

THE POST-SOVIET EXPANSE: IDEOLOGICAL ASPECT OF GEOPOLITICAL EXPANSION

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By Way of an Introduction: Ideology, a Foreign Policy Weapon

Today, the academic community treats ideology as a political weapon charged with lies.¹

The political community in the West, likewise, tends toward the term's negative implications: "The term is invariably brought up to devalue the opponent's intellectual or political position interpreted as a promotion of its narrow interests."²

More often than not, ideology is described as a "system of thought and values subordinated to social, economic, or political interests" designed to "conceal or at least camouflage the true interests of any particular group."³

On the other hand, it is believed that "it is hard to contest the generally accepted interpretation of total ideology which says that in all par-

ties and at all times human thinking remained ideological."⁴

This widens the limits of the concept of ideology; however, it is not our task to establish the degree of its potential truthfulness. We are out to confirm that ideology is a political (and geopolitical) category.

Ideology is closely connected with politics either as an instrument (which suggests its negative implication) or an aim in itself (which is a positive function); sometimes it can be both at one and the same time.

"As a more or less free and clear system of basic propositions which determine political trends,"⁵ each ideology is convinced of its absolute correctness; it supplies instructions for practical activities and directs them.

¹ See: J. Barion, *Was ist Ideologie?* 3.Aufl., Bonn, 1974, S. 45; A. Hans, *Ökonomische Ideologie und politische Theorie*, Göttingen, 1972, S. 126.

² J. Barion, op. cit., S. 9.

³ *Handwörterbuch Internationale Politik*, W. Woyke (Hg.), Opladen, 2000, S. 148.

⁴ K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, 8.Aufl., Frankfurt a.M., 1995, S. 70.

⁵ K. Hübner, *Die Wahrheit des Mythos* (Russian translation *Istina mifa*, Moscow, 1996, p. 338).

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There are several forms of political ideology—it can be open, organized, partial, systemic, or total⁶—all of them rooted in immutable principles. Each ideology has something which relates it to fundamentalism, stemming from its conviction that its truth is ultimate.⁷

Ideological confrontation is a struggle between different values expressed in the desire to interpret them.

This suggests that ideologies may contain positive (values) and negative meanings (anti-values); the latter frequently relies on corresponding terms such as freedom/totalitarianism. This constitutes the verbal element of politics used to shape the consciousness of the elites and the masses in all states and employed as a diplomatic weapon.

The verbal element (its oral and written forms) is of fundamental importance for politics.

In fact, history is frequently described as a “never ending struggle for words” and a “struggle for the victory of one’s own linguistic formulas and, by extension, for the triumph of one’s own world of ideas and one’s own ideology.”⁸ This fully applies to domestic and foreign policy. This is related not so much to different interpretations of terms accepted in different linguistic systems as to their “correct” or “universal” translation: a completely “neutral” approach is impossible for the simple reason that no “objective” observer can escape the impact of one ideology or another.

⁶ See: *Grundelemente der Weltpolitik*, Gottfried-Karl Kindermann (Hg.), 4. Aufl., München, 1991, S. 154.

⁷ Early in the 19th century, French philosopher Destutt de Tracy coined the term “ideology” in his *Éléments d'idéologie: idéologie proprement dite*, Paris, 1995. It is commonly believed that the New Age has known three “major” and incompatible ideologies: liberalism (bourgeois democracy); communism (Marxism, socialism), and fascism (National-Socialism). Any ideology contains certain values and is based on them (the West avoids the term “ideology” because of its negative connotations and prefers to use the term “system of values;” the meaning, however, remains the same and ideology is as alive as ever). The values are numerous; they are expressed through concepts. As a “unit of thought,” each and every concept should be specified (within everyday or scholarly parlance) with the help of signs (such as words) to become a term (especially if a concept is described by one word) (see: V. Dreier, *Empirische Politikforschung*, München/Wien, 1997, S. 119).

⁸ W. Bergsdorf, *Politik und Sprache*, München/Wien, 1978, S. 49.

Ideology as a guide to action affects political decision-making; this explains why no political system and no state (even those in which the term is a priori rejected as negative) can function to the full extent of its abilities and pursue active and successful policies without an adequate ideology.

This is commonplace, but not infrequently the post-communist elites, in the minds of which an ideology is closely associated with the failed *communist ideas* (communist propaganda of the late-Brezhnev period can serve as a pertinent example), tend to ignore its usefulness.

The fact that the West, which imparts a negative meaning to the term, operates on the international arena with a strictly codified and powerful ideology (this will be discussed below) makes the situation even worse.

Ideology is inseparable from geopolitics, which, “just like any other politics, needs ideological legitimation. Spatial images are created and are ideologically charged to protect state borders, realize territorial claims, expand the spheres of influence, and distinguish between friends and foes.”⁹

After World War II, the Soviet Union and the West long avoided the term “geopolitics” as a “fascist conception;” today, many experts are still very critical about it (the *Geopolitik: zur Ideologiekritik politischer Raumkonzepte* published in Austria by the Kritische Geographie Society is an ample example of this).

Even the most active critics (who dominate Western political science) have to admit that, despite the term’s postwar exile from European political vocabulary, “geopolitical thinking still shapes foreign policy practices.”¹⁰

Geopolitics is only partly pure as an academic discipline (Alexander Dugin has offered a well-rationalized substantiation of this and concluded: “A geopolitician cannot escape biases”).¹¹ Other authors (with whom we side

⁹ R. Zeilinger, Ch. Rammer, Foreword to *Geopolitik: zur Ideologiekritik politischer Raumkonzepte*, Band 14, Kritische Geographie, Wien, 2001, S. 7.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Moscow, 1999, p. 92.

point to its applied nature in the military, economic, and political spheres: it “produces ideology and makes it possible to identify the normative principles for national and international policies.”¹²

Other authors, Henry Kissinger among them, oppose geopolitical and ideological thinking in foreign policy¹³; what is meant here is not

ideology per se but so-called political idealism, the opposite of political realism (geopolitics also belongs to this category)¹⁴; this does not doubt the close association between geopolitics and ideology.

It should be said that the ideological aspects should not escape those who study the processes in the post-Soviet expanse.

¹² R. Zeilinger, Ch. Rammer, op. cit., S. 8.

¹³ See: H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994.

¹⁴ See: G. O Tuathail, “Geopolitik—zur Entstehungsgeschichte einer Disziplin,” in: *Geopolitik: zur Ideologiekritik politischer Raumkonzepte*, Band 14, S. 26.

The West’s Ideological Politics in the Post-Soviet Expanse

As soon as the communist system and the Soviet Union became history, most of the Soviet-successor states willingly embraced the Western philosophy and ideas of the world. In the last two decades, the West has been using its ideological instruments (and other methods) to push forward its geopolitical interests.

The unquestioned acceptance by the Soviet successor-states of the new “values” and the corresponding terms (“democracy,” “human rights and freedoms,” etc.) as part of their political parlance allowed the West to interfere indirectly (and sometimes directly) in their internal affairs.

The West (the United States in particular) has assumed the right to interpret its own values; reports on the state of human rights, democracy, freedom of the press, etc. are piling up. When dealing with the post-Soviet states which belong to the Council of Europe, the West relies on all sorts of legal obligations to promote its ideology.

The Color Revolutions in some of the Soviet successor-states are the best evidence of the fact that the strategic diplomatic initiative belongs to the West; some other states (they figure as defendants, *being objects rather than subjects of politics*) have recognized the priority of Western values.

Together with other states, the West included Russia in its “ideological orbit;” criticism of the Chechen war was accepted as a matter of fact, while Russia’s criticism of the “violations of human rights by the United States” in Guantanamo, Iraq, or Afghanistan would have raised many brows.

The history of ideology as an effective foreign policy and, in particular, geopolitical weapon is a fairly short one. It began in the 20th century as the political idealism of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, the theory of the permanent revolution, etc.

In the colonial conquests era and later (until World War I), military might (demonstrated or used) remained the main geopolitical weapon. Missionary outreach helped to strike “ideological roots” in the newly captured lands: it cannot be described as an ideological weapon in the contemporary sense of the word. Ideology as a foreign policy weapon came into play when the colonized peoples were liberated.

By the late 19th-early 20th centuries, the Western nationalist ideologies tinged with racism (such as the Manifest Destiny in the United States) were used to justify expansion at home and inspire it¹⁵; the Cold War transformed ideology into an instrument of impact used by both great powers.

¹⁵ See: D. Walter, “Imperialistische Großraumkonzepte? Anmerkungen zu einem eingängigen Bild,” in: *Geopolitik: zur Ideologiekritik politischer Raumkonzepte*, Band 14, S. 84.

Here is what former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in his *Diplomacy*: “In 1971 the Nixon Administration decided to add the European Security Conference to its list of incentives for encouraging Soviet moderation. We employed our strategy of linkage... The most significant provision of the Helsinki Agreement turned out to be the so-called Basket III on human rights. Basket III was destined to play a major role in the disintegration of the Soviet satellite orbit, and became a testimonial to all human rights activists in NATO countries... Basket III obliged all signatories to practice and foster certain enumerated basic human rights... Both Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Lech Walesa in Poland earned their place in the pantheon of freedom fighters by using these provisions, both domestically and internationally, to undermine not only Soviet domination but the communist regimes in their own countries. ...I summed up the Ford Administration’s attitude in my speech: ‘The United States pursues the process of easing tensions from a position of self-confidence and strength. It is not we who were on the defensive at Helsinki; it is not we who were being challenged by all the delegations to live up to the principles being signed. At Helsinki, for the first time in the postwar period, human rights and fundamental freedoms became recognized subjects of East-West discourse and negotiation. The conference put forward *our* standards of humane conduct, which have been—and still are—a beacon of hope to millions.’”¹⁶

There is an obvious connection between the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and Gorbachev’s “perestroika” (when Western ideology filled the Soviet expanse and transformed it into the post-Soviet expanse). We should not forget that at all times the Soviet leaders were aware (to different degrees) that they should seek justification and legitimation in the West.

Here is what Henry Kissinger has to say about the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe exploited by the United States to confirm its diplomatic presence in the European continent and acquire the right to meddle in its affairs: “This monster diplomatic process grew out of Moscow’s deep-rooted sense of insecurity and unquenchable thirst for legitimacy. Even as it was building an enormous military establishment and holding down a score of nations, the Kremlin acted as if it were in constant need of reassurance.”¹⁷

More than that: Stalin, the most powerful of the Soviet rulers, went out of his way to create a positive image of his country abroad (he invited prominent Western leftist intellectuals and was not alien to bribing foreign ambassadors, etc.). Under Khrushchev, this took the form of the famous “Catch up and Overtake America” slogan. The quote from Kissinger covers the moods of the Brezhnev era; Gorbachev’s and Yeltsin’s times need no comments.

We deem it necessary, however, to dwell at length on the Putin and Putin-Medvedev period to find out how Russia, as the core and the political center of the post-Soviet expanse, responds to the ideological expansion of the West.

Russia, a Self-sufficient “Pole” of the Post-Soviet Expanse: New Ideology Needed

Putin as president cut short the most objectionable manifestations of Western interference in Russia’s domestic affairs. Determined to strengthen the country’s sovereignty, the new leaders out-

¹⁶ H. Kissinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 758-760.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 758.

lined Russia's interests which, it was stated, might differ from those of the West (and the United States) or even contradict them.

They revived the geopolitical logic (abandoned and forgotten under Gorbachev and Yeltsin) which included, first and foremost, a move toward closer partner relations with the West European countries (Old Europe) and attempts to somehow alleviate U.S. pressure on them and on Russia. This was obvious at the level of Russia's immediate military-political and economic interests.

The ideological component (primarily values) also needed attention. Under Putin (and Medvedev), Western values have been never questioned; at the official level Russia was described as a European country moving toward liberal democracy. At the same time, Russia's specifics (the way the values and the ideology of its political system were interpreted in particular) were recognized and justified in the form of the "sovereign democracy" thesis formulated during Vladimir Putin's second term.

We cannot but wonder what contemporary Russia thinks of ideology as a whole?

Today, Russia is resolved to use ideological conceptions in a rational and pragmatic way; its cautious and utilitarian approach is rooted in the 1980s-1990s when the Soviet ideological doctrine collapsed and the Western axiological patterns were accepted without much discrimination, the political, social, and economic consequences of which are best described as catastrophic.

Today, liberal ideology (in the form of post-liberalism) still predominates, but the world has already developed a taste for alternative ideological concepts and ideological systems independent of the West: the Bolivarian movement in Latin America; Islam (particularly its Iranian version), and China's path of development.

The Russian political class is too pragmatic to choose one of the various ideological concepts, but it is still trying to integrate into the Western establishment and to "evict from memory" some of the most unsavory moments of the Soviet past.

Certain influential forces in the West exploit the past and revive bits and pieces of the Cold War period interpreted in the anti-Russian and even Russophobic spirit to convince the world that Russia is a hostile and aggressive country (like some terrifying bear in a cap with earflaps and wielding a blood-smear ax).

This explains why Russian politicians demonstrate much more caution than the ordinary people when talking about Stalin and his cronies, a fact amply shown by all sorts of public opinion polls.

This brings to mind China where the cult of Mao Zedong survives practically at the official level despite his serious blunders and even errors. This is explained by the fact that, unlike Stalin, the Chinese leader never meddled in European politics. The Russian political establishment, on the other hand, has to take the position of its Western partners into account.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who called for an uncompromising struggle against Soviet power and suggested that human rights issues (human rights over the rights of the nation, etc.) should be used to put pressure on the Soviet Union and who later developed into a severe critic of what he had defended, can be described as a symbol of the current ideological split. He was not alien to Russian ethnic nationalism (when he wrote about the Russian lands seized by the Kazakhs).¹⁸

Today, the Russian leaders draw on Solzhenitsyn and his ideas as one of the officially recognized ideological sources.

What can be said about Solzhenitsyn's position? His criticism of Western values casts aspersions on or even rejects the thesis that "Russia is a European country." The same applies to the term "multipolarity" as part of the political discourse.

¹⁸ See: A. Federin, "Kak ne stoit obustrivat Rossiu," *Obshchina*, No. 47, 1990, pp. 12-13; L. Kopelev, "Pismo Solzhenitsynu" (30.01-05.02.1985), available at [http://imwerden.de/pdf/syntaxis_37_pismo_kopeleva_solzhenitsynu.pdf].

It is not enough to reject “unipolarity” for the sake of “multipolarity” in order to supply the idea of reunification of the former Soviet republics (the RF included) with theoretical underpinnings. In this context, it is not enough to think of Russia as a separate country or even as a separate “great power,” but as the center of a distinctive “civilization.”

The question is: should we treat Russia (and the post-Soviet expanse) as a single whole? How should we describe this expanse? What are its functions on the Eurasian continent and what is in store for it?

The Post-Soviet Expanse as a Large Civilizational Expanse—Necessity and Prospects

Let’s specify the term “civilization,” which until recently lacked a strict scholarly definition accepted by the world intellectual and academic communities. In the 18th, 19th, and even as late as the 20th century, it was used as the opposite of “savagery” and “barbarism,” this usage being accepted by many ideologists, particularly liberals and Marxists.

It should be said that the term also implies certain vast territories, has a spatial, in addition to temporal, dimension, and brings the term “empire” to mind. The two terms, however, do not coincide territorially, but they do share the urge to spread far and wide to territories populated by “savages” and barbarians.”

This suggests that the correlation between “civilization” and “culture” should also be discussed. It has been discussed by many authors; today they are practically unanimously accepted as synonyms; it is specified that culture is related to the spiritual aspects (art and creativity), while civilization to formal structures, rational systems, etc. In the narrow sense, they cannot be described as complete synonyms because one civilization may comprise various ethnic groups with their distinctive cultures.

The term “expanse” is treated as a “politically arranged soil” (Dugin’s definition based on Friedrich Ratzel’s theories).¹⁹

In the first half of the 19th century, German political economist Friedrich List formulated an economic autarchy conception of “large spaces.”²⁰ The civilizational context was also present in the form of a suggested customs union between Austria, Prussia, and other German states (which belonged to the same sub-civilization) in order to compete with the Anglo-Saxon world.

Samuel Huntington in his famous article “The Clash of Civilizations?” (which appeared in 1993 in *Foreign Affairs* and was later expanded into a book published in 1996) splendidly rationalized the importance of the space/civilization correlation for international politics. The result shattered the very foundations of previous convictions: the civilizations stood opposed not to “backwardness” and “barbarity” (as was believed in the 19th century) but to each other.

It was not Huntington, however, who divided the world into civilizational spaces and tied together the concepts of “civilization” and “space.” This division existed long before him in European political geography (the Germans use the word *Kultur* to describe civilization).²¹

And this division helped not so much to analyze the civilizational aspects and explain the processes and events going on but to create a *thinking pattern*.²²

¹⁹ A. Dugin, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁰ See: A. Dugin, *Russkaia veshch*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 2001, pp. 123-124.

²¹ See: G. Stöber, H. Kreutzmann, “Zum Gebrauchswert von ‘Kulturräumen,’” in: *Geopolitik: zur Ideologiekritik politischer Raumkonzepte*, Band 14, S. 219-222.

²² See: A. Dugin, *Russkaia veshch*, p. 227.

The idea of the political map of the world as a sum-total of “large civilizational spaces” has a rich tradition to fall back on.

To what extent is this conception applicable to the post-Soviet expanse?

Many factors have still survived to show that despite the fact that the Soviet successor-states differ greatly from the Soviet nations, the post-Soviet expanse is a single organism (at least, culturally and civilizational). This means that all of them (the Baltic countries included) still belong to the “Soviet civilization.”

This is a term in its own right: nearly 70 years of Soviet power created a shared mentality in the Soviet people and the Soviet culture phenomenon.

This allows us to look at the post-Soviet expanse as a single whole; it is further justified by the shared past of the former Soviet nations rooted in the Russian Empire (the Soviet Union emerged on its territory which had taken centuries to acquire its final shape) and by the fact that Russian is still the language of communication.

This approach is appropriate not only from the position of political science—to a certain extent it is politically expedient.

Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, the main CIS actors, form the core of integration (which is their stated aim). Tajikistan, Armenia, and to a certain extent Kyrgyzstan side with them, albeit with certain reservations.

Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have so far been showing moderate integration enthusiasm, but they are open to cooperation. The Baltics is the only region that has fallen out of the post-Soviet expanse.

Despite the well-known position of the present Georgian leaders, the country has not yet identified its foreign policy strategy; more than that: it is still vague about its self-identification as part of Europe or Eurasia (including closer cooperation with Russia).

Whatever the case, Christian Orthodoxy has moved to the fore in the republic today, which makes Georgia part of the post-Soviet expanse (at least until it joins NATO and/or the EU, which will not happen any time soon, if at all), since it is home to other Christian Orthodox peoples.

This means that the post-Soviet expanse coincides with the CIS territory (plus Georgia). *All the post-Soviet states will profit from economic reintegration; the political expediency of transforming the post-Soviet expanse into a large civilizational space* calls for special consideration. It is possible only if the sovereign states agree to closely cooperate and revise their foreign policy priorities.

It should be said that the term “large space” suggests “not mere quantitative expansion and enlargement, but rather a transition to a new plane.”²³

The Soviet successor-states are the targets of the geopolitical expansion of large civilizational spaces (the European Union and the United States in particular) rather than of individual powers. The post-Soviet states (Russia in the first place) should not place their stakes on the contradictions between Europe and the U.S. when formulating their foreign policy strategies: temporary misunderstandings will not shatter the West, a single military-political, economic, and ideological mechanism.

What German politician Carl Schmitt wrote about the wars of the Middle Ages waged in Christian Western Europe is highly relevant to the above: “The essential point is that within the Christian sphere, wars among Christian princes were bracketed wars. They were distinguished from wars against non-Christian princes and peoples. These internal, bracketed wars did not negate the unity of the *respublica Christiana*. They were feuds of assertions of right, realizations of right, or confirmations of a right of resistance, and they occurred within the framework of one and the same total order encompassing both warring parties.”²⁴

²³ C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Telos Press Publishing, 2003, p. 237.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

Today, the easily settled diplomatic disagreements between Western states have replaced the wars of the past; despite their urgency they can be described as “bracketed;” they never “negate the unity” of Western civilization as part of “one and the same total order.”

As a product of history, the West is a powerful large civilizational space, a geopolitical entity that claims global dimensions.

The post-Soviet states deal with the West rather than with individual actors of international politics.

On the other hand, militant Islam acts as another global force; the post-Soviet expanse has already had a taste of its expansion.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

A larger civilizational space may help the mentally and culturally close peoples of the former Soviet Union preserve their real sovereignty; this task calls for a viable ideology (not Marxism-Leninism) created by the concerted efforts of the nations’ intellectual elites aimed at consistently assessing and comprehending ideas, conceptions, myths, traditions, values, and “historical memory.” This cannot be done without state support.

We have to apply what Carl Schmitt wrote about medieval Christian Europe to our context: despite the internal wars and conflicts (the events in Abkhazia, Karabakh, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Chechnia, Georgia, etc.), we belong to the same civilization and have no moral right to destroy our civilizational (geopolitical) unity. The time has come to pool our forces in order to reconcile the conflicting sides and restore their mutual trust.