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Russian Military Renaissance: An Unnecessary War

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Abstract

The deep roots of the war between Russia and Ukraine are the firm U.S. conviction that the latter should become a NATO Member State to deter the post-Soviet influence of the former. Proponents of the Russian intervention use various arguments to justify Moscow's use of force, but their starting point is far from rational. Both political and historical realities in the region prove that the geopolitical choices of minor actors are typically subject to competition among great powers. Throughout their record of confrontation, both the United States and Russia have demonstrated that Eastern Europe is essential for their foreign policy. The purpose of this paper is to assess if the Russian invasion of Ukraine is an expression of *realpolitik*. The arguable position that the Ukrainian conflict is the West's fault inspires considerable debate among Western scholars who believe that Ukraine's membership in the Alliance is inevitable. In the article, I argue that the actions of Russia are not an expression of realist foreign policy simply because Putin's nuclear threats are not rational. Instead, Kremlin's war embodies a strategic amalgam of what I call military renaissance – the long-term dream of Russia to restore the Soviet Empire to its former spheres of influence. That is why the Cold War strategy of containment will not work.

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Introduction

There is a common understanding, accumulated in the world's history, upon which Western policymakers always rely as they face Russia. One part of Russian politics is now largely neglected. Many European and American decision-makers have regarded contemporary Russia as a rational actor even when its President threatens the West with nuclear war.

Russian *realpolitik* is considered rational if Vladimir Putin defends his borders from the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Although the starting point of such an assumption is logical and robust, it is insufficient to explain Russian behavior after the invasion of Ukraine. If we assume that Moscow remains a rational actor, we should conclude that the use of nuclear weapons is not a reasonable probability. One may observe that nuclear states that are not treated as equal when shaping the regional status-quo are typically dissatisfied and, thus, face the ultimate choice of whether to react. However, rational leadership favors self-preservation over mutual assured destruction (MAD). Therefore, when two nuclear powers, such as the United States and Russia, compete in the post-pandemic world order, with stability shattered by a regional crisis and by a rising power like China, one should not always rely on the firm realist assumption that rational behavior will prevent MAD. While states remain the primary actors in international relations and act rationally, state leaders like Vladimir Putin could radically revise their conventional wisdom under the guise of *existential threats*.

In this paper, I will explain why the war in Ukraine poses an unnecessary risk to Russia. My claim is that the military conflict we witness in Eastern Europe has its roots not only in the Russian perceptions of NATO and U.S. Foreign Policy. It also stems from an essential aspect of the Russian grand strategy, which I call *military renaissance*. I offer various arguments in support of my assumption, primarily related to the objective observation that Russian nuclear diplomacy mirrors the non-rational vision of the Neo-Eurasian geopolitical paradigm, which presumes the existence of imminent military confrontation between Russia and the West. Pessimism about Neo-Eurasianism, promoting war-like behavior, was imposed by the inconsistent assumption that the philosophy of Alexander Dugin resembles conspiracies and did not enjoy the support of the Russian Presidential administration. However, one should not neglect the striking similarity between Dugin's vision of Eurasian geopolitics and Russian foreign policy in Eastern Europe. To say that the Neo-Eurasian theory reflects Russia's struggle for regional leadership in the region is to state a fact, which is a geopolitical reality in Ukraine.

Why was the West Wrong about The Russian Bear?

Post-Soviet Russia, ruled by an anti-systemic leader like Putin, and Ukraine, a non-nuclear actor since the end of the Cold War, are not considered suited for the mission of mutual agreement. Could both states reconcile to peaceful relations when geostrategic differences are great, and the former's actions bound the latter with the primordial right to self-defense? Measuring the time from the war's outbreak, this paper concludes that the answer is no. With the unipolar world order transitioning into a state of Sino-American bipolarity, international relations have proven to be an anarchic realm where peace is fragile (Waltz, 1988, p. 620). Despite all efforts of the international community that might have had a reasonable chance of securing peace if it were not for the Western misconceptions about Russian behavior, the present situation in Ukraine takes the world to the brink of World War III. Is this a geopolitical reality only because America underestimated the Russian preparedness to prevent NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe? Is it simply the fear of MAD that has encouraged the Russian Bear from playing on nuclear warfare? Or is the rise of China-related somehow to the Russian attempts to resurrect the Soviet Union? Before seeking the answers to those dilemmas, we should first explain the nature of the Russian military renaissance.

I use the term *military renaissance* to indicate the revival of Russian political ambitions to reestablish Moscow's influence in the post-Soviet space through hard power. Most studies in the field reflect two realities relevant to Russian military policy before the Ukrainian war. One is that Kremlin has no interest in risking nuclear war by attacking a NATO Member State and that Putin's doctrine does not seek to restore Russian influence in former Warsaw pact states (Trenin, 2016, p. 29). The other contends that Russian aspirations for rebuilding its conventional military force have their roots in the Russian strategic culture after the Cold War, which has deprived Soviet decision-making of its rationality (Renz, 2016, pp. 31-32).

The first assumption failed to pass the test of history. Within a divided Europe, deprived of military identity, Russia and the United States constitute the parties destined to decide the future of Ukraine and all of Eastern Europe. America is the winner of the Cold War, the obsessing enemy of Russia, and Kremlin is the scary Bear who pursues a policy of prestige to regain its great power status. Any event in Europe that has a structural impact on the post-pandemic security architecture of the Old Continent concerns the interests of Washington and Moscow. Before the Ukrainian war, Russia had a long record of convincing the European states that they could no longer rely on the military protection of the United States and NATO (Ivanov, 2020, p. 63). With Ukraine invaded by the Russian troops, the balance of power in Europe changed drastically. As echoed by his innermost circle of generals and oligarchs, Putin does not have a realistic image of Ukraine because the decision-makers around him shape his attitudes according to what Robert Jervis calls *lack incentives for accuracy* (Jervis, 2017, p. 357). When policymakers are deprived of an accurate impulse to comprehend the security environment, they typically succumb to wishful thinking. For example, Putin's emulation of *blitzkrieg* in Ukraine originated from the expectation that Zelensky would flee Kyiv and the government would surrender to the Russians. Partially influenced by his *clique*, Putin's desires were rational but deprived of accuracy. The probability of Russian troops invading a NATO ally such as Romania is even higher if those expectations and desires continue to mismatch the geopolitical realities. The same logic applies to nuclear warfare. Some might argue that no decision-maker would advise the Russian President to press the red button. Even so, wishful thinking is a powerful stimulus, and if the actions of the other party pose an existential threat to its adversary, the latter could shape a cognitive reality that envisions, if not strategic, then at least – a tactical preemptive strike. Invasion of the Balkans, on the other side, reflects the historical attitudes of leaders like Putin – a distinctive pattern of his rhetoric. However, whether rationality or wishful thinking will prevail is yet to be seen.

The second prediction constructed four possible scenarios for the future of Russian foreign policy: status-quo, Westernization, Stalinization, or Russia in Chaos (McNabb, 2017, p. 187). I assume that two of the mentioned scenarios are most likely to predetermine the future of Russia if we do not witness nuclear warfare: Russia in chaos or Stalinization. Many political actions of the Russian political elite have corresponded to these presumptions. The tightening of Russian control over Eastern Europe led to the consolidation of NATO, which, in turn, triggered the accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance. The plan to form an anti-Russian coalition in Europe resulted in a coordinated deterrence strategy supported by the United States.

Not only is there no chance of building a modern and Westernized Russian state, but as a second consideration, the basic

argument of my assumption is that China would now allow it. President Xi Jinping expressed increased interest in cooperation with Moscow in a reluctance to ensure that the Russian nuclear umbrella will continue operating and serving China's national interests. China does not take a side in the conflict, and my assumption is that it will abstain from any action unless provoked by the West. When it became clear that the Chinese military and economic capabilities were growing at a level that would, in the next fifty years, exceed the United States, American policymakers began to express concerns that Washington would lose the strategic competition to Beijing. A potential Chinese attack on Taiwan is typically taken as an opportunity for propaganda against China. Therefore, Chinese decision-makers are presently concerned with their country's rise, falling below the level necessitated surpassing the United States.

I hope no scholar would argue that the dynamics of the status quo in Eurasia are irreversible. To say that Russia will be capable of modifying it is to state a fact, which is, however, far from clear. Changes in the balance of power affect different European states differently, emphasizing security cooperation and gas policy. In a status quo, where many states depend on Russian gas, the incentive to outplay the rest of your allies and defend your energy interests weakens European unity. In the Balkans, changes may severely affect Bulgaria and North Macedonia differently, which means that the probability of keeping the status quo in the region is highly unlikely to be taken relevant. Occasional attempts to shatter the balance of power might be taken, but as long as nuclear warfare is not an option and as long as NATO's capabilities outnumber the Russians, the balance of power in Europe will tilt in favor of the West.

Stalinization and chaotization of Russia are the most probable outcome of the Bear's military adventure in Ukraine. The constant presence of economic sanctions and diplomacy could escalate into another crisis in Eastern Europe. However, it is folly to assume that Russia will change even if we witness the downfall of Putin's rule. It was equally wrong to assert that Moscow would reshape its foreign policy after the end of the Cold War, but with the Soviet Union defeated, the West hoped to see a modernized and predictable Russia rising from the ashes of its predecessor. An expectation as praiseworthy, as misguided. The Ukrainian war, born of conditions in which the interests of two nuclear powers clash, could shift Russia's political determination. However, it will hardly lead to changes in the cultural perceptions of Russian society. George Vernadsky points out in his essays that Eurasianism is the unifying theory that positions Russia in neither Europe nor Asia (Halperin, 1982, p. 477). The Eurasian paradigm presumes a political amalgam of the Byzantine Orthodox culture and the centralized political order of the Mongols. In other words, Eurasianism is the essential core of Russian politics. Therefore, the absence of individualism, a free-market economy, and a cultural renaissance is a precondition for the inability of Russia to endorse liberal democracy. Rather than a cultural difference than an antisystem pattern, the Eurasian paradigm presupposes the confrontation between Russian culture and the West. However, such a contradiction is far from inevitable. The problem arises from the Neo-Eurasian geopolitical theory of Alexander Dugin, who argues that Russia and the United States are destined to fight (Dugin, 1997, p. 20). With the Russian troops marching through Ukraine, Dugin's influence on the Russian grand strategy has become even more evident.

Russian Foreign Policy is Not *Realpolitik*

I proceed to my central contention – that Russian politics at present does not embody the realist paradigm. A popular

assumption contends that Russia pursued a policy of revisionism and realpolitik to regain its status of great power and that it built a Russian-centered regional order (Allison, 2017, p. 529). Although Allison's approach is correct in his predictions, it lacks specific arguments in favor of what the author calls unrestrained realpolitik. Unrestrained or not, realpolitik relies on competitive systems regulated by the rationality of the most successful competitors (Waltz, 2010, p. 76). Although rational in his intentions and struggle for self-defense against the enlargement of NATO, Putin is reckless in his behavior. Although revisionism and the great power policy are distinct features of Russian foreign policy, their validity is undermined by the irrational threats of nuclear warfare. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is about realpolitik, but the vision of Russia, using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against Europe is an expression of either wishful thinking or non-rational perceptions. Although the Western theory of realpolitik presumes hegemonic behavior, the primary concern of state actors is their survival (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 6). In the Russian case, we have a unique example of a former great power, which seeks to survive, and a leader who follows a contradictory foreign policy of nuclear diplomacy.

The realist foreign policy, in which state actors maximize the use of force and are occupied with defending their national interests, is designed to ensure that only the most skillful players will win the game without risking destroying the international system itself. The history of the Cold War shows that even the most minor victories of the Soviet Union exceed the devastating impact of MAD. We should then come to the conclusion that contemporary Russia differs from the USSR not only in terms of military capabilities. Its rationality has decreased over the last three decades. Russian attention was focused on challenges by regional and global competitors such as transnational terrorist networks or the U.S. struggle for liberal hegemony. To reap substantial gains from its foreign policy was extremely difficult, for, within the post-Cold War age, there was no certain scenario about the future of the U.S.-dominated security architecture. Thus, Russia needed a revisited geopolitical paradigm to replace the old Soviet doctrines without opposing America directly. One might argue that the influence of Duginism on Russian foreign policy is comparatively inconsequential or exaggerated. However, such an objection does not explain the chaotic nature of Russian actions in Ukraine. Russia, with limited success, substituted its hybrid strategy for conventional warfare, while Ukraine still acts as a deterrent to Moscow's aspiration for regional hegemony. Russian military policy was not a matter of necessity but of caprice based on a combination of wishful thinking and miscalculations on the Ukrainian preparedness to retaliate. Possible prolongation of the hybrid tactics would have enabled Russia to expand its influence in the post-Soviet space by gaining more influence so that any attempt of NATO to counter would be bound to fail. For Russia, however, a war against Ukraine seemed to promise even greater assets – given the balance of power in Europe, such military conflict was supposed to divide the Alliance and raise Moscow's strategic preponderance in the Balkans. Putin's misjudgment of the situation is best illustrated by the inconsistent military doctrine of the *scorch war* that failed due to Western support for Ukraine.

Furthermore, one should not neglect the rhetoric of Russian political officials, who justify their leader's actions using *demilitarization and denazification*. However, if demilitarization is typically understandable in a conventional military conflict, denazification causes complex disbeliefs. One group of scholars defines denazification as a form of projection, one of the most common mechanisms for defending oneself from one's unacceptable subconscious (Dragaš, 2021, p. 6). For others, it is simply a doctrine that justifies Russian efforts to overthrow the government in Kyiv and transform Ukraine into a Belarus-like regime loyal to Kremlin (Makowski 2022, p. 1). In general, denazification is a code word for regime

change (Person and McFaul, 2022, p. 19). In truth, the explanations mentioned would be incomplete if they lacked the geopolitical theory of Alexander Dugin, which was central to Russian foreign policy after the end of the Cold War.

To assume that Neo-Eurasianism constitutes the fundamental pillar of Russian politics is to state a fact. Political geographers properly observe that Dugin's geopolitics reproduce the worst excesses of the imperialist gaze, combined with the relationship between rationalism and mysticism (Ingham, 2001, p. 1). In the rest of the section, I will explain how Duginism affects Russian political perceptions of what policymakers in Moscow still call a "special military operation in Ukraine." I also briefly summarize how Neo-Eurasianism influences the Russian security doctrine.

Dugin's firm conviction that multipolar globalization should replace the unipolar world order is central to Russian strategic culture (Dugin, 2014, p. 11). Although the Neo-Eurasian paradigm does not explicitly reject the process of globalization, it rebukes its universalization. In other words, globalization can operate effectively only in a multipolar world. Dugin's appraisal of multipolarity corresponds to the political line of Putin's administration that promotes the establishment of post-liberal world order in which Russia and China will enjoy the status of great powers. Putin's intentions to expand Russia's influence in Europe have formed an offensive posture against the United States and NATO. Since Moscow is in possession of the world's largest nuclear arsenal, no NATO ally would directly challenge Russia. Therefore, the struggle for multipolar world order reinforces essential conditions that would still exist in the absence of WMD: Washington and Moscow have different visions of globalization, and thus, the competition between both powers is a geopolitical reality. Even if the Soviet Union did not collapse, the superpowers would continue to fight for spheres of influence in Europe.

Neo-Eurasianism contends that Sea and Land nations coexist in a state of nature confrontation and that their clash is imminent (Dugin 2015, p. 5). Dugin identifies the Russian Federation with the civilization of the Land, a living organism that shapes the Eurasian heartland (Vernadsky, 1969, p. 10). It is essential to highlight that Duginism implicitly considers Kievan Rus an ancient territory that belongs by heritage to Russia. On the contrary, Western Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world from the civilization of the Sea, the thalassocracy, are constantly at war with Russia. Here, Dugin employs the Slavic doctrine of Leontiev, claiming that the imminent war between Land and Sea follows the logic of history (Dugin 2015, p. 7). Suppose the inevitable nature of such confrontations is more important than the survival of the international system. In that case, we should ask whether Dugin's theory would advocate a nuclear strike against the Sea were the United States and its allies able to defeat Russia in conventional warfare. The obvious answer is yes. Western policymakers doubt that Putin will press the red button for many reasons. However, the increasing number of states opposing Russia would increase the cognitive temptation of the Russian President and limit the scope of his decisions. Putin will find himself paralyzed and trapped between the consistent support for Ukraine and the neutral approach of China. Simply because Neo-Eurasianism advocates an imminent clash, he will face the ultimate conclusion that nuclear weapons are the only credible deterrent to Russian adversaries.

It is important to stress the tangible nature of Neo-Eurasianism. Dugin's theory has a final purpose that he borrows from the classical Eurasians, seeking to avoid a methodological accusation of utopia. The Neo-Eurasian paradigm postulates that the original purpose of Russian foreign policy is to restore the Eurasian Empire (Polukhin, 2014, p. 139). Among all Eurasian founding fathers, Pyotr Savitsky has the most profound view of Eurasia's future, claiming that Russia should

keep its imperial legacy in whatever government it exists (Glebov, 2005, p. 2). Duginism jumps beyond Savitsky's concept, stating that the Russian Federation is the rightful heir to all historical, political, and cultural forms that took shape on the territory of the Russian plain (Dugin, 2015, p. 4). Taken together, those Eurasian assumptions are the most important characteristics of contemporary Russian politics. Duginism combines the efforts of Eurasian scholars to explain the future of Russia and applies them in practice. The constancy of Moscow's struggle for multipolarity, alongside Putin's personal desire for the denazification of Ukraine, has made for a striking similarity to incorporate the basic pillars of Duginist philosophy in Russian foreign policy.

Furthermore, the apocalyptic messages of Duginism add political credit to the charisma of the Russian leadership that needed a revisited political formula after the end of the Cold War. One historical loss for Russia qualified as the greatest tragedy by Vladimir Putin was integrated into his foreign policy – the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The present status of this narrative shapes the cornerstone of the Russian grand design to resurrect the Eurasian Empire in its former glory. A purpose that could either lead nuclear powers to MAD or establish a new status quo in Europe, in which the United States shares its influence with Russia. A realist, however, would assume that only if Eurasia truly unites politically, culturally, and economically, which is an increasingly unlikely scenario in the face of rising China, could the USSR rise again. With its invasion of Ukraine thus, Russia pursues a foreign policy that could either lead nuclear powers to MAD or establish a new status quo in Europe, in which the United States shares its influence with a newly emerged Sino-Russian bloc.

A War of Russian Roulette without Bullets

In a world order in transition, the major rising power – China, overshadows both the United States and Russia. To assume that Beijing will take the world's leadership in four or five decades is to state a reality. Therefore, under the current circumstances, the Russian Federation has one essential maneuver – provoking tensions with America and maintaining constructive relations with China. The war in Ukraine was the ultimate expression of Russia's balanced behavior, and if it were not for Putin's personal desire to restore the lost Soviet glory, Moscow would enjoy a far more favorable position in international relations. Thus, I assume we could best describe contemporary Russian politics as a roulette without bullets.

If the Russian intervention in Ukraine is identical to hybrid warfare, then the most likely scenario of its outcome would duplicate the annexation of Crimea. However, Russian actions should be taken as an indication of the Kremlin's weakness to elaborate on a different hybrid strategy. There is a growing academic consensus that hybrid warfare embodies a non-conventional paradox of military tools such as capturing territory without resorting to military force, creating a pretext for military intervention, and using tools to influence the decision-making process of state victims or strategic adversaries (Chivvis, 2017, p. 2). But such definitions, in their present form, are less able to explain what is happening in Ukraine than scholars, who tend to seek the purpose of Russian foreign policy in Russia's natural instinct to expand (Fuller, 1992, p. 40). In other words, Russian strategic culture favors hard power over hybrid approaches that only partially benefit Moscow. With its strength and influence in Eurasia, a regional power like Russia is more likely to pursue an expansionist policy to counter NATO's enlargement. That is not to say that Russian soft power is entirely deprived of relevance. However, soft power and hybrid warfare alone are insufficient to explain the long-term purposes of Russian

politics in Eastern Europe. Putin finds it easier to cooperate with China and irritate the United States than challenge the NATO allies directly. With the Alliance closer to Russia's borders, however, the Russian President ceased its policy of hybrid balance without realizing that the West is more difficult to deal with in a direct confrontation than in an asymmetrical conflict. As soon as Russia abandoned its precedent hybrid warfare strategy, Moscow entered into a military conflict that would most likely repeat the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan.

The benefits of hybrid warfare stopped shortly after Russia invaded Eastern Europe. Russian power is still predominant in Eurasia but far from absolute. Describing Eurasia as Russia-dominated does not mean that Moscow can exercise regional power but that the rest of the regional actors favor its predominance. Claiming that, however, is arguable. By coming to terms with China, as Putin has already done, Russia has partially abandoned its idea of restoring the Eurasian Empire. Or can we assume that the rise of China does actually indicate that its primary concern is with the war and affective Chinese economic interests in Europe and Eurasia? Although the political interests of Russia and China in Central Asia often coincide, their European policies conflict. Even though NATO considers China a threat to its security, the global economic dependence on Beijing will give little place for Europe to deter Chinese foreign policy. Russia, quite the opposite, suffered heavy losses from the sanctions of the West even after Putin attempted to revive the Russian economy through gas policy. Most European states had already developed strategies to emancipate from the Russian oil, a step that should have been taken years ago when Russia annexed Crimea.

Hybrid warfare also secured strategic stability for Russian foreign policy or at least allowed Moscow to avoid or counter the detrimental effects of European sanctions and American soft power. The benefits of creating ideological tensions among Western allies or shaping domestic political forces in the Balkans exceeded the cost of war. Russia has found its opportunity to coexist with the United States in a system where the latter held the global predominance. With the invasion of Ukraine, diplomacy failed, and, to a greater extent, Russia demonstrated not its power but its vulnerability: its inability to reshape the post-Cold War balance of power on the Old Continent. The Russian military capabilities permitted Putin to act effectively in Eastern Ukraine simply because he knew that his actions would primarily affect the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, which Russia is willing to recognize. The decision of Russia to threaten the West with nuclear warfare was a further demonstration of weakness. Because the U.S. nuclear umbrella provides a robust deterrent for all NATO allies, Moscow was forced to express its threats in a way that would better fit President Biden's rhetoric of sacred obligations (Zagorski, 2022, p. 10). Thus, Russia was much inclined to overestimate the advantages it could gain from the military intervention in Ukraine as opposed to the strategy of hybrid warfare. Russian miscalculations originate from Putin's wishful thinking and the conviction that Ukraine will not pose a significant challenge to the revived Russian military. A roulette without bullets. The map clearly shows that, in the first phase of the war, Russia has permanent control over the areas under the control of pro-Russian separatists. As we should expect, a military strategy is successful only if political leaders make rational decisions without listening to decision-makers who tell them what they want to hear. Here, Jervis's wishful thinking theory explains why Putin's decisions suffer from striking discrepancies between desires, expectations, and realities.

To summarize, the favorable effects of hybrid warfare on Russian foreign policy are radically opposed to the detrimental impact of the war in Ukraine. In the case of war, losses are considerable and harder to sustain, while advantages are

difficult to be gained by military-exhausted and economically devastated Russia. It is logical to argue that the Neo-Eurasian paradigm of Alexander Dugin has deepened its influence on Russian policymakers in response to liberal universalism that the Biden administration has endorsed as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Kremlin fell the trap of every nuclear power, which seeks to expand without sharing a realistic vision of the structure of international politics. The Ukrainian resistance and the Western support for Kyiv require Russia to reshape its strategy, which relies primarily on conventional warfare. In such a case, a further military engagement in Eastern Europe would rather ruin politically and economically Russia than fulfill the Eurasian dream. The possibility of MAD has significantly increased, with both Russia and the United States being nuclear powers and the strongest NATO allies, such as the United Kingdom and France. As Russia and the United States do not undertake any steps to restore their dialogue, the conflict may soon spread in Eastern Moldova. Russia ultimately chooses to launch another attack or simply reinvent its hybrid strategy. However, it is arguable if Putin and his inner circle would accept the perspective of Russian troops withdrawing from Ukraine and leaving the West to establish military bases on Ukrainian soil.

Moreover, I assume that Russia has already reached the point of no return, beyond which the rebirth of its hybrid approach would be impossible until Putin reigns in the Kremlin. Robert Jervis clearly states that those who start wars often lose them (Jervis, 1988, p. 679). History offers dozens of empirical proofs for Jervis's assumption. Russian decision-makers failed to predict that war in Eastern Europe would further unite and revive NATO. Russia's intervention in Ukraine serves as an expression of the Russian military renaissance and proves the counterproductive and unnecessary nature of a conflict that threatens to bury all assets of hybrid warfare.

Conclusion

In the wake of the Ukrainian war, Russia will derive negative influence from its misinterpretation of the balance of power in Europe and Putin's belief that nuclear diplomacy will deter a potential retaliation from NATO. In truth, Russia is less free to act than the Alliance because allies will slowly slip away from Moscow's energy dependence. The Russian nuclear challenge and military renaissance predetermine the essential need to allocate more resources for mutual defense, a purpose achievable only through establishing European Armed Forces within NATO. A popular post-Cold War myth contends that the concept of the European military contradicts the very essence of the European project. Such an assumption is a product of non-rational delusions that identify any attempt to rearm Europe with the pre-war period before World War II. However, the interwar period in Europe was one that excluded Germany and the defeated nations from the European security architecture. In the aftermath of the Cold War, German nationalism has not been the case for a long time. The Russian challenge will force Europe to reinvent its military identity, which it once enjoyed before sacrificing its military might in two global military conflicts. Although Russia was also part of the European security architecture since the foundation of the Russian Empire, its place in the future balance of power is debatable.

Neo-Eurasianism, in its present form and ideology, will remain central to Russian foreign policy as long as the civilizational gap between Europe and Russia enjoys the political support of politicians in both parties. One might argue that the

reintegration of Russia into the European security system is a mandatory condition for its peaceful coexistence with the West. Even so, we should not neglect Russia's subsequent movement from financial and military independence to resourceful and strategic interdependence with China. Thus, it is arguable that Russia will prefer to endorse the Western path of development instead of forming a coalition bloc with Beijing. Moreover, history shows that Moscow has already made a natural choice to side with Asia or simply pursue a foreign policy that opposes the West. To look upon Russia as a future democracy is to see Navalny as the future successor of Putin. A scenario that, I believe, is far from realistic, even if he takes over the political leadership in Russia. It is more accurate and rational to comprehend Russian politics as a logical function of the Eurasian culture that shapes Russians' political and civilizational choice.

To conclude, the Russian military adventure in Ukraine is not a wise move for Putin, but it is actually, and despite its death toll, a straightforward sign of the Kremlin's irrational policymaking. If the United States and its European allies completely revive NATO and build a strategy capable of deterring Russia from the Alliance's borders, they would successfully preserve the post-Cold War status quo in Europe. The Russian influence will shift to Eurasia, which, to a greater extent, will benefit both China and the West. If, however, Russia is successful in its campaign, a scenario that is less plausible but still possible, Europe will divide into two spheres of influence. One will include Western Europe, which will completely depend on the United States, and the other will cover Central and Eastern Europe. The latter will transform into a buffer between the American and the Russian sphere of influence, nominally preserving its membership in NATO. In reality, the Alliance would shrink to its borders from 1997, formally undertaking its commitments under Article Five. This is not to say that China will lose its influence in Europe. Beijing would prefer a deterioration in its relations with Moscow than leaving its European markets. Thus, it is useful for the United States to finally consider China, a potential partner in a nuclear world where the ultimate threat remains MAD.

A threat by Russia to use nuclear force is equal to a threat to do massive damage to its adversaries by risking their survival. It is a radical decision and should be discussed by both Washington and its most prominent peer competitor – Beijing. The nuclear superiority Russia enjoys, keeping the world's largest arsenal of WMD, provokes a constant fear that a non-rational leader like Putin would tempt to launch a preemptive strike on NATO or at least – to use tactical nukes against Ukraine. The former scenario would lead the world to the brink of a nuclear holocaust, while the latter would result in a new Chornobyl. Therefore, by fueling the Ukrainian war and increasing the possibility of MAD, nuclear powers ensured the transition from a U.S.-dominated unipolar order to a Sino-American contested bipolarity. It is, to a certain extent, due to its ancient culture and millennial political tradition, that China has abstained from interference in any conflicts, following the Confucian principle: "To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order." Russian policymakers should have endorsed an important lesson to ensure that Russia would be able to bear the responsibilities of great power in the post-pandemic world.

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