

RUSSIA'S GEOPOLITICAL IDENTITY AS A MEANS OF ENSURING ITS NATIONAL SECURITY

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The article addresses the issue of peculiarities of Russia's geopolitical identity in the context of the problem of choosing new geopolitical coordinates that can ensure Russia's national security in the face of global political transformations. The authors highlight the fact that, taking into account the new challenges of the world development related to the escalation of global competition, Russia faces the challenge of raising its geopolitical status within the global political system. Establishing Russia's geopolitical identity becomes an important means to ensure its national security and to position itself on the global political scene. Identifying Russia's place on the global political scene will make it possible to develop responses in order to strengthen Russia's statehood and to revive its image as a world power.

Key words: geopolitical identity, civilizational identity, national security, global transformations, geopolitical competition, geopolitical status, geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

The specific nature of modern geopolitical processes is manifest in the large-scale reconstruction of the world, in the modification of its structure associated with the appearance of new national boundaries and permanent remaking and division of spheres of influence. The complexity of these processes is accompanied by profound changes in the distribution of political forces and subjects of influence in the world community that are linked to the collapse of the unipolar world order and the emergence of new centres of political influence. The current geopolitical reality demands that countries and regions construct a new identity concept that could ensure their national security in the context of social instability and uncertainty.

At present, Russia is in the thick of things related to the escalation of geopolitical competition among countries that has led, in many different regions, to the emergence of vast zones of instability posing a threat to the world's secure development.

In this regard, the relevance of the issue of Russia's geopolitical identity is determined by the need to choose new geopolitical coordinates in the face of global political transformations that will enable Russia to determine its role in the world community and to ensure its national security. This study focuses on analysing a wide range of issues concerning the importance of Russia's geopolitical identity in the modern world and its role in ensuring its own national security.

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The issue of Russia's geopolitical identity has become a fundamental part of the scholarly discourse. Scholars point out that Russia's searching for its place in today's unstable and controversial world accounts for the fact that the issue of Russia's geopolitical identity is more relevant than ever. The break-up of the Soviet Union plunged Russia into an acute crisis not only in socio-economical, but also geopolitical terms.

Russia possesses strategically important nuclear weapons, rich natural resources and a unique location at the intersection of the national interests of the world's most powerful countries, from economical and military standpoints. All of these and many other factors guarantee that Russia will remain one of key actors in the international scene, capable of ensuring its national security at three different but interrelated levels: global, Eurasian and regional.

METHODOLOGY

It is the interdisciplinary approach that provided the theoretical and methodological basis for this research, making it possible to investigate the issue at the intersection of traditionally independent fields of study: psychology, social philosophy, political science, sociology and cultural studies.

For the purposes of this article aiming to explore geopolitical identity, we adopted the method of constructive realism, developed by P. Berger and T. Luckmann in their study, "The Social Construction of Reality". The authors made the assertion that people's subjective representations of the world are institutionalized and finally become objective social structures. Different ways of constructing social reality are included into the process of an individual's socialization. Berger et Luckmann point out that "identity is formed through cultural processes" (1, p. 279). During the identification process, the individual realizes that he belongs to a group, i.e. he associates his individuality with his group's system of values and standards. It is group identification that allows the individual to realize continuity of his existence within the system of generations and in the course of history. However, identity is not only about integration into and self-identification with a specific community, it is also about opposition and confrontation: "us/them", "our/their" [2].

Today, scholars underline the problematic nature of the global development. In order to describe social processes, Z. Baumann uses the term "flowing society", in which traditional institutes and normative references change quite rapidly [3]. U. Bek mentions "society at risk", drawing attention to potential unpredictable dangers that face the world in the context of social instability and uncertainty [4].

In today's scholarly discourse, all these tendencies are combined in the notion of "late modernity" or "late modern" that reflects the state of extreme instability and unpredictability of social development (A. Giddens, P. Dalgren, S. A. Kravtchenko). In these scholars' viewpoint, the issues of the late modern period consist, first of all, in that people have difficulty feeling confident about the present

and, at the same time, they find it hard to choose where to move next [5, p. 7]. This is why the transition from one type of social organization to another, namely, from modernity to late modernity, is accompanied by the identity crisis both at the level of society and of its various groups, and at the level of inclusiveness of independent societies into one global system of interaction [6]. The theory of late modernity helps to better understand the social context that accounts for the issue of Russia's geopolitical identity.

Another theoretical and methodological foundation of this study is the transformational approach, its key concepts being the "paradigm of crisis" and the "paradigm of social trauma". The "paradigm of crisis" is best reflected in Emile Durkheim's and Robert K. Merton's theory of "social anomie". In their point of view, anomie arises from the devaluation of the value system in society due to social transformations, accompanied by the crisis of social institutions [7]. In our research on challenges and threats to Russia's national security, caused by the processes of geopolitical competition, we draw mostly on J. C. Alexander's and P. Sztompka's theory of "social trauma" that focuses on the negative consequences of the global political transformations of the world order [8].

The above-mentioned approaches provide the theoretical and methodological foundation of the present research on Russia's geopolitical identity as a means to ensure its national security.

RESULTS

Rapid changes in the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have exacerbated the problem of identity. Never before in human history has this problem been so acute and never before has it concerned virtually all states and nations in the world. As a matter of fact, the problem of identity has become the survival issue, and multiculturalism policy contributed a lot to this process [24]. According to some researchers, "the society, founded on the functioning of global nets, would inevitably come in contact with "alien" dangers from other communities..." (9, p. 10). Global transformations occurring in the global development facilitate the replacement of traditional types of identities with new ones, related with the geopolitical self-fulfillment and self-determination of the participants in global politics.

Russia's challenge of searching for its geopolitical identity first emerged in the post-Soviet period, synonymous with profound changes in Russia's geopolitical importance in world politics. As some researchers stated, at that time "Russia turned from being a superpower and one of two poles of the bipolar international system into a third-rate country..." [10, p. 176].

The change of Russia's geopolitical status led to the reduction of its territory size, the shift of its western borders to the east, the withdrawal of its former strategic allies and the emergence of centres of tension in Central Asia, in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe.

However, despite the change of its geopolitical status in the world, Russia has preserved its nuclear capability and its geopolitical location in the centre of the Eurasian region, and this is what determines its geopolitical significance in the modern world.

Halford Mackinder, Karl Haushofer and Nikolay Y. Danilevsky, among other outstanding geopoliticians, draw attention to Russia's geopolitical significance. Their views can be explained by Russia's geographical position in the heart of Eurasia that determines its political status, the essence of which is summed up in one of the key principles of the classical geopolitics: "Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world". At the same time, Russian territorial location at the intersection of two civilisations, the East and the West, raises the controversial issue of its geopolitical identity.

Academic literature on various aspects of the issue of Russia's geopolitical identity is represented by the works of Kamaludin S. Gadjiev, Aleksandr G. Dugin, Zuriet A. Jade, Mikhail V. Ilyin, Aleksey A. Kara-Murza, among others. These researchers point out that geopolitical identity represents a unique set of values, principles, attitudes, socio-political ideals, on the basis of which people ready to share their common destiny, mission and interests are integrated.

According to Gadjiev, geopolitical identity is, first of all, manifested by the fact that "people as citizens of a specific country identify themselves not only with a specific territory as such, but also with its political and economical system, its specific values and objectives, methods and means, lifestyles and socio-cultural realities, history and national destiny, etc." [11, p. 6-7].

In his research on the world's geopolitical organization, Dugin highlights the diversity of Russia's geopolitical identity determined by its historical background and by its modern condition [12]. We share his opinion that, in our days, Russian society is offered many geopolitical identity models by various political factions that diverge in their ideological, political and attitudinal views about Russia's further development. Thus, geopolitical identification models that are offered to the Russians serve the interests of specific political forces.

Ilyin follows the same line of reasoning in his analysis of Russia's geopolitical identity, focusing on its spiritual and mental components that include geopolitical codes, images and other identity patterns [13]. In his view, these factors were used in different ways at different stages of Russia's political development, but they are still remembered and implemented in modern Russian politics.

Russia's identification of its place and its mission in the modern unstable and controversial world is still subjected to the internal discord of values and the painful search for the national idea [25]. Researchers draw attention to this factor, noting that "the social consciousness of most people in Russia and Russian-speaking people abroad continues to be split: everyone feels mostly European as far as culture and

technology are concerned, and Asian from the spiritual and geographical points of view" [14, p. 244].

As for Kara-Murza, he highlights, in his analysis of the specific nature of Russia's geopolitical identity, that Russia is a stable, invariant historico-cultural formation with two main features: 1) civilizational identity resulting from Russia's belonging to the Eastern branch of the European Christian civilisation; 2) geopolitical identity, related to Russia's historical location on the Eurasian geographical platform [15].

In this vein, Kara-Murza provides rationale for the "duality" of the Russian identity, best represented by the fact that "Russia's European civilizational and Eurasian geopolitical identification are not merely different, but rather two intrinsically connected parts of its overall self-determination in the world that require seamless coordination with each other" [15, p. 127]. Moreover, in its course of history, Russia knew its moments of glory exactly when its civilizational identity and geopolitical objectives were in harmony.

In Kara-Murza's viewpoint, Russia's national security and successes in the global political system have always depended wholly on the unity of its geopolitical and civilizational self-identification that allowed it to solve both its geopolitical and civilizational tasks. On the contrary, the decline or loss of Russia's political status in the international community has always been related to the lack of balance in its civilizational and geopolitical tasks or to attempts to artificially and deliberately synthesize them [15].

Jade conducted a comprehensive research on Russia's geopolitical identity, and, in her view, geopolitical identity is a multilayered system formation, which is the basis for constructing political space and for integration of geopolitical members. Jade specifies three levels of geopolitical identity [16].

The first level is the political exploration of the geographical space, that is, the implementation of state power and organization of intergovernmental relations based on where the geopolitical influence zone boundaries are. This level implies a specific geopolitical interaction, in which the subjects are the main "players" on the geopolitical playing field pretending to expand their spheres of influence whereas the objects are the territories, their geographical resources presenting geopolitical value, and people who live on these territories.

The second level of geopolitical identity is represented by the geopolitical worldview that comprises the ideas, doctrines and clear models of the geopolitical world organization. In Jade's opinion, the geopolitical worldview is adequate to the geopolitical world organization only when people consider themselves, from the perspective of the geopolitical world perception, to be equal members of the global geopolitical processes instead of just pawns used by major geopolitical forces.

The third level of geopolitical identity is linked to the geopolitical world perception that reflects people's understanding of the place and role that their state

has in global politics. Jade interprets the notion of “geopolitical world perception” from the socio-psychological perspective and includes in its content those features of the socio-cultural, traditional and historical subjectivity that are related to the concept of historical memory, national mentality, national stereotypes and paradigms.

The above-mentioned levels of geopolitical identity complement each other and represent a combination of rational and irrational facets of understanding and making sense of Russia’s place and role in the global political system and also of the socio-political adaptation of people in politics.

Thus, our analysis of the key approaches to the issue of Russia’s geopolitical identity shows that its development is a major means of ensuring Russia’s national security, since it contributes to determining the area of its national interests and the general outline of its geostrategy in the 21st century. [17].

DISCUSSION

Today, within the context of the relevance of Russia’s geopolitical identity issue, political and scholarly discourses focus mainly on the controversial question whether Russia is a regional or world power.

A number of analytics tend toward an opinion that Russia has lost its status of a major world power after the USA won the Cold War, and this is why Russia can only exist as a regional power. The proponents of this approach appeal to the concepts of the rise and fall of empires that became widespread in the 80s with a helping hand of P. Kennedy.

Other researchers argue that, despite many dramatic events of the past decades related to the destructive consequences of the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the change of Russia’s geopolitical significance in world politics, Russia has not lost its status of a great power and remains one of the key actors of modern geopolitics. Moreover, Manfred Worner, the former NATO Secretary General, believes that Russia is “a too big geopolitical mass” to be dismissed.

In their turn, some Russian researchers indicate that Russia’s geopolitical location as such, i.e. its situation between the West and the East (not only geographically speaking, but also from the perspective of the political development) requires that Russia should participate in the structuring and maintenance of the balance of power in the world. Taking an active part in various regional and global political processes, Russia is capable of forming such a balance of power that responds to its national interests. As Gadjiev puts it, “a mere look at the political map would suffice to confirm that Russia’s geopolitical scope itself condemns it to being a world power” [18, p. 9].

A. Panarin, the representative of the neo-Eurasian approach, upholds a similar position and argues that Russia “cannot ignore its geopolitical tradition or its system of external expectations that are addressed to it (negatively or positively) as a

holder of the Heartland. Russia should realize that it cannot pass, by arbitrary decree and by the arbitrary will of some elites, from being a continental power – the participant of the Heartland – to being an oceanic power that relate to the Rimland... Russia's continental location is the unalterable characteristic of its destiny and imposes limitations on political choices and geopolitical creation" [19, p. 26].

Additionally, Henry Kissinger draws attention to Russia's geopolitical significance as a bulwark of the global balance of power: "In the past two hundred years, the European balance of power was, in some cases, preserved thanks to Russia. Without Russia, Napoleon and Hitler would probably have succeeded in creating universal empires. Similar to the two-faced Janus, Russia has been a threat to the balance of power and one of its key components, important for itself and still not quite a part of it" [20, p. 124].

Today, most Russian researchers argue that, despite internal problems caused by a severe economic downfall, Russia is now reviving its geopolitical status of a world power [21]. The presence of the following features of Russia's geopolitical identification account for Russia's perceptions about its status in the global political system. First, it is this country's unique geopolitical location, the large scale of its geopolitical space and its transit possibilities on land and in the ocean. As Gubtchenko puts it, "Russia's geopolitical location and space, the need for its territory's communication and transit possibilities allows it to be an active and powerful actor in world politics" [21, p. 116]. In the second place, its rich natural resources determine Russia's long-term strategic potential. Russia's energy resources represent best of all its strategic potential. For example, nowadays, Russia exports over 50% of its oil and over 60% of its gas to the European Union. Despite the fact that the Russian-European Union energy partnership is functioning in quite a contradictory way, it is evident that the process of developing a unified mechanism in the energy sector between Russia and Europe is taking place, after all. Thirdly, it is Russia's active participation in solving international problems and conflicts, determined by Russia's status in the United Nations. Fourth, it is Russia's immense military potential that is capable to ensure its national security, drawing on its strategic nuclear and military-space forces. Fifth, it is Russia's own cultural and civilizational specific nature. The high level of development of Russian culture and cultural achievements allow Russia to remain a unique world civilisation, having its own national and cultural peculiarities that other civilisations must reckon with.

Russian scholars highlight the fact that, at present, the Russians are in split minds as to Russia's civilizational achievements: "On one hand, Russia attained international acclaim in literature, art, architecture, folk art and outstanding scientific discoveries; on the other hand, there is the ongoing destruction of historical memory and the falsification of political history, and this factor exerts a negative influence on the social consciousness and consolidation of the Russians and on the promotion

of national pride for their great country among all peoples that live in Russia” [21, p. 118].

It goes without saying that the geopolitical positions in today’s Russia are less strong in comparison with the Soviet period, but, as many researchers have rightly observed, “building geopolitical identity in the modern context acts as an indicator that makes it possible to judge about the character and direction of the integration processes of geopolitical members into the political structure of the society and about the development thrust of the geopolitical process” [22, p. 27].

CONCLUSION

Overall, it should be noted that, today, the situation in Russia has significantly changed and has brought to the fore the issues of determining Russia’s new place and role in global geopolitics, of defending its national sovereignty, of identifying its national interests, of establishing new strategic goals, of reassessing the whole system of relations with other members of global politics. Today, Russia has every right to submit a request for active participation in world politics.

It is necessary to be aware of the complexity and uncertainty of geopolitical processes in the modern world and to realize that a country aiming to ensure its national security and to protect its national interests must have not only “constant” friends, but also allies that can and must change depending on the specific distribution of political forces on the world scene. Besides, the strengthening of Russia’s geopolitical status and its growing influence in various parts of the world must be accompanied by the elaboration of an internal geopolitical identity for the multi-ethnic country such as Russia [23], without rejecting the achievements of Western countries in this area [25]. This determines the need for shaping Russia’s geopolitical identity that would integrate the Russian society on the basis of understanding its national interests in the context of escalation of geopolitical competition.

Based on the above-mentioned information, we can conclude that, despite hardships in the past decades, Russia revives its geopolitical positions and exerts a significant influence on the content and nature of the global and regional balance of power.

Determining Russia’s geopolitical identity becomes an important means to ensure its national security and to position itself in world politics. Russia’s possession of strategically important nuclear weapons, of rich natural resources, of the excellent location at the intersection of the interests of the world’s most powerful countries, the centres of economical and military power, and many other factors guarantee that Russia will remain one of the key actors on the international scene, capable of ensuring its national security at three different but interrelated levels: global, Eurasian and regional.

In conclusion, despite the change of Russia's geopolitical status in the late 20th century, caused by the breakdown of the bipolar international system, today's geopolitical challenges require adequate responses that will determine Russia's geopolitical status in the evolving multipolar model of the modern world.

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