

RUSSIA'S FOOTHOLD IN ASIA: UNDERSTANDING EURASIANISM IN RUSSIAN POST-SOVIET DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Russia's aspirations to find an ideological direction for foreign policy after the disintegration of 1991, when Russia was experiencing political turmoil, and security and economic perplexities were at their peak. The present study observes that Russia initially focused on Western-centric policy, but soon realised the need to recapitulate its direction towards the East. The opportunities and challenges emanating from Asia propose a balanced approach for Russia to make its foothold in Asia. The study investigates the prints of Eurasianism in Russian foreign policy and finds that having a Eurasian identity, Russia has stakes to manoeuvre in the region. This paper aims to analyse Russia's objectives and interests in Asia and scrutinise Russia's potential to become an organic, yet substantial part of shaping Asia's political, economic, and security realities. The research is qualitative in nature and discusses challenges and opportunities for Russia in Asia through secondary sources. The paper argues that Russia has both New Eurasianist and Pragmatic Eurasianist impressions in its foreign policy.

Keywords: foreign policy, Eurasia, Eurasianism, pragmatic, Asia

INTRODUCTION

It has been almost four decades since the inception of Russia as a sovereign state. The Cold War events and the disintegration process left the Soviet Union in turmoil, not only from an ideological perspective, but it had caused a severe political, economic and social crisis. The search for identity, and the struggle to find a foreign policy direction were core objectives for New Russia. However, after the emergence of Russia, the foreign policy has been in a continuous process of formulating and comprehending the desired goals for surviving in the international system. Foreign policy since 1991 has become more ideological, and for this, there are three core elucidations. First, after the fall of Marxist ideology, the vacuum created needed to be filled. Secondly, the post-Cold War crisis accentuated Russian scholars to deal with the challenges created by the international environment, the change in the power structure, and the emergence of new Russian diplomacy. Lastly, the appalling economic conditions at home have forced Russia to articulate a more inclusive foreign policy that could help her play a significant role in the international system (Sergunin, 2004). The factors of external threat, domestic crisis, and the ambition to search for its post-Cold War identity have influenced and transformed the foreign policy into a more rational perspective. The geography of Russia is significant in many ways. First, it lies in European and Asian territorial boundaries, making it a Eurasian Russia. Secondly, the hunger for warm

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waters, the priority of territorial integrity, economic advancement, and a more active role in the international system have embarked Russia to make a foothold into the periphery of the Eurasian continent.

The roots of Eurasianism in Russian foreign policy date back to the 19th century among political elites of Russia due to the emergence of Pan-Turkism, and later, classical Eurasianism began to form. Nikolai Trubetskoi and Nikolai Berdyaev are the most influential proponents of Eurasianism which says that Russia's identity is apart from Europe with a civilisational context making it a Eurasian identity (Pryce, 2013). Initially, Russia was not keen to extend its relations towards the Far East, but later, events such as 9/11 and the security and economic agendas that stretched toward the East had led her to embark on reorientation in her foreign policy. However, Russia has bolstered strategic ties with Asian countries, notably China, North Korea, and India, and is now developing relations with other Asian countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and Pakistan. It is argued by the author that the Kremlin is pursuing a two-track approach to balance power politics at the global level. The first is Multipolarity, and for this, Russia is extending ties with China, the EU, Japan, and India under the umbrella of a 'grand alliance' to counterbalance America's hegemony. Secondly, to counterbalance the USA, it focuses on positive notions opposed to anti-Americanism. For this purpose, Russia adopts a 'rational alternative' by portraying international law and UN conventions on morality in response to NATO interference (Lo, 2002).

Russia thus has adopted a more balanced approach to making its foothold in the Eurasian continent with a Eurasian identity. This paper follows the fundamental concept of Eurasianism and the Eurasianist trends in Russian foreign policy, mainly focusing on the Asian dimension and the contributing factors in Russian foreign policy towards Asia since 2000. The two elucidations of Eurasianism, i.e., Pragmatic Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism, will be discussed and analysed in the following section. In the paper's final part, Asia's significance for Russia will be studied.

The adopted methodology is exploratory research and qualitative in nature. Secondary sources of data have been used and analysed to answer a pertinent question: Why and how have the ideological aspirations of Russia been transformed since the disintegration? Secondary sources used comprised of multiple published books, edited books, journals, e-journals, articles, magazines, research papers, newspapers, and electronic libraries.

CONCEPTUALISING EURASIA AND EURASIANISM

It is commonly understood that Eurasia is the combination of two regions, i.e., Europe and Asia, making it a Eurasian continent. In the 18th century, the fundamental geographical division of Russia entered both Asia and Europe to make its foothold by following the imperial ideology. This idea was floated through geography texts and became a universally accepted truism, and this geographical demarcation has become a fundamental geographical feature in Russia (Bassin, 1991). Trubetskoy's proclamation of Eurasianism appeared to be a new concept: Russia-Eurasia or Eurasia, due to a distinct cultural and historical entity entirely different from the Europeans. In addition, a notion of self-identification proclaims that Eurasians are composed of

different nationalities in Russia, including the Asian people and Russians, entirely distinct from the Europeans (Riasanovsky, 1964). However, Nikolai Denilevsky argued in the 19th century that, 'The area of Eurasia is a distinct geography separated from both Europe and Asia.' 'The name Eurasia is not intended to amalgamate Europe and Asia, but rather, as a discrete entity. Savitskii, Trubetskoi, and their peers conceived Eurasia as neither Europe nor Asia, but a diverse 'geographical world' distinct from the first two' (Varol, 2013). According to Hann (2016), the concept of Eurasia associated with Prince Trubetskoy, Petr Sawaitkii, and a few noblemen of post-1917, is referred to as Russian intellectual thought.

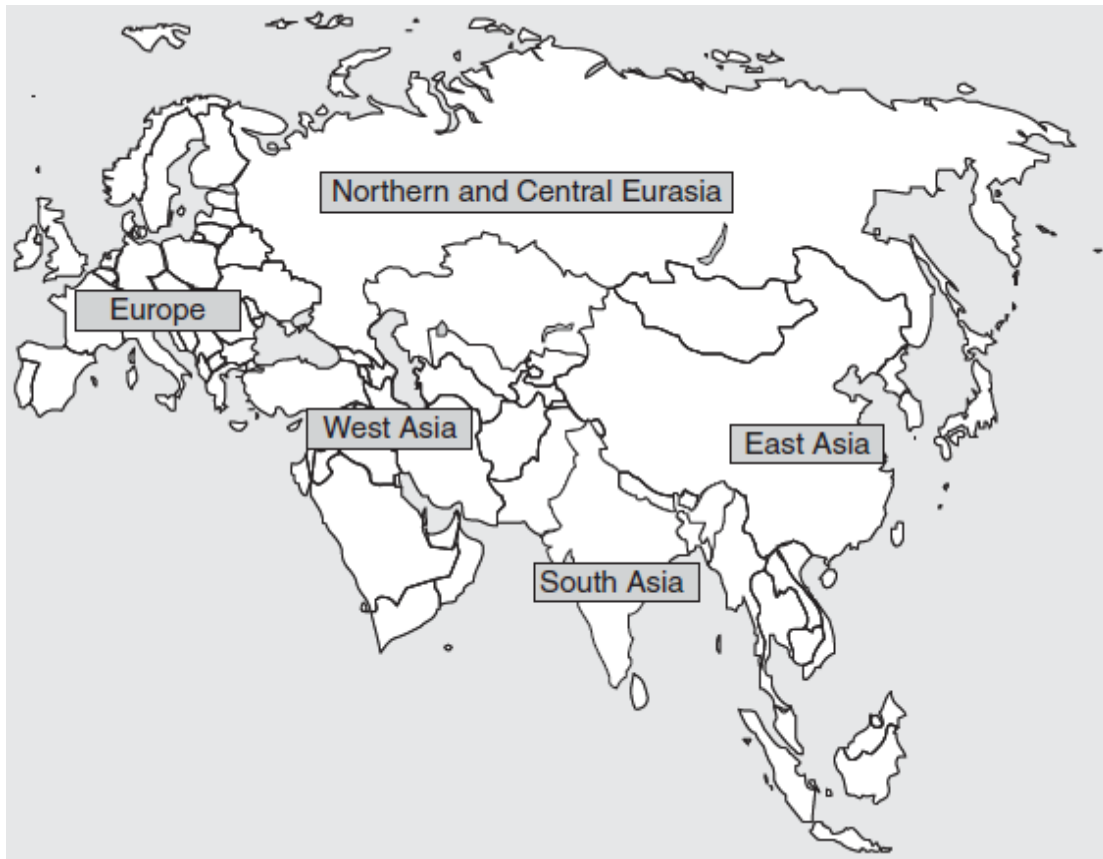
Eurasia is a complex and highly debated term with multiple meanings and illustrations. It comprises two aspects, i.e., geographical, politico-philosophical and ideological, mainly consisting of Asia and Europe's geographical space (Eurasia). The second aspect is more complicated and complex, with multiple perceptions and views that Eurasia probably emerged and evolved from imperial Russia (Mostafa, 2013). Eurasia is a significant region, and Sergey Karaganov assumes the international system as a new bipolar system where Eurasia is a single powerful region. Additionally, 'Greater Eurasia' in geo-economic, geopolitical, and geo-ideological space is a concept in opposition to the West, particularly 'Greater America' - further characterising it as a new Cold War (Karaganov, 2018).

Eurasianism means many things. However, this conception opposes the US global agenda of creating a unipolar new World Order. Subsequently, the Eurasianists are of the view to stand against American Atlanticism. During the Cold War, this principle was confined only to the political space of the former USSR. On the other hand, Alexander Dugin's definition of Eurasia goes beyond any space, but comprises any religion from anywhere around the globe against American hegemony and unipolarity. The boundaries of Russia-Eurasia have more or less corresponded with the spaces of 'Russian *gosudarstvennost*', which means Russian state. Alexander Dugin's Eurasianism is beyond the territorial boundaries; instead, it is a global project (Bassin, 2014). This global project has now been in a Diasporas of Eurasians with more ideas under Eurasianism. The interpretation of Eurasianism is not confined

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to only one aspect when it comes to assessing Russia's influence - it is multi-layered with many faces and explanations. Five macro-regions have covered the whole Eurasian landmass to explore Russian integration (Vinokurov & Libman, 2012). They are Europe, Northern and Central Eurasia, West Asia, East Asia, and South Asia – as shown in Map 1 below.

**Map 1: Five macro-regions covering the whole Eurasian landmass**



*Source:* Vinokurov & Libman, 2012

The conceptualisation of Eurasianism is thematic, indicating Moscow’s area of influence to regain the great power status.

### **EURASIANISM IN RUSSIA’S FOREIGN POLICY**

The evolution of Eurasianism in Russia’s foreign policy started at the time of Peter the Great (1672-1725) when he won the war against Sweden’s Charles XII, and ultimately the territories which manifested into new geographic lines, including the newly won territories - moving Russia’s place from the Asian continent to Europe. Subsequently, the ideology of Eurasianism further developed in the 1920s amid Russian intellectuals who migrated from Western Europe after the civil war and the October Revolution. The version of Eurasianism was known as the “third way,” albeit the works of Nikolai Trubetskoy, Petr Savitsky, and others were mainly influenced by Halford Mackinder, Karl Haushofer, and Alfred T. Mahan. They envisaged Russia as distinct from Europe and considered it a ‘conduit amid East and West with a spiritual and geopolitical third way.’ According to Eurasianists, ‘the people of USSR (Muslims and Turkic, Slavics and Orthodox) have created a bond during Russian rule. They also share particular characteristics of commonness that connect them as a political unity (Varol, 2013).

However, the October Revolution of 1917 resulted in immense expatriation of non-communist supporters. The idea was to establish Russia’s own identity in the post-

revolution period and Eurasia was a credible alternative for collective security. To find the “third way” means being neither socialist nor capitalist (Nugraha, 2018). Later, Eurasianism emerged in 1921 when a collaborative publication by Prince Trubetskoy, Petr Savitsky, Pyiter Suvchinsky, and Georgy Vesileyvich - “Exodus to the East”, was published—following which, more publications on Eurasianism gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s among Russian émigrés living in Europe. The contributions to Eurasianism were the idea of theorising Mongol political rule history in the Russian state and providing critiques of the western system of colonialism (Silvius, 2014).

Meanwhile, Trubetskoy insisted that Russia should abandon its Great Russian nationalism for pan-Eurasianism which upholds Russia’s paramount status in the Eurasian fraternity. Apart from all the conceptions under Eurasianism, Eurasia was a multi-national community not based on any common genetics, but shared history and civilisational empathy. During the period of the Soviet Union, the émigré Eurasianists were denounced and suppressed, and later in the 1960s, Lev Gumilev - a historian, geographer, and ethnographer took their ideas. He presented Eurasianism in two respects, i.e., 1) to develop a continent of Russia-Eurasia as a multi-national civilisation without any domination and conquest. He believed in the collaboration of Russians and Non-Russians; and 2) his emphasis was on the lower-level questions on ethnicities because he believed that national groups or ethnicities are natural phenomena as biological organisms that could never be merged or mingled. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Eurasianism or neo-Eurasianism took its place at the end of Perestroika.

Soviet Russia was concerned with territorial fragmentation, and Russian conservative nationalists attempted to re-establish the Soviet legacy under Perestroika doctrines with Soviet Marxist ideological slogans. Subsequently, it was definite that no other ideological perspective would work, but to resurrect the Eurasianist arguments in post-Soviet Russia. Initially, neo-Eurasianism looked different from the previous idea, but it combined the classical dimension with Gumilev’s concept of Eurasianism. This combination provides a broader scope of Eurasianism themes and ideological flexibility. Today, Eurasianism has a wide variety of opportunities in post-Soviet constituencies with different purposes and interpretations, including the organic unity of Eurasian space and a vision of bond among Eurasian people. In post-Soviet Russia, Eurasianism Balkanises into different versions. From Populist Neo-Eurasianism ideology presented by Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov to resurrect the neo-imperial Soviet entity, to Classical Eurasianism which supported multi-national state under the leadership of Russia-Eurasia, to Kazakh Eurasianism since the 1990s for assembling former Soviet states under Eurasian Economic Union, to an official Russian Eurasianism promulgated under the supervision of President Putin since 2000. Moreover, in today’s Russia, Eurasianism is much more of a nationalistic or conservative ideology rather than more or less a consistent set of ideas informing Russian foreign policy (Bassin & Pozo, 2017).

After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Eurasianism re-emerged from classical to neo-Eurasianism as a political movement (Nugraha, 2018). The transitional process from classical to neo-Eurasianism was enunciated by Russian political elite Alexander Dugin. Meanwhile, the publication of Vladimirtsov’s essay on Genghis Khan instigated far-right interest. Alexander Dugin then started to re-design the philosophy of Eurasianism with more comprehensive ideas that could define Russia in the 1990s (Pryce, 2013).

Multiple perspectives and doctrines have been adopted at the national level in Russia by Evengii Primakov, Gennadi Ziuganov, and Alexander Dugin. It was argued that Vladimir Putin is a 'closet Eurasian.' The different versions of Eurasianism have been thrived by political elites across the post-Soviet space, not only among ethnic-Russians, but also non-Russians. However, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the legacy of Eurasianism, particularly in its 'classical' interwar phase that Lev Gumilev had advocated, remained in Russian diasporas. Nonetheless, when considering and analysing all of the evolving versions of Eurasianism, two main characteristics are common: 1) it represents the unique amalgamation of Asian and European beliefs, and 2) Eurasianism is the legitimate successor of the classical legacy (Bassin, 2014). Concerning this notion, Russia encompasses a cohesive civilisational identity - including divergent civilisations and cultures across the Eurasian space, which results in the interaction throughout the Eurasian continent combining Europe and Asia in terms of economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. That outlook makes Russia the "Russia-Eurasia" or Eurasia (Gerald, 2012).

Papava (2013) argues that Eurasianism in Russia's geopolitical sphere justifies Russian imperial ambitions that aim to get an overriding influence and place in the centre of the Eurasian continent. As interpreted by fundamentalist Nationalists in Russia, Eurasianism incorporates economic and geographic terms, including Russia's strong role in imitating a "third way" in political and economic spheres that consisted of authoritative administration and a corporative economy (Light, 2006). This thought of the "third way" has been employed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that traces the speeches and actions of President Putin: "the significant idea for today is that Russia must be an empire that rules the former Soviet Union spaces and beyond." However, it argues that President Putin and this school of thought are not the chauvinistic nationalists, but instead imply utmost nationalism. They are more prone to stress the re-emergence of Moscow's diverse and multi-racial empire, including Muslim/Turkic and Slavic communities (Varol, 2013).

During his July 2000 visit to China, President Vladimir Putin declared in front of Chinese media that, "Russia is equally European and Asian country, and we pay tribute to European pragmatism and oriental wisdom. That is why Russian foreign policy will be balanced." The President and his government members have repeated similar statements. They aim to highlight the balanced approach of Russia towards Europe and Asia. Moreover, Marlene Laruelle argues that President Putin balances his foreign policy with pro-Chinese and pro-Eurasian dimensions. Still, the ideological perspectives of neo-Eurasianism exhibit an anti-Chinese stance (Bassin & Pozo, 2017). If we analyse the interpretation of Eurasianism, it states that Russia has been following neo-Eurasianism and pragmatic Eurasianism in its foreign policy discourse. However, with different political contexts and political agendas in other regions and circumstances, it is impossible to limit the significance of Eurasianism into a set of rudimentary doctrinal characteristics. This multi-layered and multi-faceted political ideology in foreign policy discourse has sparked an extensive debate.

**Map 2: Russia in Eurasia**

Source: Chufrin, 1999

### **EMERGENCE OF NEO-EURASIANISM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA**

There are three most significant politico-ideological explanations of Eurasianism, i.e., New Right Eurasianism, Communist Eurasianism, and Democratic Statist Eurasianism. First, New Right Eurasianism emerged in the early 1990s from two geo-politicians, Alexander Prokhanov and Alexander Dugin. New Right Eurasianism has produced a significant geopolitical theoretical perspective for Russia's place in the New World Order. New Right's principal adversary is Atlanticism, and the threat is globalisation and cosmopolitanism, which is mondialism. Mondialism comes from western based chauvinistic cosmopolitanism practices. Presidents Gorbachev and Yeltsin were both agents of mondialism, and they undermined the cultural distinctiveness of Eurasia. Hence, Russia's mission is to unite against mondialism.

Secondly, Communist Eurasianism is the opposite concept of the New Right. They subscribe to the concept of neo-Sovietism and emphasise the golden age of the Soviet era that should take as a reference in post-Soviet Russia that will provide international pride and respect to Russians. The core organisational force behind neo-Sovietism is the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) directed by Gennadi Zyuganov. CPRF transpired from the Russian Communist Party in 1991 and was banned after the August 1991 coup d'état (Lester, 1997). It later rejuvenated in 1992, providing a new interpretation of Russian geopolitics. Zyuganov's ideas of geopolitics have been influenced by and drawn from Halford Mackinder and other geopoliticians. The aim is to anticipate Russia's status as a constant effort since early medieval origin in Kievan Rus to regain its position in the Eurasian continent. The battle under this school is to resist capitalist globalisation and to secure Russia's military and

economic status through renationalisation under state-directed modernisation. Furthermore, the idea of geopolitics for new Russia is to re-establish communist Russia.

The third school of Eurasianist thought is Democratic Statist Eurasianism which combines and follows the western style of democracy with neo-nationalism in Russian political discourse (Zyuganov, 1994). Russia's fundamental role is to stabilise the Eurasian continent through bridging between Asia and Europe. They perceive Russia's role is not to imply an antithesis of the West just like in the Soviet era, but rather to show an active role in post-Soviet space, i.e., Eurasian terrestrial. Statists believe Russia's role is in specific spaces of Eurasia, such as the Near Abroad, which consists of 14 independent republics of the Former Soviet Union, the West, and Asia (Smith, 1999).

Russia, since its disintegration, has been observing a transformative foreign policy in search of an identity as to what is Russia, and what is Russia's place in the international system. To find out the status of Russia in global politics, different policies under different leaders have taken place. Nevertheless, those policies are a sign of continuity in Russia's foreign policy. Eurasia's foreign policy discourse has been a matter of flux - whether it is Kozyrev doctrine, Primakov doctrine, or President Putin's doctrine. Foreign Minister Kozyrev's pro-Western foreign policy orientation manifested as Atlanticist (Westernisers). They believed that Russia's main aim should be partnership with the West - particularly with the USA, because historically Russia belonged to Western civilisation. They believed in having a lesser association with newly emerged republics (Sergunin, 2004). Subsequently, the foreign policy orientation of Atlanticists faced colossal criticism and challenges after the Duma elections of 1993 and 1995, when the Communist and Liberal Democratic Party elevated. Furthermore, the NATO expansion to Central and Eastern Europe has challenged and questioned the perception of Moscow's identity and national interest in the international system.

Meanwhile, the idea of Neo-Eurasianism gained acceptance and support to draw Russia's great power status and multi-cultural identity in comparison to Europe and Asia. This disposition of neo-Eurasianism was presented under a doctrine by Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov. His doctrine included the efforts to restore Russia's lost pride and status, followed by multipolar world order against United States unipolarity. The doctrine highlighted the importance of pragmatic foreign policy direction. Later, the Primakov doctrine was formulated into a grand strategy under President Putin in 2000 (Nugraha, 2018). However, the foreign policy orientation under the discourse of Eurasianism has been reluctantly progressive and transformative since 2000, which seems to be a more pragmatic and balanced approach. This transformative orientation has sparked a debate on multi-faceted approaches to Eurasianism since 2000. Two of them, i.e., Alexander Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and Pragmatic Eurasianism, have been discussed and analysed in detail.

## **ALEXANDER DUGIN'S NEO-EURASIANISM**

Alexander Dugin's political ideology was closely related to classical Eurasianism. However, he began to transform it beginning 1991, and this was called Neo-Eurasianism. Dugin is among those Russian intellectuals who hate western ideas, especially those responsible for the collapse of the USSR. Apart from his philosophical and political



writings, Dugin also participated in political activities and formed his own National Bolshevik Party. The beginning of political changes in President Yeltsin's regime at the start of 1994 had created a thought in Dugin's mind that there was no need to establish his new nationalistic revolution. However, Dugin realised that the prevailing political situations and the regime's support for his and Lemonov's idea to strengthen the Russian state could help spread his ideas. Later, in 1999-2000, he published his ideas in collaboration with Alexander Prokhanov (Shlapentokh, 2007). One of his most famous texts published in 1997, named 'The Foundations of Geopolitics', is used by Russia's military, civil, and intelligence agencies. In his introduction, he referred to geopolitics as an essential factor in studying foreign policy. His theory was adopted from various classical works of Karl Haushofer, Harford Mackinder, John Spykman, and others. Dugin extensively used the theoretical perspectives of Mackinder and focused on Russia's unique geographic location termed as the 'heartland' or the centre of Eurasia, where Russia is neither East nor West – rather, a distinct identity as Eurasia. The period of the Cold War, according to Dugin, was a confrontation between land power (USSR) and sea power (USA) to maximise their strategic spaces. He admitted the borders of the USA were protected as compared to the USSR due to the seas which the USA could use to control the strategic depth of the Eurasian continent (Ersen, 2004).

Dugin considered that the coalition of Anglo-Americans formed one pillar in response to the continental pole that Moscow had been familiar with building for centuries. For now, its ambition is to again develop a continental power against the Atlantic powers by using the vast geographic, demographic and strategic spaces of the Eurasian continent (Ersen, 2004). Alexander Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism arose as an ideological and political phenomenon that became the main feature in post-Soviet Russia's self-consciousness.

### **Main features of Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism**

Neo-Eurasianism consists of the principles of classical Eurasianism as a base for future development and practical purposive application. It revolves around the modification of philosophical history according to geographical location. Russian history seems to be a vanguard of the altitudinal system (East), the opposite of the temporal 'West.' Neo-Eurasianism is a search for a global response alternative to mondialism (globalism). Eurasianism has become a powerful platform for anti-globalism or an alternative concept to globalism. Moreover, it highlights that globalisation is a challenge to the civilisations and nations of the Eurasian continent. All countries in Europe and Asia must listen to each other regarding different norms, value systems, and habits. Dugin argues that we are against globalisation as a form of ideological, political, economic, and value-based imperialism. To develop and promote diverse and intensive cultures, customs, history, values, and religions, International Eurasian Movement can be seen as an eternal movement. Eurasia or Eurasianism is not confined only to the geographical boundaries of Eurasia. Instead, it is a strategy on a global scale to understand the reality of globalisation and bids a different way of unipolar globalisation.

This idea is the 'multipolar version,' including numerous global poles/zones. It completely rejects the notion of the New World Order and the universalism of Americanism and Atlanticism. Eurasianism is a venture of strategic, geopolitical, and economic amalgamation of the Eurasian continent. According to Dugin, Eurasia is a living space of three integrated poles across the meridian. Eurasian plan of the future

division of the planet is divided into four vertical geographical belts from North to South. These four geographical belts are, i) the American continent, ii) Euro-Africa (European Union is its center), iii) the Russian Central Asian zone, and iv) the Pacific zone. Within these zones, development and growth corridors will take place. Dugin further articulates that these meridian zones counterbalance each other, and together they will counterbalance the Atlantic zone. The fourth zone – the Russian Central Asian zone, counterbalances pressure on America and provides Pacific and European zones to act self-sufficiently. A real multipolar world and Great spaces can only be formed if the fourth zone is created successfully. It is connected to the integration of post-Soviet territories on a democratic and non-violent basis without any domination of ethnic or religious groups. The basic principles of Neo-Eurasianism are i) differentialism (plurality of value system versus conventional and domination of single ideology, i.e., American liberal democracy, ii) tradition versus suppression of cultures, iii) rights of nations versus the golden billions and the hegemony of the rich North, iv) ethnicity and history as primary subjects versus homogenisation of people, and v) social equality versus exploitation of man by man. In economics, there is no ultimate truth, i.e., liberalism and Marxism can only be applied partially. In practice, with the free market concept, strategic sectors of the economy should be controlled according to society's social and national objectives. The Eurasian continental belt intends massive economic and strategic activities in the four Great spaces of the globe (Dugin, 2014 & 2017).

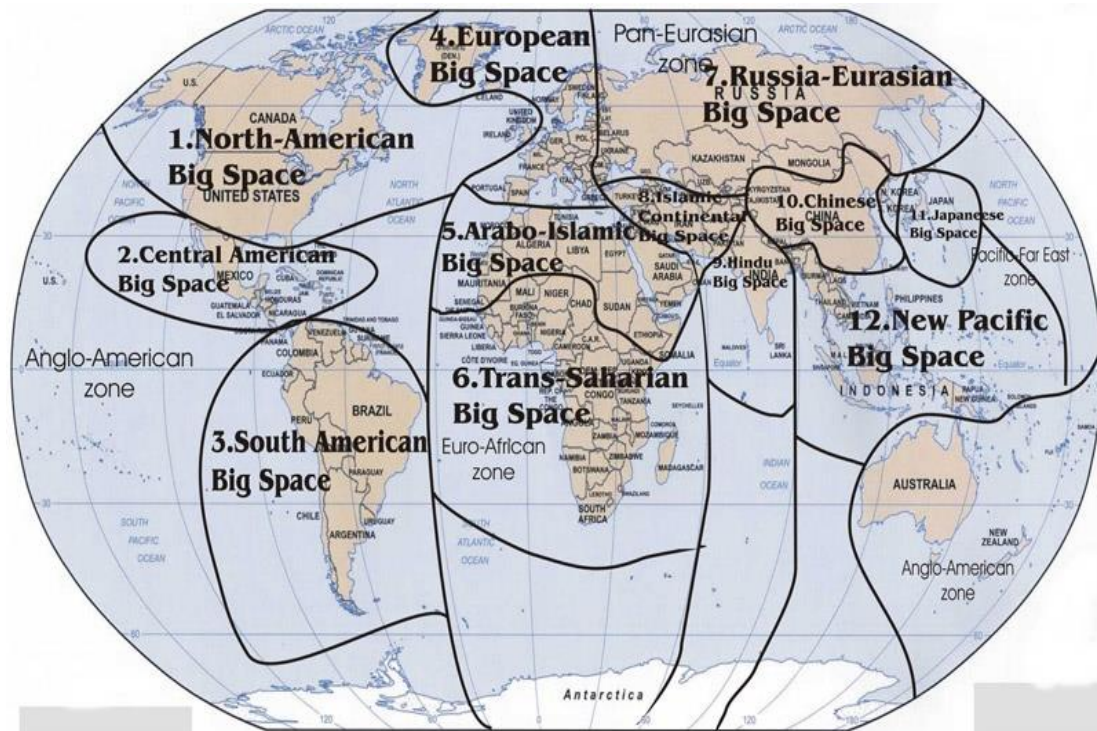
Dugin visualises the Eurasian continent more than Europe and Asia. Mark Bassin argues that Dugin advocates Russia as an entirely new vision of Russia in the world with a global perspective of the Eurasian New World Order. His objective under the ideological grounds of Neo-Eurasianism is to eliminate the threat of American hegemony (Bassin, 2014).

**Map 3: Multipolar World - Four Zones/Poles**



Source: Dugin, 2014

Map 4: Multipolar World: Four Zones – Great Spaces



Source: Dugin, 2014

The ascent of Neo-Eurasianism in the Kremlin's foreign policy is determined by the necessity to characterise and reinforce the circles and impacts, and the requirements to formulate foreign policy following national awareness and political culture (Nugraha, 2018).

## PRAGMATIC EURASIANISM

Pragmatic Eurasianism is to secure incorporation from below which encourages free movement of goods, capital, services, and labour. This process aims to strengthen long-term economic stability. It is an ideology of integration and open regionalism based on strong interaction across the continent, including the West and the East. Along with financial stability, it also has the factor of long-term socio-cultural integration (Vinokurov, 2013). Moreover, pragmatic Eurasianism has several components - integration process as means rather than a purpose, subsidiary principles, open regionalism, collective process led by several states, and priority over economic unification. This approach's primary concern is the process of convergence in the Eurasian continent through the integration of economic, social, and political partnerships in the regions of Eurasia. In this context, pragmatic Eurasianism entails longstanding stability of costs and benefits while implementing and measuring integration (Vinokurov, 2013).

Vinokurov and Libman (2012) describe the notion of Eurasia as a space including both Europe and Asia. They argue that Marlene Laruelle (2008) uses the interpretation of 'pragmatic Eurasianism' to describe the Russian political and

economic presence in Asia. Pragmatic Eurasianism is defined as a policy to support interaction among the different parts of the Eurasian continent. Apart from the ideological Eurasianism or post-Soviet Neo-Eurasianism, pragmatic Eurasianism is not based on shared history or future; however, the core concept is to share common economic and political interests among various countries. Pragmatic Eurasianism is sometimes combined with other post-Soviet states with domestic ideologies and nation-building programmes, particularly in Kazakhstan under Nursultan Nazarbayev, who became a proponent of post-Soviet Eurasianism. He originated the idea of Eurasian integration among the Former Soviet Union (FSU). He personifies several pragmatic economic-based Eurasianism integration projects. Laruelle views political and economic integration between Asian countries and former Soviet states as the utmost striking feature of Eurasianism. The pragmatic interpretation of Eurasianism in the international debate is primarily described by Johannes Linn who associated the idea of pragmatic Eurasianism with economic linkages in the Eurasian continent (Vinokurov & Libman, 2012).

**Table 1: Concept of Pragmatic Eurasianism**

|                                                           |                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Constituent factor of Eurasia                             | Emerging economic linkages                                               |
| Perception of Europe                                      | Included                                                                 |
| Perception of Asia                                        | Included                                                                 |
| Perception of Westernisation and Modernisation of Eurasia | Learning modernisation strategy from West and focus on economic linkages |
| Nature of concept                                         | Set of foreign/economic policy without ideological pretense              |

*Source:* Vinokurov & Libman, 2012

Pragmatic Eurasianism is not a national ideology for Russia’s physical identity in the region, but to protect the interest of Moscow’s identity. Grigorii Karasin, a senior diplomat, in 1996 stated, “where should we pigeonhole Russia; in Europe or Asia? Of course, Russia is a Eurasian power, and this notion is as clear as day.” The territorial disputes with Asia’s power, i.e., Japan and the interests in regional security and economic objectives, have led Russia to be involved in Asia more than any other European countries. The Eurasianist language by Presidents Yeltsin and Putin uses a pragmatic and instrumentalist way that justifies a balanced approach policy with a less anti-Western approach. Pragmatic Eurasianism never rejects the West’s importance in foreign policy nor refuses Russian cultural empathy with Europe. In his address at the EU-Russia summit in 2000, Putin stressed that “Russia was, is and will be a European country due to its culture, geographic location and economic incorporation with regional players.”

The behaviour of a balanced foreign policy is the crucial element of pragmatic Eurasianism that started in 1993, and its prominent advocate was Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov who became the voice for a balanced foreign policy approach. Prime Minister Primakov recognised the cooperation with the West, specifically with the USA. He was a strong advocate for Kremlin's great power status and linked it with the Eurasian identity. In addition, militarily, Russia looked toward Asia regarding its security concerns. Meanwhile, after the 9/11 attack, Russia's support to the US was conditional on pragmatic Eurasianism for acquiring goodwill and respect. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was criticised by Russia. However, the event of 9/11 and the changing international security paradigms had forced Russia to adopt an instrumentalist Eurasianist identity and foster relations with China under the platform of SCO through joint military exercises (Rangsimaporn, 2006).

Since 2000, Russia had witnessed a foreign policy of pragmatism to defend national economic interests (Libman & Vinokurov, 2012). President Putin's interpretation of Eurasianism is rigorously pragmatic, and there is no evidence of his view on the transnational variation of classical Eurasianism. In multiple speeches, President Putin has stated the importance of Eurasia and proclaimed Russia as a Eurasian power. Still, his foreign policy orientation is more balanced with European exposure and focuses on the Asia–Pacific region. However, it is argued that the model of Pragmatic Eurasianism was adopted in 2012 by the Russian elite for economic integration in former Soviet space. New Eurasianists criticise the policies of President Putin due to his realpolitik pragmatic approach to dealing with international affairs. His pragmatic Eurasianism aims to foster an alternative alliance system to expand Russia's position in Europe and the western-centred international order. President Putin has seen Russia not only as the idea of the "Russian World", but also as a centre of Eurasianist civilisation with his contemporary and pragmatic Eurasianism form. In his 2012 inaugural speech, President Putin stated:

“We are responsible for the Russian state and our country's historical progress. It depends on our capability to be leaders and the epicentre of gravity for all of Eurasia, on our progress in developing a novel economy and advanced living quality, our endeavour to back Russian families, and our determination to evolve the gigantic Russian space from the Baltic to the Pacific Ocean.”

President Putin's vision is also supported by officials of the Russian Orthodox Church (Bassin & Pozo, 2017). The below-mentioned statement of President Vladimir Putin reflects the idea of Russia as a Eurasian and to re-assert its foreign policy orientation in Asia in terms of economic, political, and other contacts with the regions.

“Moscow has traditionally viewed itself as part of the Eurasian continent (Evroziatskaia). We have not obliterated that Asia encompasses the majority of Russian territory. But to be honest, we haven't always taken advantage of this advantage. I believe this is the time for us and the countries of Asia-Pacific to look and move beyond words and develop economic, political, and other strategic alliances. Russia currently possesses all of the necessary capabilities to do so (Rangsimaporn, 2006).”

Multiple publications analyse Russia's shift in its foreign policy towards Asia as 'Russia's pivot to Asia,' 'Putin's pivot to Asia', or in Russia termed as 'turn to the east.' Moscow's new concept of foreign policy has emphasised the importance of economic activities in the Asia Pacific, and creating security architecture is Russia's priority (Korolev, 2016). To articulate Russian foreign policy in Asia, it is substantial to discuss Asia's significance and the reasons for Russia's tilt towards the region.

## **ANALYSING EURASIANISM IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF RUSSIA**

### **Significance of Asia and Russia's tilt**

There are two factors which underline the significance of Asia. Firstly, Asia is gaining prominence in the global political and economic landscape. It is likely to reshape the correlation of power and configuration of forces among significant players in the international system. Secondly, the contours of the emerging security landscape in this vast region have remained substantial. Future developments in Europe are more explicit, but this is not the case in Asia. The factor of spectacular economic growth is the significant context of the Asian dimension in the foreign policy of major players. Domestically and internationally, due to high-level instability and uncertainty, Asia has the potential for sub and inter-state conflicts, lacking in channeling disagreements due to the lack of norms and institutions. Asia has the features of uneven natural resources distribution, political fragmentation, mistrust, conflicts, hatred, uneven economic development, and the failure in reconciliation. Thus, Asia is a ground for rivalry and contention among major powers to influence regional politics and acquire natural resources (Chufrin, 1999). According to Lowey Institute Asia Power Index, the three largest economies are in Asia, and the fourth is the USA, a Pacific power. Moreover, Asia will have two-thirds of the world population by 2025. The economic transformation and development of Asia are reshaping the power dynamics in the global system (Bley & Lemahieu, 2018).

The Eurasian approach stimulates, and engagement with Asia becomes a practical question in post-Soviet Russia. During the 1990s, post-Soviet Russia's leaders understood the significance of creating relations with its Asian neighbors. It perceives Russia's endeavour at finding an option in contrast to the West and the political affirmation that Russia's objectives of internal advancement and modernisation cannot be accomplished without cooperation towards the rising economies of Asia. "In this manner, through Pivot to Asia, Moscow isn't getting some distance from Europe, but giving Asia a level of consideration equivalent with Russia's advantages and practical interests of the 21st century (Karle, 2019)." Moreover, having a Eurasian identity, there are multiple factors for Russia to articulate its foreign policy in Asia, such as:

- Different social, political, demographic, and economic changes in Russia itself.
- Rapidly accelerated role of Asia in terms of political and economic perspectives in international relations.
- Transformation in the international environment of Asia and perception of Russia towards these changes.

- Asia contained threats and challenges for Russia's national interests that need a long term well thought out political, economic, and security policy response.
- Changes in the global and regional security environment require Russia to transform itself.
- Spillover of ethnic rivalry crosses interstate borders, territorial disputes, arms smuggling, religious fundamentalism, drug trafficking, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that require collaboration and a regional security framework (Chufrin, 1999).
- Russia's tilt toward Asia opens ideological space for Russia to develop its norms of international engagement which can further its multipolar world order agenda.
- Russia and Asia's cooperation provides opportunities in the energy sector because Russia is the major natural gas and petroleum oil supplier. Asian countries, i.e., China, India, Japan, and South Korea, can find a feasible option in Russia's gas and oil resources.
- Russia aims to develop the economy of Eastern Russia with the cooperation of the Asia Pacific region (Karle, 2019).

Russia's objectives and interests in Asia focus on Russia's potential to become an organic yet essential part of political, economic, and security realities in the continent i) as a geopolitical security provider from Eurasian Heartland to southern Asia, ii) as a carrier of substantial natural resources and, iii) as a global 'balancer' to mitigate North-South rivalry and a partner in the redistribution of global influence in the international system (Chufrin, 1999).

## **RUSSIA'S FOOTHOLD IN ASIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

President Putin's Asia Pivot policy is from a global viewpoint, and it is also a regional matter primarily to the Kremlin since it is fundamental for world order and disorder in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Asia, geopolitical competitions will be generally extreme, as exemplified by the developing competition between Washington and Beijing. It will be at the core of global economic development and rivalry. On the other hand, Russia is following its aspirations to be a resurgent global power. Moscow's rising concern is that if Russia is to be paid attention by others, it should accomplish something beyond the 'counter West strategy', a spoiler of American and European points. It should build up its pragmatic plan and accept a noticeable profile as an independent player. Asia additionally holds another somewhat symbolic significance. Moscow considers the Asian countries powerful instead of a declining, tired Europe. It is not necessarily the case that the Russian elite has shed their Eurocentric viewpoint. Exchange with the European Union is still more than two-and-a-half times that of with China. Europe is the leading market for Russian oil and gas reservoirs. Asia is a clear canvas for Russia's foreign policy, an inheritance of past disregard and Eurocentric inclination (Lewis, 2019).

Russia's most obvious opportunity to anticipate itself as an essential player may lie as an economic contributor. Although the nations are slanted to consider Russia to be in reverse, un-dynamic, and excessively dependent on standard assets, it is, in any case, has a remarkable effect in a few regions. The most significant is the energy sector,

with Russia having an edge because the Kremlin is the world's biggest exporter of oil and gas. The ever-extending prerequisites of Asia's quickly developing but energy-poor economies need the oil and gas from Russia. Consideration has concentrated for the most part on Sino-Russian cooperation. However, Moscow quickly decreases its reliance on China by growing new markets in Asia. It has empowered Japan for different LNG adventures, expanding on the effectively generous contribution of Mitsui and Mitsubishi in the Sakhalin-2 oil and gas improvement. It has also brought Indian energy organisations into the Vankor oil and gas field in Eastern Siberia (Peterson, 2019). Despite Chinese restrictions, Rosneft is additionally directing oil investigation with Vietnam in the South China Sea. Yet, Russia faces significant obstructions in understanding its desire to turn into a considerable energy provider to the countries in Asia. These incorporate American sanctions which have disheartened cooperation with Japanese and South Korean organisations; variances in oil and gas costs which have recently raised questions about the reasonability of a few significant expense adventures; the effect of US shale gas production and reserves; and the development of renewable energy.

Nonetheless, these troubles are not insuperable, particularly as Asia-Pacific interest in non-renewable energy sources is estimated to develop firmly for decades. Moreover, Russia is an important bridge between Europe and Asia: the China–Mongolia–Russia corridor being one of the six assigned courses for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is the pre-prominent Arctic force whose Northern Sea Route could become a significant transportation corridor connecting Asia and Europe. In addition, the Russian Far East lies at the intersection of upper east China, Japan, and the Korean Peninsula (Lo, 2019). Besides, Central Asia has been a significant region for Moscow's geopolitical and geoeconomics interests since it lies far from the sea than any place else on the earth, and it could transport and benefit from its stores of rich non-renewable energy sources by utilising Russia – the sole travel passage. Russia is the proprietor of the pipelines going through the region, which constrain Central Asian states' revenues. Confronted with the developing interests in the region from different nations, keeping Central Asia dependent on Russia just as guaranteeing its most extreme conceivable offer in significant pipeline ventures has become Moscow's objective (Wlodkowska-Bagan, 2012).

Russia's Pivot to Asia depicts numerous difficulties alongside different opportunities. First, it gives the chance to incorporate the Kremlin with Asia, an economically significant part of the world. The Kremlin's shift towards Asia can also stretch a balance to its over-dependence on Europe, which currently represents approximately one segment of Russia's external exchange and 75% of remote direct interest in Russia. Finally, deliberately, strategic ties with Beijing suggest an opportunity to counter the US. These reasons have been substantial for a considerable length of time in reality, with Russia adjusting its ties with Beijing in the post-Soviet time.

Additionally, the Ukrainian episode and the Kremlin's extending offense from the Western world have accentuated the significance of making its strong foothold in Asia. Currently, Russia has accomplished in transforming itself into an open global power along its borders in the Middle East, Europe, South and East Asia, and the Arctic. However, the Kremlin must consider the track of its policies because the East is a unique region, but at the same time, a difficult one. China, India, Japan, and South



Korea are, for the most part modernising and developing military strength, in light of uncertainties about the desire of their regional opponents. The challenge for Russia is to exploit the assurance of the East while lessening the dangers of a significant clash. In addition, the Kremlin's relations with Beijing have been based on the idea of convergence due to the Pivot to the East. President Putin's focus on Moscow's relations with Beijing has never been anything more. Both states' strong association has developed more profound and organised state of affairs at the United Nations Security Council. Their bilateral relations have become particularly strong, moored by Moscow's arms deals with China and joint Western Pacific and East Asia activities. The platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, driven together by Beijing and Moscow, has become substantial for collaborating in regional conflicts. Beijing has been the Kremlin's crucial strategic ally in respective exchanges surpassing USD\$100 billion in 2018.

In the quest to achieve its objectives, Russia needs more strategic partners. To an enormous degree, Russia's not-so-good relations with the US and Russia's balanced ties with India have stagnated as of late, as India has tried to fabricate an increasingly cooperative relationship with the US. Developing relations with Tokyo and Delhi is a fragile issue, as these two states want close ties with Russia to deal with the mounting tensions due to China's rise, while at the same time, Russia requires close relations with China to counter the US and establish a strong market in the region to develop its economy. Subsequently, the Kremlin should remember these two extensive difficulties looming ahead as it turns toward the East. Henceforth, Moscow's future economic prosperity lies in the extended Far East - it must develop a cordial presence in Southeast and East Asia alongside the Northeast.

Additionally, Moscow's Far East should be immovably connected to the European side of Moscow through lines of correspondence and political networks. Undoubtedly, the division of the Kremlin Far East is not a fast-approaching risk, yet some idea ought to be given to this issue presently to forestall the rise of this threat in this difficulty (Graham, 2019). According to the Lowy Institute Report, Russia lacks economic weightage in Asia compared to China, but carries political influence. Specifically, the rise of China, the Sino-Indian border conflict, and Pakistan - Russian convergence of interests over the Taliban in Kabul are the instruments that Moscow has used to increase its influence in South Asia. It is argued that by accepting India's cordial relations with the US, Russia is extending its partnership with China as a competitor to the US in Asia (Singh, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

While considering the study of the Russian Federation after the disintegration of the USSR, it was a substantial concern for the Post-Soviet Russia to rebuild its assertive state posture. The breakdown and the internal vulnerabilities have directed Russia to design a comprehensive foreign policy. According to the challenges and the power balance, the transformation in Russian foreign policy shifted towards Asia due to the inclusion of regional and extra-regional powers. Geographically, Russia occupies a significant position. Firstly, it lies in European and Asian territorial boundaries, making it a Eurasian Russia. Secondly, the hunger for warm waters, the priority of territorial integrity, economic advancement, and a more active role in the international system

have embarked Russia to make a foothold into the periphery of the Eurasian continent. This research concludes that Russian foreign policy (without declaring) follows political Eurasianism, and for that, two interpretations are worth mentioning, i.e., Neo Eurasianism of Alexander Dugin and Pragmatic Eurasianism. The focal point of this research is the continent of Asia. The researcher argues that Asia is gaining prominence in the global political arena and is likely to reshape the correlation of power and configuration of forces among major players in the international arena in which Russia must operate. President Putin's Asia Pivot is a clear strategy for Moscow to manoeuvre in the region.

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