

# On Early History and Geography of Russian Foreign Policy

The Origins of Modern Times: A Hypothesis

*Timofei V. Bordachev*

**Timofei V. Bordachev**, Doctor of Political Science  
National Research University–Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia  
Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs  
Professor;  
Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies  
Academic Supervisor

SPIN-RSCI: 6872-5326  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3267-0335  
ResearcherID: E-9365-2014  
Scopus AuthorID: 56322540000

E-mail: [tbordachev@hse.ru](mailto:tbordachev@hse.ru)  
Tel.: +7(495) 772-9590 \*22186  
Address: Office 427, Bldg.1 Malaya Ordynka Str. 17, Moscow 119017, Russia

DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2022-20-3-71-93

The ongoing debate over Russia's place in world politics is a natural continuation of the historical, cultural, and philosophical experience of the late 19th century—the time when the country's imperial statehood was in its prime but which also brought into light the problems that several decades later would lead to dramatic events in the last century—Russia's technological and institutional backwardness compared to its most significant rivals, nationalist sentiments in its peripheries, and the challenges of managing a vast territory and multi-ethnic society. These issues are

explored in depth by Russian historiographers and are well familiar to any educated Russian citizen. This explains why in discussing the intellectual and cultural origins of Russian statehood even the most enlightened observers turn first of all to Alexander Pushkin and Pyotr Chaadaev, and the political and philosophical disputes between the Westerners and Slavophiles in the 19th century, but seldom feel the need to recall earlier periods of Russian history.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Historians agree that it was the inability of the tsarist empire, and then, of the Soviet Union (whatever its achievements) to find a response to the above challenges that caused the catastrophes Russia was destined to experience in the 20th century. The effects of those upheavals are still with us today. Moreover, the need to address these problems again and again seems to explain the amazing viability of the Russian state. After all, its European rivals have long said goodbye to the tasks usually facing powers of enormous scale and international significance. Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and Turkey established themselves in their current capacity by getting rid of the need to address the problems of nationalism and control of vast territories, which enables them to focus on less fundamental tasks of development.

Russia however, has retained a vast territory and multi-ethnic society. Therefore, the factors stemming from the country's imperial nature are still critical for understanding the problems it is facing today and the experience of other multi-ethnic powers (Miller, 2006, pp. 11-24). However, this is of little help for understanding how Russia addresses these problems and is useless for understanding how it reacts to foreign policy challenges and opportunities. The focus on the imperial period alone obstructs a broader look at the factors that shaped the unique features of Russian foreign policy thought.

Russia had acquired these features long before it became an empire. The Russian Empire's impressive victories and losses totally obscure another major phase in the history of Russian statehood—from the emergence of the Grand Principality of Moscow till the end of the 17th century. Of course, most important are events of the second half of the

15th century and the early 16th century when Russia formalized its sovereign statehood under Ivan III and began its territorial expansion beyond the bounds of Great Russia's North-East. It was at that time that Russia emerged or continued to exist as a unique social entity called Great Russia and formed its political system (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 22). All this occurred in a unique geographical, international, and cultural environment. When Russia ventured outside of this environment during the imperial period, it began to answer the above-mentioned questions that still puzzle us today.

The problem of preserving Russia as a strong and independent power in the face of the West's technological progress and growing expansionism was resolved by Peter the Great, which underlies the historic importance of his rule and the root cause of his cult. But it would be wrong to say that the experience the state gained from its emergence till maturity is less important than the ensuing victories and defeats. The more so since by the time Russia was proclaimed an empire in 1721 it had acquired geopolitical dimensions that provided it with a strategic depth greater than that of any other country in the world. Accordingly, by virtue of unique initial conditions Russia acquired a unique mode of responding to later external challenges. This is not to mention the fact that its current geographical boundaries are practically identical to those it had had before the beginning of its struggle for Ukrainian lands in the middle of the 17th century.

Furthermore, one should by no means overlook the important specific character of Russia's relations with Western European international politics. Russia is the sole state with an almost five-hundred-year-long continuous sovereign history that throughout its growth and maturing neither experienced a significant impact of Western European international politics, nor exerted any influence on it. True, Klyuchevsky wrote that "the Muscovite state is an armed Great Russia fighting on two fronts" (Klyuchevsky, 1937, p. 47), but in the West it confronted the weakest of its potential rivals—the Swedes, Livonians, Lithuanians, and the Poles—who never played a central role in Western European international politics and some of them were not even involved in it.

Russia's *political organization* emerged on its own, and this distinguishes it from the Western European powers, which it began to interact politically no earlier than the middle of the 16th century. The most important stage in the formation of their foreign policy culture was accompanied by intense struggle with each other. France and Britain experienced it during the late Middle Ages, and for Germany and Italy the process lasted much longer to be completed in the second half of the 19th century. Such interaction predetermined a close connection between the internal political organization of Western Europe's most important countries and the entire European space.

Even in the case of smaller European powers (Austria, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries) the states acquired their current form in close interaction with neighbors, that is, within the framework of the European system of interstate relations, which was extrapolated to the whole world in the 18th-19th centuries. In contrast to its current and future European partners, Russia formed on the foundation of Great Russia in a different environment. The nature of Russia's state was determined by its completely unique experience. This alone enables us to take a different look at whether Russia hypothetically belongs to the European political civilization. This does not deny cultural kinship between the western Romano-Germanic and eastern Greek-Slavic parts of Europe within the framework of their coexistence, with the latter part ultimately absorbed (excluding Russia) by the former one, stronger in military-political terms.

Russia emerged in the Western European system of interstate interactions somewhat later and it never overcame its peripheral status within this system. Although during the Great Northern War of 1700-1721, Russia under the leadership of Peter the Great defeated one of the largest military powers of that time, it obtained real influence on the European balance of power only after the Seven Years' War of 1756-1763. Russian and foreign historians largely agree on this score. As Hamish Scott puts it, in the second half of the 18th century Russia was "the most successful and dynamic continental state" (Scott, 2004, p. 252).

It was only then that the Russian state came into direct contact with the leading European powers and its actions became part of the

balance of power that would remain central to world politics for the next 150 years. In making its foreign policy decisions, Russia had to consider the power capabilities of European states more and more often—something it had never had to do before. Such a limitation of power finally manifested itself in the 19th century. For the first time, the fundamental distinctions between Russia's foreign policy culture and that of the other trend-setters in building the new European order became evident at the Congress of Vienna. It was then perhaps that a dividing line was drawn between Russia and Western Europe, whose greatest powers determined the nature and content of international politics in the 16th-19th centuries.

### **THE HYPOTHESIS**

Henry Kissinger highlighted these distinctions in his seminal work, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace*. He points to the special position of Emperor Alexander I and the fundamental features distinguishing his logic from the behavior of his partners from Austria, Britain, Spain, Prussia, and France (Kissinger, 1957, pp. 152-153). At the same time, even such a respected author confines Russia's policy to the monarch's personal traits and character, or (very reluctantly) to Russia's exceptional military capabilities after the victory over Napoleon. The main subject of that study, though, was the creation of the international order after a revolutionary situation, and not the analysis of Russia's behavior.

Up to the third quarter of the 18th century Russia could not be influenced by the system of norms and customs of international contacts that in the previous century was commonly referred to as Westphalian. The content of that system—the balance of power—could in no way affect Russia's ability to cope with foreign policy tasks during numerous wars. The Western European cultural and diplomatic tradition was of little interest to Russia as its practical significance for the Russian state in the struggle for survival was tiny. Russia settled conflicts with its close European neighbors who might cause harm on its own as its own personal affairs. Ivan III said so clearly enough in a letter to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, informing him of the

intention to regain the Principality of Kiev by war. The widely known alleged “correspondence” between Ivan the Terrible and British Queen Elizabeth I is regarded as a funny historical incident, while similar communication between European sovereigns often became elements of impressive geostrategic changes. Diplomatic relations between Moscow and the European courts were of a consular nature and by no means resolved fundamental regional policy issues, of which territorial ones invariably came first.

The hypothesis is the following. *By the time Russia appeared on the scene of the Western European (and therefore global) international politics, it had already devised an integral basis of a foreign policy culture that determined how the state should respond to challenges and what the internal regulators of its behavior could be.* Since the issues of war and peace are central to the science of international relations, it was in the early period that there emerged what Karamzin in his panegyric to Ivan III (if we use the definition of Yakov Lurie) calls the “system of war and peace” based on “far-sighted moderateness” (Lurie, 2021, p. 224).

Also then, at the very dawn of statehood, its firm character was built and the energy of rulers was geared towards “unifying northern Russia in the struggle on three frontlines” (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 11). In the course of that struggle, the Russian state, as defined by Alexei Petrov, “became churched,” the “social and everyday lifestyles were sacralized,” with no clear dividing line between the religious and secular sides of culture (Petrov, 2008, pp. 314-324). It was precisely the theocratic nature of the Russian state that before the middle of the 17th century instilled in it such an important part of the Byzantine political and religious heritage as “estrangement” from the West that had committed an act of betrayal (which created the conditions for the strongest moral contempt for it).

Today, Russia is much closer geopolitically to its borders that existed before it began to spread to territories with a predominantly non-Russian population. Therefore, trying to comprehend Russia’s experience only from the time it started addressing the issues that are still crucial today is tantamount to artificially limiting oneself to the

discussions held in the very specific conditions of the 19th century. But if we put aside the fatalistic interpretation of the well-known saying that Russia cannot be understood with the mind alone, there is hope that the early and little-studied part of the history of the Russian state will provide yet untapped opportunities for scientific cognition of Russia's foreign policy. Otherwise, the analysis will revolve around its imperial period, which, in fact, was very short.

### **THREE SOURCES OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

Like any state, Russia in its foreign policy relies on three interrelated elements—geography, history, and culture (the dominant religion being the latter's central element). Each of them is of fundamental importance to communication with other social organizations and creation of basic internal conditions serving as a background for subjective dialectics and random facilitation. Even the most significant shock in Russian history—the revolutionary events of the early 20th century—was unable to overpower these foreign policy culture factors. Even more so, this is beyond the capacity of a far less significant phenomenon, such as the current military-political clash between Russia and the West.

This does not mean that the ongoing discussion about likely changes in Russian-European relations is devoid of practical sense—it can make the inevitable process of Russia's adaptation to an international order where Western Europe no longer rules the roost more comfortable for national identity. However, the current conflict with the West as such is a product of our own foreign policy culture (in addition to opponents' actions) and of how Russia deals with the main dilemmas of interaction between power and justice in international politics.

### **GEOGRAPHY**

This factor only serves as foreign policy's most stable physical basis and sets its vector that no event (other than the demise of the state itself) can alter. As Hans Morgenthau formulated in one of his works, “on the relatively stable foundation of geography the pyramid of national power rises through different graduations of instability to its peak in the fleeting element of national morale” (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 165).

The landscape creates opportunities for economic activity, the assessment of threats, the perception of space in the context of social community's survival, people's ability or inability to control their aspirations, and the understanding of the existence (or absence) of natural boundaries.

The Russian landscape is a vast expanse that knows no external physical limits and is covered with rivers. It is equally vulnerable to external threats and convenient for continuous colonization when such opportunities present themselves. Under these conditions, the policy of the Muscovite state, according to Valentin Bochkaryov, "followed the colonizing advance of the broad masses of the population, whose interests in this respect were consonant with dynastic aspirations" (Bochkaryov, 1944, p. 166 cited in Krivosheev et al., 2021).

Geographically, the cradle of Russian statehood—the Great Russian North-East—was located at the greatest distance from the main centers of civilization in Eurasia, where internecine struggle among peoples in various manifestations was simmering from Western Europe to East and South Asia. Initially, the Russian territorial base was expanding outside the reach of the leading powers that had emerged at these centers. The Russian state did encounter serious opponents, but they were very few, strategically weak and unable to create strong statehood in the most decisive period of history. None of them has survived to this day. It is precisely the geographical location of the Russian state that explains why its participation in European or Asian affairs was a result of independent development, and not of objective factors that might make it a vital need.

This is Russia's main distinction from its near neighbors in the West, where, for geographical reasons, the formation of states within the modern limits was organically linked with processes in their immediate environment. In the early stages of history, Russia, too, experienced the influence of its neighbors—the Golden Horde and the Russian-Lithuanian State, and then the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, relations among the Russian principalities that had survived the Horde invasion, were even more important. In both cases, the political environment was not preserved as a permanent factor in



Russian foreign policy but was absorbed by the Russian state over several hundred years of territorial expansion. Later, the decline of powerful neighbors produced a situation where Russia began to take over their former territories, gained a foothold in Asia, and then manifested its presence in Europe by fully establishing itself as a sovereign state within the boundaries of the Great Russian ethnic group at the beginning of the 16th century. By that time, Russia had filled all available geographical space and incorporated the peoples it was in touch with throughout the period of gaining its own historical foreign policy experience.

By virtue of geography Russia appeared in the European theater of power politics as a full-fledged state, for which the European order was not a survival factor, but a source of human, economic and technological resources. Their acquisition during the 17th-18th centuries brought Russia into big European politics, but even the most decisive step to overcome geography—the transfer of the capital to the shores of the Baltic Sea—was unable to significantly mitigate the effects of remote location and the perception of interests derived from it. It is not accidental that such a prominent representative of historical science as Dominic Lieven combines culture and geography—“the medieval Byzantine heritage and the geographical position of Russia” in explaining why it “will never fit completely into the European scheme” (Lieven, 2007, p. 331).

After the devastation of the Eastern Slavs’ territories as a result of the Tatar-Mongol invasion in the middle of the 13th century a new Russian state emerged there where, as Nikolai Gogol wrote, “the terrain, uniformly smooth and even, almost swampy everywhere, overgrown with dreary fir and pine trees, was not a land brisling with life and movement, but showing some kind of squalid existence discouraging for any thinking soul” (Gogol, 2018, p. 39). Regardless of whether we agree with such a melancholic vision of Northern Russia’s topography or not, it points to the main feature of the living space, where “the ratio of the population to the inhabited space remained unfavorable for an intensive economic and social culture” (Presnyakov, 1918, p.14).

Those were the topographical conditions in which Russia existed for 350 years, from the moment Moscow princes entered the struggle for

power within Great Russia and until the first steps towards the takeover of Ukraine in the middle of the 17th century. Siberia's contribution was small in this respect—the territories where Russians set foot were huge and, with rare exceptions, unsuitable for intensive agriculture. In the entire space from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean, Altai alone was suitable for efficient and affluent farming, while elsewhere natural conditions were equally unfavorable for dense settlement.

These were the geographical circumstances in which the political organization of Russia as a “country undergoing colonization” was laid down and acquired its final form. Its territories beyond the historical core, in the interfluvial region between the Oka and the Volga, were a result of gathering forces crucial for the survival of the state ruled from one center and for its “oneness” (Mavrodin, 1951, p. 153). In other words, what Dominic Lieven defines as “the management of multi-ethnicity” (Lieven, 1995, p. 608), for Russia from the very beginning was centralized and relatively unified administration of huge territories, necessary for the existence of the state—power capable of protecting its inhabitants from eastern, southern, and western predators. By virtue of its geographic location, the Russian giant had to control and expand territories in order to survive.

Therefore, long before the emergence of the empire and ethnic nationalism as its natural challenge, which manifested itself most graphically in the 19th century, Russia was faced with the task of organizing lands populated predominantly by Russians but much larger than those of the largest European powers like France. Even now, the problem of governing regions that have basically the same ethnic structure but are located so far from each other that they may have different interests, remains relevant. But already at a very early stage of Russia's history the administrative integrity was, according to scholars, practically the sole way of preventing the disappearance of the people inhabiting it under the pressure of more united and numerous communities.

The topography of the Russian state throughout the period of its growth and maturing was exceptionally favorable for creating its power base, with rivers as the most important means of communication,

and mountains as impassable protective barriers. The center of lands' unification under Moscow's rule was located in a unique region at the source of many rivers, which made military expansion, internal communication and trade exceptionally convenient in terms of shipping. In contrast to most continental states, Russia was not divided by rivers (like France, Germany or China, for instance), but was united into an integral organism—the rivers were usable most of the year as safe inland shipping routes and comfortable ice roads in wintertime.

In the following centuries, Russians' advance into Siberia also proceeded along the rivers, which served as relatively safe internal routes of communication. None of the great Siberian rivers was able to stop the Russians' eastward trek until they reached the Black Dragon River (Amur), beyond which there lay another great civilization. In Russia there had always been too many rivers for a growing state to be localized around just one of them. In the following centuries, all of Russia's military and economic outposts were built on rivers, which ensured internal communication between Moscow-centered territories.

Before crossing the Urals, Russia did not have a single topographic barrier inside—unlike Western Europe, where mountain ranges were the most important factor for the demarcation of nation states. The grand princes of Moscow found their lands' topography very convenient for consolidating power and expanding the lands they ruled. Conceived at the earliest stages of Russia's development, the boundless idea about the possibility of its own presence makes it difficult to determine political, artificial limits, which, if mutually recognized, have traditionally served as the basis of diplomatic relations between equal powers.

In an era that can be considered decisive for the formation of the political map, Russia did not encounter insurmountable physical obstacles, and this most probably left a deep imprint on its attitude towards the question of natural borders. During the first centuries of its history Russia felt no need to develop the habit of seeing borders as natural dividing lines. These days we react very emotionally to the emergence of virtual barriers, which are insurmountable for political reasons, and strive to resolve this problem.

## **POLITICS**

The initial stages in the formation of the Russian state, most important for gathering a critically important mass of the population, were accompanied by grand princes' struggle for resources. Their goal was "to consolidate the internal forces of the country and take all of its international relations in their own hands" (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 23). This struggle was waged with other Russian principalities, which became the first targets in the expansion campaign that began with the takeover of Kolomna and Pereslavl-Zalessky and the establishment of control over the entire Moskva River basin by 1302. The Asian empire of the Golden Horde and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, deeply peripheral in relation to the main European processes and in union with the Kingdom of Poland since the end of the 14th century, can be considered external factors, although this is not indisputable. First of all, because in both cases there was a high degree of mutual intertwining at the level of aristocratic family ties, and, in the case of the Horde, actual vassalage until 1480.

The gathering of Russian lands in Moscow's hands was completed under Vasily III at the beginning of the 16th century. It is widely known that the historical process of the "struggle for power over Great Russia" unfolded in two interconnected domains: relations with other Russian principalities and ethnically different external forces outside of North-East Great Russia.

From the very beginning, relations with the rest of the Russian principalities were foreign-policy ones, because already at the end of the 13th century "ancestral disputes among princes were replaced by rivalry from a position of strength" (Solovyov, 1988, p. 209). The main question was not about who is right in accordance with tradition, but who is stronger. The first acts of such rivalry were campaigns by Prince Daniel of Moscow (son of Alexander Nevsky) to conquer, successfully, Pereyasavl Ryazansky (1301), and by his son Yuri, two years later, against another neighboring principality—Mozhaisk. Much later the Moscow princes returned to the issue of dynasty in the context of reclaiming the territories of Kievan Rus, which rightfully belonged to them.

Moscow's initial special political and strategic position, which had no direct contact with Lithuania or the Horde, allowed for a more flexible and patient foreign policy, but hindered unification, as both of Novgorods, Ryazan, Pskov, and Tver tended to opt for a "multi-vector" approach and felt the temptation to preserve independence with reliance on an external ally (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 22). So, Moscow had to simultaneously handle two tasks: integrating the Russian lands proper into a single state and fighting against their hostile external neighbors. Forced to act in such circumstances for almost two hundred years, Moscow developed the habit of behaving like "a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, towards a given goal," which George Kennan somewhat superficially interprets as a consequence of "centuries of obscure battles between nomadic forces over the stretches of a vast unfortified plain" (X, 1947).

Under these conditions, the Russian foreign policy tradition developed a special style of diplomacy, its aim being not so much the search for a balance of power as the desire to build up own resources crucial for survival in a hostile environment. The environment itself was also not completely alien to Great Russia: the Lithuanian-Russian State and the Horde contained significant elements that made it possible to view both as natural sources of territorial growth and integration of the population into Russia. In other words, until the middle of the 16th century, the Russian state had no neighbors whose right to preserve independence would be reinforced by clear ethnic and religious distinctions.

It was then, apparently, that a tradition, unique in comparison with other European empires, was laid for the equitable inclusion of the nobility of the new territories into Russia's ruling class and, as a consequence, for the treatment of the acquired possessions not as colonies but as part of a single organism. Dominic Lieven regards this feature as a clue to Russia's resilience to internal shocks and, at the same time, the reason for its inability to return to the ethnic "core" the way Britain, France, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire did in the 20th century (Lieven, 1999, pp. 163-200, p. 180). Just the latter, according to historians, showed similar readiness to integrate other peoples and

elites, but it was never able to break out of the narrow geographical area inhabited by the Ottomans proper.

Another important aspect of a state's foreign policy is the way of identifying the place of external partners and their power capabilities and interests in the system of one's own priorities and related decisions. As has been shown above, by virtue of geographical factors the Russian state at the most fundamental stages of development was able to solve the central problem of survival without resorting to interaction with the European powers. The embassy of the Holy Roman Emperor to the court of Ivan III in 1487–1489 failed to engage Moscow in European politics. Although already at that time Ivan III himself did not hide his intentions to “reconquer his homeland—the Grand Principality of Kiev, owned by Casimir and his children,” of which he frankly notified Maximilian I in 1490. But this task, in Moscow's opinion, should and could be solved independently, without any help from other states, and accordingly, there was no need to meet their proposals halfway. In fact, it was an internal affair of Russia, part of which, due to historical circumstances, was temporarily under the Polish king's rule, but was to be inevitably regained.

Moreover, at the end of the 15th century, Russia, as a new political force, emerged “aware of its independence and its own interests” (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 2). The latter is especially important: Russia's awareness of independence was not associated with some recognition, that is, with gaining some abstract legitimacy within the European order. The source of its legitimacy was of a completely different kind: “By the grace of God, we are sovereigns on our land <...>, and we have the ordinance from God” (Tomsinov, 2003, p. 67). Moscow understood very well that such an arrogant answer was not fraught with serious trouble—if the emperor is looking for an alliance to fight the Poles, he certainly lacks the strength to threaten. Much more important for the stability of the state was not external recognition, but the internal one, based on the creative development of the legend that the Russian sovereign had received the royal title directly from the Byzantine Emperor during the reign of Vladimir Monomakh (Ibid, p. 66).

This historical episode happened just eight years after Ivan III was forced to maneuver between the unwillingness of the “rich and bellied” Moscow boyars to accept the risk of a direct collision with the weakening Horde (they demanded that he (Ivan) “should not be rude to the tsar”) and pressures from church hierarchs in the person of Metropolitan and Archbishop Vassian of Rostov (Lurie, 2021, p. 255). These hesitations are known to be one of the most intriguing affairs in Russian history, which show the true nature of the choice Ivan III made in 1480, and the risk that his choice entailed.

Several years later, extremely cautious and diplomatic Ivan III took a lofty posture in relations with the strongest European power. Russia's relations with the Holy Roman Empire—the political center of the Western world—were nowhere near in importance to its affairs in the East and South. Its power policy was developing in a different geographical direction. At the end of the 15th century, Western Europe really had very little to offer to Russia.

In this sense, even if relations between Russia and the leading powers of Western Europe at the decisive turning point in Russian history were not determined by ecclesiastical disagreements (which will be discussed below), they could not be allied relations merely due to the remoteness of the theaters where these powers were solving their foreign policy tasks. The growing presence of European specialists, most of whom were Greeks and Italians, in Russia in the third quarter of the century had nothing to do with the quality of interstate relations.

Russia would clash with the European forces directly only in the middle of the 16th century, and especially during the Time of Troubles. However, the former case was what these days is called “proxy war” that the Holy Roman Empire was waging against Russia (if there was any war) through Poland, which was barely subordinate to the emperor. The Poles' second invasion and the Swedish expansion were a result of the collapse of the Russian state due to a dynastic crisis. During that period, the European states themselves pursued a policy of isolating Russia and actively fought against its attempts to have a say in European affairs and develop trade in Europe. In 1547-1548 the

empire and its Livonian allies firmly upset Hans Schlitte's attempt at the mass recruitment of Europeans for work in Russia (Chernikova, 2019, p. 288).

The first real efforts of diplomacy taken under Peter the Great for the sake of achieving military-political goals were aimed at expanding territories beyond the borders of Russian lands, and not at ensuring their own security. Russia's desire to "be an arbiter in European affairs," which Chancellor Bezborodko expressed in the mid-1780s, was the end product of the historical experience that the country had gained by the time it emerged on the European scene and of its scale and self-confidence gained in the East (Scott, 2004, p. 255). Russia emerged separately from the political civilization of Western Europe; its diplomatic and foreign policy culture took shape in different conditions, outside of the club of the strongest states, whose formation had no bearing on Russia.

#### **"MY BONES WILL REMAIN IN THIS CITY"**

Moreover, in terms of culture, from which the political and philosophical foundations of the national foreign policy derive, the Russian civilization initially developed under the influence of two most important factors. Firstly, the awareness of the truth of its faith and of the uniqueness of the only, by reason of circumstances, Orthodox state that did not succumb to Islam. Secondly, the superiority over neighbors in the West, arising from the firm belief in the truth of the faith, although it had nothing to do with the radicalism of the "morbidly impressive" Ivan the Terrible. Also, in the South and in the East, that state was in contact with the paganism of Siberia's indigenous ethnic groups and Islam of the Golden Horde, and later the Ottoman Empire. The political contradictions with them were devoid of a heavy cultural or religious flavor. While the geography of the medieval Russian state and its important foreign policy tasks in the 14th-16th centuries made relations with the West irrelevant, the matters of faith initially created conditions for antagonism.

It can be assumed that the theocratic nature of pre-imperial Russia was too significant for Russia's national identity to be easily



supplanted by the European habits imported by Peter the Great, or participation in continental diplomacy: they remained just episodes against the backdrop of the strong belief in its own exceptionalism. And not because the Church occupied a special place in the state system—with Nikon's reforms and, especially, those effected in 1721, its influence ended. The central factor that determines the place of religion in Russia's foreign policy is that the exceptional position of the Church at the early stages of Russia's history enabled its ideals to lay the groundwork for the (political) outlook of the people and the state.

This paper does not aim at describing in detail how the position of the Orthodox Church and its relations with the secular authorities evolved during the period known as the gathering of the Great Russian lands. The well-known outline of events shows that from the very beginning of the “process of socio-political organization of the Great Russian nation,” the rulers of Moscow were well aware of the importance of close alliance with the Church (Presnyakov, 1918, p. 13). This alliance rested upon the will of Metropolitan Peter (the second half of the 13th century—1326) to bury him in “this city” of Moscow (Krivosheev et al., 2021, p. 214). This decision had a significant moral impact on all his successors, who, right up to the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1438-1445, were also appointed in Constantinople, but chose the capital of the new rising state for permanent residence (Klibanov, 1989, p. 75).

After the devastation caused by the Tatar-Mongol invasion and amid the princes' permanent feud, the Church became the central institution of Russian society and, indirectly, of the state. As Sergei Solovyov noted, “the unity of Russia rested upon a single metropolitan” (Solovyov, 1988, p. 222). Moreover, as Gelian Prokhorov put it, “the ecclesiastical and spiritual rallying of Great Russia around Moscow preceded political rallying” (Prokhorov, 2000, p. 43). Alongside the metropolitans' formal powers, this made ecclesiastical ideals dominant not only in people's minds, but also in the thinking about the nature of the developing state, and its place in the world and its relationship with other powers. Orthodoxy began to play a role that it lacked during the Kievan stage of its development, and even more so during the period of

feudal turmoil that had preceded the Mongol invasion—the role “of a religion that most of all binds and forms peoples” (Gogol, 2018, p. 36).

The ideology of a growing state rested upon the idea of the continuity of Kievan Rus, mainly to the extent that “the specific features of medieval political and legal consciousness” required, but even now we see the true extent of its presence in Russian foreign policy mentality (Tomsinov, 2003, p. 63). It implies that the state and its institutions can operate effectively in the present and the future only if they are rooted in the past. This formed a political concept of the succession of power that the Moscow princes inherited from the Kievan ones, including the right to own all ancestral lands. But of still greater, fundamental importance was the legend of the “Caesar’s gifts”—an all-invented legend which was repeatedly improved and edited, and which ultimately served as the basis of the Russian state ideology.

The concept of a true, divinely crowned Christian tsar and the idea of the authorities’ mission as service to Orthodox Christianity, which constitutes the basis of this ideology, took its final shape in writings by monk Philotheus. His works are known to the general public mainly in the context of the “Moscow, third Rome” concept, although, as historians testify, the reference to the earthly role of the Russian state as a direct successor to Byzantium is much older. Of real importance is this: in Philotheus’ works, as Vladimir Tomsinov noted, for example, there is the idea of the “Roman Kingdom” of the Lord—an ideal indestructible state, the image of which, after the “betrayal” and collapse of Constantinople, is taken over by the Moscow Tsardom (Ibid, pp. 70-71). The Russian state, therefore, is not just a new bearer of the ideal of an Orthodox Christian state. The “third Rome” concept indicates that Russia is the last earthly bearer of this ideal.

The interpretation of the political royal power that arises on this basis—“without a tsar there is no Holy Russia, without Holy Russia there is no tsar”—is derived from the Byzantine “unitary” idea. As French theologian Yves Congar defines it, “earthly government and the earthly order of things follow the order of Heaven—on Earth there is only one order, one truth, one justice and one authority, the bearer of which is the image and representative of God: to one God up in

heaven there corresponds one monarch on Earth, at least legally” (Congar, 2011, p. 26). Since the ideology of the Muscovite State asserts the idea of the transfer of Rome, there also occurs the transfer of the ecclesiological primacy associated with it: Christian society is built in accordance with the image of the Heavenly Kingdom and heavenly politeia; it unites all aspects of life in a single order under the authority of the emperor (Ibid).

The Russian state’s attitude to the Latin West was formed on the basis of integration of the princes’ political ideas and the theological and canonical thought of the Church. Congar writes: “From the Byzantine ideal’s point of view, many episodes in the history of the Christian West look like real betrayal” (Ibid, p. 28). It “found itself under the rule of barbarians and went over to the barbarians; it committed treason by creating an ostensibly Roman emperor, but in fact a German, that is, a barbarian emperor” (Ibid). This circumstance, after being transferred to Russian soil, laid the foundation for both the political and cultural alienation of the two worlds: the Byzantine one, which positioned itself as the sole successor of Rome, and the Latinized barbarian world.

The only attempt to solve the problem of division, which Rome undertook under extraordinary circumstances before the fall of Constantinople, failed in Russia but not because such was the political will of the princes. As Yuri Krivosheev notes in his works, the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-1439 was led by newly appointed Metropolitan Isidore, previously known for his commitment to compromise with Rome and to overcoming the schism of 1054. The Grand Prince of Moscow was not strongly against this appointment (Krivosheev et al., 2021, p. 297). The metropolitan’s return in 1441 in the capacity of cardinal presbyter to the Russian lands aroused young Prince Vasily II’s cautious alarm (Maleto, 2018, p. 102). However, the opponents of unification within the Church and the people had a final say, which made it possible in 1448 to put an end to the historically established tradition of the metropolitan’s appointment by Constantinople (Krivosheev et al., 2021, p. 300).

By the time the dwindling Byzantine Empire decided to commit what from the point of view of the Orthodox tradition was the most

terrible crime, Russia had already walked the historical road to a point where it was able to act independently and on the basis of an ideology that even the will of the emperor and the patriarch were unable to shatter. By that time, the foundation of relations between Russia and the West had been built on the condemnation and denial of the entire path chosen by Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. In the eyes of the Muscovite State, the European neighbors from the very beginning were guilty of betrayal which, according to the teachings transferred from Byzantium, “first” Rome committed in relation to Christianity, and its entire ideology did not imply the slightest chance of a compromise when it came to such an important issue. It is not accidental that Russia’s first military offensive against the forces of Western Europe in the late 1550s and early 1560s was based on the idea of the apostasy of its nearest neighbors in the West—the Livonians—from the Christian faith (Kurukin, 2020, p. 126). Alienation and condemnation of betrayal are two of the most important concepts that determine Russia’s attitude towards the West. Even the three hundred years of imperial and Soviet history, when Europe was closest to Russia, were unable to shake these cornerstones.

### **KNOW YOURSELF BETTER**

The hypothesis outlined above certainly does not mean that the historical and cultural experience Russia accumulated during the imperial or Soviet periods of its history is of less value. It makes up the bulk of knowledge and assumptions used to address Russia’s current foreign policy problems, among which the central one is the difficulties Russia encounters in its efforts to independently integrate into the global economy and politics. The calls for recognizing itself beyond the traditional European space and thus paving the way for sustainable development in the future still do not find mass support and understanding. This is not surprising: since the establishment of universities in Russia all of its intellectual, political and business life was associated with the presence in Europe and the solution of tasks closely related to it. But if we assume that the coming split between Russia and the West is insurmountable—not through our fault, but,

above all, due to objective factors of global and regional development— it will make sense to look at Russia's history more broadly, far beyond its imperial period, however magnificent it was.

Nor does this mean that “pre-Petrine Russia” should be considered the only reliable reference point in understanding the country's political culture, even as regards such a narrow part of it as foreign policy. Like any country, Russia has gone through an incredible number of landmark events and experiences. Some historical events are taking place before our very eyes. But the most stable features of Russia's behavior developed when Western Europe meant nothing to it but a chance to invite skilled craftsmen, who had no access to political and spiritual life. Therefore, now we should take a closer look at the pre-imperial period of Russian history, for this is the source of specific features that determined not only the choice of foreign policy tools, but the very mode of thinking about foreign policy tasks regardless of the era their appearance is associated with.

## References

- Bochkaryov, V.N., 1944. *Feodalnaya voina v udelno-knyazheskoi Rusi XV v. Bor'ba za sozdaniye Russkogo natsionalnogo gosudarstva* [The Feudal War in Princely Rus in the 15th Century. The Struggle for the Creation of the Russian National State]. D.Sc. Thesis (History). Moscow: Moscow State University.
- Chernikova, T.V., 2019. *Rossiya i Evropa: nachalo dialoga* [Russia and Europe: The Beginning of Dialogue]. Moscow: Kultura.
- Congar, I., 2011. *Devyat' vekov spustya. Zametki o vostochnoi skhizme* [Nine Centuries Later. Notes on Eastern Schism]. Kyiv: Dukh i litera.
- Gogol, N.V., 2018. *Rossiya. Put' istiny* [Russia. The Path of Truth]. Moscow: Ripol Classic Publishing House.
- Kissinger, H.A., 1957. *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Klibanov, A.I. (ed), 1989. *Russkoye pravoslaviye. Vekhi istorii* [Russian Orthodoxy. History Milestones]. Moscow: Politisdat.
- Klyuchevsky, O.V., 1937. *Kurs russkoi istorii* [Russian History Course]. Moscow: G. Lissner and D. Sobko.

Krivosheev, Yu.V., Sokolov, R.A. and Guseva, S.V., 2021. *Moskva v epokhu Srednevekovya: ocherki politicheskoi istorii XII–XV stoletiy* [Moscow in the Middle Ages: Essays on the Political History of the 12th-15th Centuries]. Saint Petersburg: Petersburg State University.

Kurukin, I.V., 2020. *Zhizn' i trudy Silvestra, nastavnika tsarya Ivana Groznogo* [The Life and Works of Sylvester, Mentor of Tsar Ivan the Terrible]. Moscow: Kvadriga.

Lieven, D., 1995. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as Imperial Polities. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30 (4), pp. 607-636.

Lieven, D., 1999. Dilemmas of Empire 1850–1918. Power, Territory, Identity. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (2), pp. 163-200.

Lieven, D., 2007. *Rossiiskaya imperiya i yeyo vragi s XVI veka do nashikh dnei* [The Russian Empire and Its Rivals from the 16th Century to the Present Day]. Moscow: Evropa.

Lurie, Ya.S., 2021. *Dve istorii Rusi* [Two Histories of Rus of the 15th Century]. Moscow: Kvadriga.

Maleto, Ye.I., 2018. *Srednevekovaya Rus i Konstantinopol. Diplomaticheskiye otnosheniya v kontse XIV – seredine XV v.* [Medieval Russia and Constantinople. Diplomatic Relations at the End of the 14th – the Middle of the 15th Centuries]. Moscow: Tsentrpoligraph.

Mavrodin, V.V., 1951. *Obrazovaniye yedinogo Russkogo gosudarstva* [Formation of a Unified Russian State]. Leningrad: Leningrad State University.

Miller, A., 2006. The Value and the Limits of a Comparative Approach to the History of Contiguous Empires on the European Periphery. In: K. Matsuzato (ed.) *Imperiology: From Empirical Knowledge to Discussing the Russian Empire*. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University.

Morgenthau, H.J., 1948. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: McGraw Hill. Cited by: [https://books.google.ru/books?id=jdALAQAQAQBAJ&pg=PA170&lpg=PA170&dq=morgenthau++pyramid+of+power+geographical&source=bl&ots=NWUYZsPvuq&sig=ACfU3U2tYBVhDQ0\\_2G7WH1idFEAqXVuf1A&hl=ru&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj4tqqc6t74AhVBx4sKHW15CXoQ6AF6BAG\\_EAM#v=onepage&q=morgenthau%20%20pyramid%20of%20power%20geographical&f=false](https://books.google.ru/books?id=jdALAQAQAQBAJ&pg=PA170&lpg=PA170&dq=morgenthau++pyramid+of+power+geographical&source=bl&ots=NWUYZsPvuq&sig=ACfU3U2tYBVhDQ0_2G7WH1idFEAqXVuf1A&hl=ru&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj4tqqc6t74AhVBx4sKHW15CXoQ6AF6BAG_EAM#v=onepage&q=morgenthau%20%20pyramid%20of%20power%20geographical&f=false)

Petrov, A.V., 2008. Slavyanofobia glasami istorika russkikh drevnostei [Slavophobia in the Eyes of a Historian of Russian Antiquities]. In: *Rossiya i Udmurtiya: istoriya i sovremennost'*. *Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, posvyashchennoi 450-letiyu dobrovolnogo vkhozhdeniya Udmurtii v sostav Rossiiskogo gosudarstva* [Russia and Udmurtia: History and Modernity. Materials of the International Scientific-Practical Conference Dedicated to the 450th Anniversary of the Voluntary

Entry of Udmurtia into the Russian State]. Izhevsk: Udmurt State University.

Presnyakov, A.E., 1918. *Moskovskoye tsarstvo* [Moscow Kingdom]. Petrograd: Ogni.

Prokhorov, G.M., 2000. *Rus i Vizantiya v epokhu Kulikovskoi bitvy* [Rus and Byzantium in the Era of the Kulikovo Battle]. St. Petersburg: Alteya.

Scott, H.M., 2004. *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756–1775*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Solovyov, S.M., 1988. *Sochineniya v vosemnadtsati knigakh* [Essays in Eighteen Books]. Kniga II. *Istoriya Rossii s drevheishikh vremyon* [Book II. History of Russia since Ancient Times], Vol. 3-4. Moscow: Mysl.

Tomsinov, V.A., 2003. *Istoriya russkoi politicheskoi i pravovoi mysl. X–XVIII veka* [History of Russian Political and Legal Thought in the 10th–13th Centuries]. Moscow: Zertsalo.

X, 1947. The Sources of Soviet Conduct. *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (4), pp. 566-582. Available at: [doi.org/10.2307/20030065](https://doi.org/10.2307/20030065) [Accessed 12 June 2022].