to the two states’ strategic partnership.

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84 Roberts, 23.
85 Teper, 379.
86 Allison, 1271.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 1272.
In November 2013 Yanukovych, under mounting pressure from the Kremlin, withdrew from an EU trade deal popular among Ukrainians; the result was a wave of immediate and widespread civil unrest that came to be known as Euromaidan.\(^89\) Although the US government played no role in the protests or in Yanukovych’s subsequent flight into Russian exile, Putin declared the revolution a coup and blamed the United States for stoking the flames of revolution.\(^90\) Putin combined his ambitious commitment to the EAEU with a healthy dose of neo-Eurasianist anti-American rhetoric to ultimately portray the events as a product of US interference. Interpreting Euromaidan in this way allowed Putin to justify Russia’s subsequent retaliatory measures, challenge the post-Soviet world order, and “[make] it clear that Russia was prepared to defend itself from any further encroachment or interference in areas it considers part of its core security.”\(^91\) He “staked out not just an economic, political or strategic division but a normative division, requiring states to choose between EU-centered and Russia-centered integration.”\(^92\) The Russian State Duma approved the use of military force to stabilize Ukraine, and within a week Russian troops had occupied strategic locations across Crimea.\(^93\) Putin signed a decree declaring Crimea a part of the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014.\(^94\)

The Kremlin’s presentation of the annexation in “unprecedented national irredentist terminology, [aimed] at reunifying the Russian nation in one state,” indicates the influence of neo-Eurasianism on Putin’s foreign policy actions, or at least on his public justification of them.\(^95\) In his speech to the Russian Federal Assembly following the annexation, Putin invoked

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89 See Roberts, 5123.
91 Myers and Barry.
92 Allison, 1256–57.
93 See Myers and Barry.
94 See Roberts, 24.
95 Teper, 379.
the shared history of Russia and Crimea, stressing the connection of “culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus” and stated that “Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia.”96 Speaking of Crimea as the site of Prince Vladimir’s baptism and therefore the origin of the Russian Orthodox faith, Putin called Kiev “the mother of Russian cities.”97 Putin’s history of Russia and Ukraine culminated in his declaration that “Ancient Rus’ is [their] common source, [they] still cannot live without each other.”98 This rhetoric about identification and solidarity between the populations of Russia and Crimea indicated Putin’s effort to redefine Russian national identity in terms of a Greater Russia.99 His “wildly popular” actions lifted his domestic approval ratings and “unleashed a nationalistic fervor” in Russia, revealing an infectious support for this unique articulation of neo-Eurasianist nationalism.100

Further neo-Eurasian aspects of Putin’s Ukraine policy emerge whenever he casts himself as “the guardian of the Russian people, even those beyond its post-Soviet borders.”101 He justifies his actions as protective measures against perceived threats to Russian compatriots in Crimea, echoing the Karaganov Doctrine, and his language is decidedly paternalistic: “We hoped that Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, especially its southeast and Crimea, would live in a friendly, democratic and civilized state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law […] This is not how the situations developed.”102 Putin’s selective use of neo-Eurasianist ideas and rhetoric to justify an act that constituted such an

96 Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation.”
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 See Teper, 386.
100 Myers and Barry.
101 Ibid.
102 Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation.”
affront to the liberal democratic world order highlights the violent nature and growing power of Dugin’s ideology.

6. Conclusion

Putin’s pragmatic implementation of neo-Eurasianism since his third presidential term and his encouragement of its spread among the Russian public have threatened the democratic world order. First, the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union represented the rise of a new kind of supranational entity: an international community independent of the established western alliances. Russia’s annexation of Crimea was also groundbreaking in its violation of international customs. Neo-Eurasianism offers a framework in which Putin can combine an anti-Western stance with his nationalistic narrative about the “guarding of Russia’s great power status.” In many ways, “the influence of Russian nationalist thought and Eurasianism [has become] Putin’s main source of ideological nourishment for asserting Russia as a key player in the management of the global affairs as an alternative to the West.” This aggressive facet of Putin’s foreign policy will likely continue to strain Russia’s relations with the West.

At the annual Munich Security Conference in February 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proposed that the relationship Russia desires with the West is one that would recognize their mutual “special responsibility for global stability.” He added, however, that Russia envisions a “post-West world order […] in which each country […] will strive to balance their own national interests with those of their partners […].” Russia wants not only to be recognized as a great power but also to pursue its “own national interests” away from the watchful eye of the West. Russia’s desire for this “post-West world order” is the most potentially

103 Dugin.
104 Kuzio, 5.
105 Lavrov.
106 Ibid.
consequential product of the growing influence and popularity of neo-Eurasianism as advocated by Putin.
Works Cited


