

The Unlimited Power of Russia

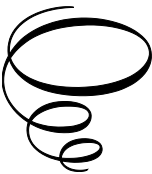
The Unlimited Power of Russia:

Origins, Power and War

By

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**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-4649-9

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-4650-5

TO MELIS AND METEHAN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Academia is a continuous journey—an ever-evolving realm of knowledge and discovery. The perpetual nature of scholarly inquiry highlights the indispensable role of collaboration, as knowledge is not created in isolation but within a dynamic social and academic environment enriched by the exchange of ideas among peers. Equally vital to this process is the provision of both motivation and intellectual support.

Therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all my family members for their unwavering encouragement and steadfast support throughout this journey. Their presence has been a source of strength and inspiration. Also, engaging in meaningful discussions with my thesis students, Ezgi and Ejazul, has been profoundly beneficial.

Merve Suna Özel Özcan
Ankara

INTRODUCTION

ASSOC. PROF. DR. MERVE SUNA ÖZEL ÖZCAN¹

The expansion of international conflicts and their effects after 2000 is noteworthy. With technological advancements, individuals can now significantly impact the existing system. While the power and effects of technology, especially social media, are manifested in crises such as the Arab Spring, the Russia-Ukraine War, and Israel's Gaza Attack, today, we also encounter wars waged by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). On the other hand, a new technological breakthrough provides predictions that developing Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) can replace humans in many fields. Although the traditional world has been a century of changing prevalent perceptions, the existence of actors who still act with inherent motives in the 21st century may remind us that there will always be things that do not change in the system. The upcoming questions will pertain to power, particularly in a practical setting. When an individual employs a power-centered strategy, it can be perceived as a danger by those in opposition, as it can potentially target their objectives. Consequently, this may provoke an adversary or a foe. Labelling others as "different" has been a recurring theme throughout history. While identities reflect who we are as individuals, power also transforms so that our power reflects who we are in the context of the state or other political units (Özel Özcan, 2022). In other words, if you are strong and seek hegemony, it may offer a simple reading as the position of great/dominant/superpower (Kennedy, 1989; Levy, 1983; Modelski, 1987), and if you are weak, the position of the other may come to the fore. In this respect, it is vital to question the great power status of the Russian Federation in the international arena. Russia has been a crucial actor in the international system since it declared empire in 1721.

This study questions Russian power based on Wallerstein's critical approach, which states that every system will be the principle of transformation. If we consider that there were many different centres of

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power in the world, particularly before the Westphalian International System of 1648, we would have a European-centered approach. However, the system includes more focus and actors than Europe alone. Another point to consider is Modelski's concept of "dominant powers," which claims that changes occur every century. However, the main problem is that the readings carried out since the 1500s present this cycle repeatedly through different theories. Are there dominant powers in every century, or is there a single founder of the hegemonic system? If so, how will Russia's place and power be read in this case? These are the main questions that will be addressed in this study. It is necessary to understand not only Russia's focus but also the structure of its system.

After the Soviet Union's collapse, Russian identity became a debatable issue among researchers. The Russian Federation experimented with different forms of identity, facing a dilemma and transition. Churchill's words, "Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," remain relevant (Keyes, 2007, p. 180). Russian history took the step to show its excellent power position in the world in 1721 when Peter the Great (Пётр Великий - Pyotr Velikiy) declared his empire. This step would change the status of Russia as an Eastern civilization or as having a Eurasian identity. While Peter the Great turned Russia into an empire, he also had a significant impact on giving this empire a Western identity. However, the most fundamental point here is that imperial ambition has now spread to Russian foreign policy. He quickly began to apply the knowledge and ideas he acquired while travelling around Europe in Russian territory. One of Peter's first acts after returning to his country was to gift the country a new imperial capital, which also has an essential place for the current president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin: St. Petersburg, also known as Peter's City. As a result, I began my study of Russian history with an introduction focusing on how Peter the Great's imperial actions ingrained specific principles into Russian foreign policy. The most important is undoubtedly the Russian policy of landing in warm seas. This policy was another name for the Russians' effort to establish domination over the lands of the Ottoman Empire, which periodically manifested itself in their imperial expansion goals.

On the other hand, when the aim of excellent power is considered in this context, it will be seen that the Russians came face to face with many European powers, especially Napoleonic France. The two most notable examples are the defeat of Napoleon's France and Hitler's Germany. Both Peter the Great and Stalin tried to use the great power potential of Russian lands to the fullest. However, it is open to question to what extent the results of the same situation are valid. Hosking (2015) states that Russia is

a paradoxical empire. Indeed, Russia, despite its vast territory throughout history, has remained a protected region, with much of its land being infertile and isolated from the sea and the outside world. In this respect, although Russian lands are suitable for expansion, they also create obstacles considering their climate. Another situation is that the state contains many elements in its vast territory. In the Russian Empire, which we will examine later, an attempt was made to standardize the society with Pan-Slavism. However, according to Hosking, this was abandoned after the failure to create the modern period empire due to the complexity of establishing and maintaining a state that assimilated everything by taking in all elements. For this reason, Russia always carries within its enormous power the weakness that will destroy itself (2015, 6).

While discussing Russia's history, it should not be forgotten that the people and the state were the great powers during the imperial and then Soviet Union periods. Throughout history, empires have been powerful political units in the international system, shaping its foundations. Like nation-states, empires have played a crucial role in history and are considered "great powers" due to their influence. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked a significant turning point, as states began to be classified based on their power. This concept has been influential in the evolution of states, relying on state authority and bureaucracy to extend their control over territories (Rich, 2009, p. 277). Therefore, many scholars have identified dominant powers (Modelski, 1987) or great powers (Kennedy, 1989; Levy, 1983, 1988) as far back as the 16th century.

The transformation of empires into modern great powers has redefined the centre-periphery dynamic by incorporating geopolitical and economic power alongside classical empires' traditional military and political power. Thus, this new power revealed the search for hierarchical superiority and the necessary nature of the system from the very beginning. In this respect, the system created by empires has always had a hierarchical structure. Even though Russia has these characteristics historically, to what extent has it been considered among the great powers? Kennedy did not consider Russia as powerful as Britain. Russia was not seen as a dominant system-transforming power. Modelski writes that there is no clear emphasis on Russia in this transformation. One possible explanation for this is Russia's internal struggles and political instability during this period, which may have hindered its ability to assert itself as a dominant power.

Although the great power position was not achieved during the empire period, the Russians changed this in a short time after the Bolshevik Revolution by creating a new bloc against capitalism. Adopting a distinct approach from the West in ideological, economic, and political terms,

Russia has established itself as a great power within the international system. The USA and the USSR have become ideological enemies in the Cold War since 1918. This year may be surprising as traditionally, the Cold War is said to have started after WWII. The reason is that the USA did not directly participate in the First World War, it directly targeted Russian territory. Our investigation now delves into the First World War's impact on Russian relations. The American military intervention in Archangel, Russia, known as the 'Polar Bear Expedition', during World War I illustrates the complexities of War. During the Russian Revolution, Archangel and Murmansk were strategically important to the White Russians and their supporters because many ambassadors and military staff from Allied nations had retreated north from Moscow and settled in the northern towns controlled by White Russian forces (Barnes & Rhodes, 2012). Initially intended to counter a German advance and reopen the Eastern Front, American soldiers became entangled in a prolonged conflict with Bolshevik revolutionaries, which persisted beyond the Armistice in France.

Four critical points rooted in Russian national identity and foreign policy have garnered attention during the Putin era. First, there is a strong belief in Russia as a great power. Second, there is a focus on excelling in military, economic, and technological fields, a tradition dating back to Peter I and continues to be a priority for Putin. Third, there is a concern about defending these strategies against objections within domestic politics and the economy, as well as in foreign policy priorities. Finally, there is an ongoing discussion about Russia's relations with the West, which has been central for the past 200 years.

For Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, the collapse of the USSR is the "greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century". The policies followed in practice show that there is more emphasis on the pre-USSR imperial period (Sakwa, 2014; Myers, 2015). Under Putin, the emphasis on Orthodoxy, one of the most essential features and symbols of power of the Russian Empire, is highlighted at every opportunity. The Orthodox Church has been reactivated (Laruelle, 2013), and the dream of empire has returned, symbolized by using the double-headed eagle as the state coat of arms since 1993. As soon as Putin took office, he set the course for Russia's future. This led to an increased emphasis on centralization, strengthening the tradition of seeking a strong leader in Russian political culture.

Indeed, the Putin Era, Russia's Great Power Goals, and Vladimir Putin's rise to power have significantly changed Russia's foreign policy and national identity. The main situations that stand out in this period:

1. The post-2000 period has seen a significant strengthening of Russia's Great Power Perception, which has become decisive in both domestic policy and foreign relations.

2. Post-2000, Russia has continued a strategy that echoes its superior position in military, economic, and technological fields reminiscent of the Soviet era. This enduring tradition, dating back to Peter the Great, encompasses the modernization of military might, the strategic use of energy resources, and technological advancements to maintain superiority in these domains under Putin's leadership.

3. Energy is emphasized as a major deterrent and reward element in Russia's foreign policy, especially in connection with the modernization of military might and technological advancements. It is an important agenda item to defend Russia's strategies against the objections it may face in domestic policy and the economy.

4. Perhaps the most fundamental issue is relations with the West. Compared to the 1990s, the 2000s have revealed significant ruptures. Of course, the Western presence, which has been more on Russia's side for the last 200 years, is significant. Indeed, this reality has been an essential topic of discussion during the Putin era. The dynamics of these relations significantly affect Russia's international position and strategic moves. The most critical example is undoubtedly the ongoing War with Ukraine.

This study aims to understand the Russian historical identity and its influence on foreign policy. When analyzing Russia's current political actions on the global stage, it is essential to consider the historical context. This study will first explore the historical roots, highlighting critical aspects of identity and power during the tsarist, imperial, and Soviet periods. Subsequently, the study will examine Russia's position within the international structure post-Cold War, mainly focusing on the period following Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000. This will include exploring Russia's foreign relations, power dynamics, energy policies, neighbouring relationships, and security perceptions within the global system. This book consists of four primary chapters. First, to understand Russia in the Putin era, it is necessary to read its historical identity roots. This situation can be seen strongly in Russia today because its history and identity create a nation and strengthen it. The second chapter studies Russia's intention and moves to become a great power in foreign policy. The Eurasian approach is crucial in this context. The focus on Eurasia and the approach to Russian identity are both essential. This is evident in Russia's foreign policy, as its position between Western and Eastern civilizations shapes its unique characteristics. Has the doctrinal shift in Russian foreign policy since 1990 aimed to include Russians and all

individuals living on Russian soil? This question will be addressed in the second part. Additionally, the military structure is of great importance. Under the Putin government, military power has become one of the most critical issues in the post-2000 period. The fundamental realist approach and military power have been critical factors in Russia's growing importance as an international actor. Therefore, examining its military device and its impact on foreign policy approaches is essential.

Each chapter offers a perspective on the emergence and development of Russia's imperial strategy, with a focus on its 21st-century vision. So, in this book, I first focus on Russia's powerful identity, deeply rooted in its historical and cultural legacies. "Origins of Russian Identity" explores the key moments and traditions that shape the national consciousness, illustrating how past events and societal values contribute to a cohesive identity that influences current policies. Russia's foreign policy has transformed significantly as it engages with the global landscape. The second chapter, "Russian Foreign Policy and Nationalist Eurasianism", examines these shifts and the emergence of new ideological frameworks that shape Russia's strategies for asserting its presence in a changing world.

"Russian Security Strategy" focuses on how security doctrines reflect its desire for global recognition and how military planning is perceived internationally within global security dynamics. So, the third chapter provides a framework for understanding Russia's security approach, which is driven by a protective instinct yet exhibits aggressive behaviors. This section reflects a Russian vision that continuously reinterprets its perspectives on security and threats, accompanied by ongoing doctrinal changes.

The fourth chapter, "Strategic Foundations of Russia's Economic Influence", focuses on two phenomena that Russia instrumentalizes: energy-economy and, to some extent, migration. This section examines the contexts in which Russia leverages these factors as strategic tools.

Moreover, the last chapter, the culmination of these elements, is detailed in "Unlimited Power of Russia: Empire's Shadow and Strategic Dominance over Ukraine." This chapter analyzes recent policies, particularly regarding Ukraine, emphasizing the influences of imperial ambitions on Russia's drive for power. Overall, "Unlimited Power of Russia" offers insights into the interplay of identity, ideology, security, and economic power that defines Russia's ambitions in the international system, revealing its ongoing quest for a prominent role in global affairs.

As a result, we will discuss the factors that have contributed to Putin's Russia's increasing power and how they have been used as tools in foreign

policy. Energy is a particularly critical aspect of this power. Additionally, we will examine the relationship between the centre and the periphery and the space that Russia has created. Furthermore, we will analyze how Russia's approach as a major power is viewed internationally. In this context, we will also discuss the extent of unlimited power during Putin's era in Russia.

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN IDENTITY: THE PENETRATION OF EMPIRE AND GREAT POWER CONCEPTS

Introduction

Changes that take place in the global arena have a simultaneous impact on the domestic political systems of nations. In turn, developments in the local political landscape have repercussions on the political culture based on global events. Identity is shaped by filling the common culture and knowledge pools that transfer from generation to generation. According to Yuval-Davis, the family sphere, which encompasses social, economic, and political networks and households organized within the kinship or friendship relations framework, plays a vital role in identity formation. All three fields produce their own ideological identities and discourses. None of these areas is homogeneous, and different parts of the state may behave in ways that conflict with others. Their effects on ethnicity, class, gender, and other societal groupings may differ (Yuval-Davis, 41). Although identity lacks a collective structure, it is formed through individual concepts, ways of participating in life, and an individual's position in social life. The essence of Russian identity has historically been defined by its differences from the Western world and a quest for power imbued with a sense of a savior mission. The identity structure of the Russians that first appeared in the international system in the 10th century, and the formation of nationalism related to this identity since the 19th century are essential to understanding the basic building blocks of Russian identity.

Furthermore, Russians have maintained a strong connection to their geographic surroundings throughout history, akin to the enduring bond observed in China. Its strategic location and power have made Russia a central focus of geopolitical theories, such as the land dominance and edge-belt theories. Leaders such as Napoleon and Hitler were also drawn to this region in their quest to conquer Russian lands. Despite facing both advantages and challenges within their region, Russians have persisted in establishing and expanding their empire since their emergence on the global stage. Initially influenced by the Mongol and Byzantine empires, the

Russians developed a unique structure that internalized religion and nationalism, creating a distinct culture.

In the post-2000 period, Russia's re-emergence as a power in global politics can be linked to the role of Russian national identity and Russian nationalism. By embracing Russian nationalism and imperial codes, the Russians closed the dusty page of the 1990s with the new millennium and started taking steps to reclaim their power in the international arena. Geoffrey Hosking (2006), in his study "Russians: Rulers and Victims," highlighted the problems in Russian national identity and questioned whether the manifestation of this identity was in the form of an empire or a nation-state. In connection with Russian nationalism, Russian identity includes great goals and internalizations, historical missions, and attributions of holiness.

The inquiry into the roots of the Russian people and their identity has been a prominent subject of discourse, not only in the realm of Pan-Slavism but also during the Soviet Era. While various theories have been proposed about their ethnic origins, the national origin myth has been closely regulated by the state, especially in the Soviet Union period. Several studies have been conducted on this topic, particularly emphasising the content of the Kyiv Chronicle and the definition of ethnicity. To build a strong foundation for Russian identity and nationalism, a comprehensive understanding of Russian ethnicity is imperative, as it has played a pivotal role in shaping nationalist movements since the 19th century. Accordingly, Orthodoxy has been crucial in shaping the Russian identity for centuries. This establishment and expansion of the empire serve as a fundamental cornerstone of the state, strategically employed as a policy tool both within the country and on the international stage. The Orthodox Church holds immense significance as it serves as the foundation of national identity, and its ideology of nationalism is prominently manifested. This section will explore the origins of the Slavs' adoption of Orthodoxy, a pivotal aspect of the Russian identity, and its subsequent development.

Although the Russian Federation may not be considered a superpower compared to the Soviet Union era, it has evolved into a great power through its various competencies and power structures. This evolution is primarily due to the codes defining nationalism and identity. Therefore, when discussing the Russian people and their history, it is crucial to consider identity perceptions dating back to the 21st century. It is essential to remember that Russia is a state founded on the legacy of the Russian Empire, but with significant differences in nationality and expansionism policies during the reign of Joseph Stalin. Victory Day, celebrated annually on May 9, is significant because of the continued influence of Stalin. In

2019, the Levada Center conducted surveys in Russia to understand attitudes towards Stalin, with 51% of participants stating that they loved, respected, and admired him. Victory Day also commemorates Russia's contribution to World War II, where they fought against Nazi Germany. Military parades are held yearly to celebrate this victory, which marks a significant moment in Russian history. The ceremony evokes both pride and wounds of the past, reminding us of how Russia changed world history with the fight against Hitler (ПИИИЯ, 2019).

Origins: The Formation of Russian Identity

Eric Hobsbawm approaches nationalism through a social history perspective, defining it as a political principle that necessitates the alignment of the state and the nation (Hobsbawm, 1990). According to him, nationalism is best understood not by examining the works of elites who produce ideas or policies on nationalism but rather through the beliefs of ordinary individuals who represent society at large. Contrary to views that see nationalism merely as an ideology developed by traditional elites to preserve their privileges and traditions, Hobsbawm argues that nationalism primarily arises from the grassroots—average peasants and ordinary people striving to protect threatened ways of life (Hobsbawm, 1990).

The process of acquiring a national identity occurs as individuals position themselves within a broader social and cultural unity. Anthony Smith's framework, which outlines the core elements of national identity, provides valuable guidance in this regard. According to Smith (1991), these elements include: i) a historic homeland or territory; ii) shared myths and narratives; iii) a mass public culture; iv) common rights and duties applicable to all members of the society; and v) a common economy. Smith also emphasizes the strong correlation between the strength and depth of an ethnic identity and the likelihood of a nation emerging from it.

Smith's definition must be understood within the framework of centralized power, especially Russian nationalism and identity. Historically, Russian identity has been constructed around a powerful centre, systematically organizing itself as a core system, and its economic structure has been built upon this power-focused centralization. In this sense, power has become an inseparable component of identity.

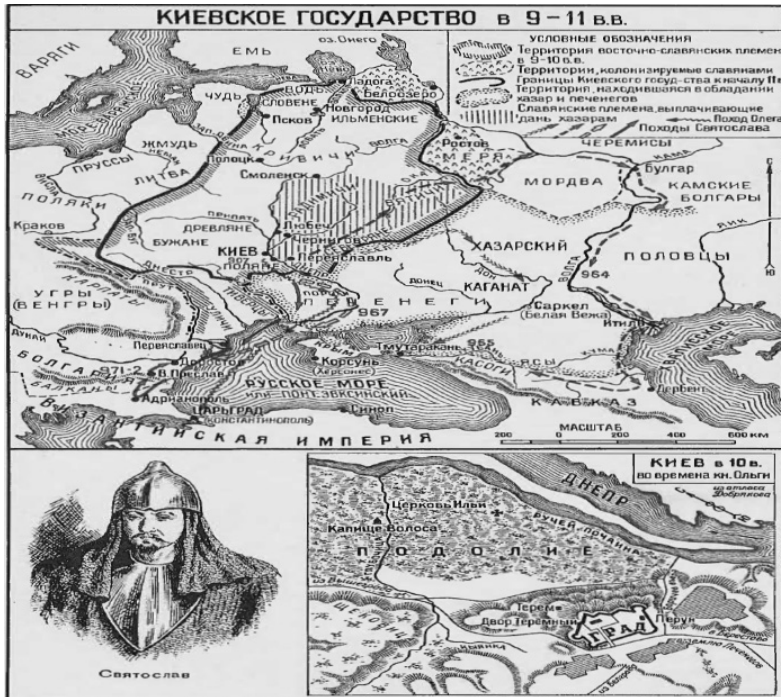
From this perspective, when studying nationalism, it is also essential to analyse the social, political, cultural, economic, and global power dynamics that shape it. This multidimensional approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the historical trajectory of Russian nationalism, particularly in terms of the complex interplay between the centralised state

structure and the identity struggles of the populace. The historical roots of the Russian people have fostered distinct characteristics that shape their identity. It is vital to examine the different stages of their history, which have shaped their identity, rather than focusing on the Western identity. From the beginning, the key elements that differentiate the Russians and significantly impact their identity are their ethnicity, religion, and language. In addition, the regional states' cultural and political influences have complemented the Russian identity's imperial aspect. According to Anthony Smith's (1991) ethno-symbolist approach, a nation is defined as a community that shares a common historical land, myths, historical memory, public culture, economy, and legal rights and duties. Based on these traits, the emergence of Russian nationalism and its problems can be traced back to the 10th century. The essential point here is to acquire an identity before the emergence of nationalism.

The Russian ethnic group consists of Kyivan, Belarusian, and Moscow Russians, whose heritage is primarily rooted in the political structures established in the independent lands of Ukraine and Belarus. This process of historical development began during the Kyivan Rus period and continued with the emergence of the Moscow Russians. In this study, we will explore the political, ethnic, or national identity of those who identify as Russian within this geography (Perrie, 2006). Over time, the Russians have cultivated relationships with numerous societies and states, including those in Central Asia. Prior to centralization in the region, the Russians engaged with a variety of groups. This is evident through their payment of taxes to the Khazar Khan until the mid-11th century, highlighting their engagements with Turkish states during that era. It's worth noting that Russian princes in the Novgorod region even adopted the nickname "kaghan," which has Turkish roots. Beyond their interactions with the Turks, the Russians also had contact with the Normans and Swedes and, at one point, even used the Swedish language (Barthold, 2004, 58).

On the other hand, religion has played a significant role in Russian history and political culture. In 980, in Drevniy Rus, which was centered in Kyiv, Vladimir, one of Svyatoslav's three sons, followed his mother's example and got baptized. In 988, he made Orthodox Christianity the Russian state's official religion. This marked the beginning of the formation of the Russian identity that is known today. Orthodox identity became the first building block of the Russian identity in the late 10th century. The third identity coding took place with the alphabet. It is important that Patriarch Photius allowed the use of Slavic in church services in 858 and, subsequently, the use of the Cyrillic alphabet. In order to Orthodoxize the Slavs, Patriarch Photius asked Constantine and Methodius, two brothers from

Fig. 1-1: Kiev State 9-11 Century



(Source: Beskrovnyy, 1946, p.2).

Thessalonica, to develop the Slavic alphabet, so that they could communicate with the Slavs and read the Bible. Thus, this new written language developed by Constantine and Methodius, known as Cyrillic after becoming priests in the Orthodox Church, spread to Slavic countries. The Russian alphabet has different characters from the Latin alphabet in terms of Cyrillic letters. This situation is a historical distinction in which Russians can see themselves as the other of Europe.

After embracing Orthodoxy, Vladimir joined the Byzantine Imperial family in 988 by marrying the sister of the Byzantine Emperor. This was in response to the Russian military units that were dispatched to the Byzantine Empire to assist in suppressing the rebellions in Anatolia. Despite facing opposition from the Byzantine Empire, Vladimir created an independent Orthodox Church in Kyiv. He appointed a Tamatarian abbot as its leader and established seven bishoprics affiliated with the Kyiv Orthodox Church in Novgorod, Chernigov, Volunya, Polotsk, Turov, Belgorod, and Rostov

in Russian territory (Acar, 2009, 35-36). During the 15th century, the Orthodox Church became a powerful institution in terms of both ideology and finances. This was possible due to the Russians' continuous involvement in the Orthodox church activities, even under Mongol rule (Soltan, 2001, 69-70). The Russian Orthodox Church's influence increased even further when the Church Council decided to unify the Eastern Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church in 1439. With the acquisition of this newfound power, Orthodox Christianity eventually played a significant role in determining Russia's foreign policy objectives, aimed at ensuring the country's national unity.

In ensuring Russian national unity, they paved the way for the development of Russian nationalism with an emphasis on the same religion, geography, and history on the axis of Orthodox Christianity. The Third Rome Theory posits that religious symbolism is intertwined with the imperial narrative, thereby establishing legitimacy and framing the role of a savior. This theory suggests that the idea of patronage has become ingrained in Russian identity. As a result, Russians have attempted to legitimize their history by portraying themselves as ancient and historically significant (Özel Özcan, 2022).

The first mention of the idea of a Third Rome strengthened the Russian princes' claims to imperial power. According to Nikolai Berdiaev, with this myth, Moscow became the successor of Rome and the defender of Byzantium's universal Christian idea. Thus, Russia became the only Orthodox empire (tsarstvo), and in this sense, an ecumenical empire like the first and second Rome Act (Hosking, 2006, 8). According to Hosking (2006, 8), the Russians hold a messianic belief which gives them an "imperial appeal". Therefore, to extend their foreign policy goals, the Russians must bring this idea to the forefront and put it into practice. One of the key points to consider within the framework of the Third Rome theory is Russia's effort to reposition itself in the legacy of the Byzantine Empire. This is not only a matter of religious continuity but also of adopting a long-term imperial vision that Russia inherited from the Byzantine Empire. In this respect, the Third Rome theory finds its whole meaning.

In essence, the Third Rome theory gradually evolved into a framework that shaped Russian foreign policy, providing it with a sense of legitimacy. Particularly after the Ottoman Empire's conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Russians began to position themselves as the Third Rome, viewing this moment as a milestone in the pursuit of an imperial vision. Over time, the Third Rome theory moved beyond being merely a religious doctrine and transformed into a geopolitical narrative that legitimized Russian foreign policy. This narrative was manifested through a protective stance toward

Orthodox Slavic peoples living under Ottoman rule, such as the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Greeks. During this period, Pan-Orthodox rhetoric aimed not only to liberate these peoples but also to reinforce Russia's international legitimacy (Riasanovsky & Steinberg, 2010). Indeed, the enduring legacy of the Third Rome theory continues to serve as a legitimizing discourse for Russia's great power ambitions, resurfacing even in contemporary crises such as the Russia–Ukraine war.

However, it is essential to emphasise that what Russia inherited from Byzantium was selective and tailored to its own needs and interests. Rather than a deep cultural assimilation, it was a limited and pragmatic appropriation. According to Billington (2004), this is precisely the case. The first major division between the Eastern and Western Churches emerged in the late 9th century when Rome added the phrase “and from the Son” to the Nicene Creed's assertion that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father.” This doctrinal change was firmly rejected by Russian Orthodoxy, which embraced the traditional dogmatic stance of the Eastern Church with unwavering fidelity. Nonetheless, while Russia fully adopted Byzantium's religious system, artistic styles, and liturgical practices, it failed to internalize its rich philosophical heritage. In short, Russia inherited “the Byzantine achievement without the Byzantine inquisitiveness.”

Here, the information learned by the Russians in the context of state administration and expansion issues, especially the Central Asian past, comes to the fore. The cosmopolitan cultural framework that shapes Russian identity is deeply influenced by its Central Asian past. The roots of Russian statehood and conquest tradition can be traced back to this era. The Mongol domination that lasted for nearly 250 years brought about significant changes to the political culture and identity of the Russian people. The Russians began to turn into a centralized and expansionist state during the period they spent under Mongol tutelage. In this context, Ariel Cohen (1996) argues that the Russians learned to conquer from the Mongols, the greatest conquerors of all time. Cohen also points out that Russian expansion reveals that the primary goal of the tsars and the Russian political elite was empire-building rather than nation-building (Cohen, 1996, 29, 37).

It is worth noting that the relations between Russia and Mongolia were not limited to the political sphere, as there were several other aspects of their interaction. Although Russian princes accepted the language, culture, administrative system, and military innovations of the Mongols, the diplomatic ceremonies of the great princes reflected Mongol practices until the 16th century (Cohen, 1996, 31).

As the Russian identity grew stronger, it was imperative to take steps to become a sovereign state. During this era, it can be observed that the

Russians laying the groundwork for nationalization and the eventual formation of the empire that would come to fruition in the future. Hence, the process in which the Russians would become a great European power began after the Battle of Kuliokova, where the Russians defeated Mamay, the Khan of the Golden Horde. Ivan took the title of *samoderjey* (autocrat) after the Golden Horde began to withdraw and took the title of Tsar to emphasise an independent Russian state. In addition, with the formation of the national state, that is, the achievement of the principle of *Edinoderjavie* (monocracy), the Grand Duke (later Tsar) of Moscow was equipped with absolute power. If the importance of Mongolian-Russian relations in this period is deeply examined, it can be seen that the khan contributed to the establishment of the union by making the Grand Duke of Moscow the chief tax collector (Vernadsky, 2007). In the early 15th century, the Russian Church played a significant role in uniting the Russian principalities. The Principality of Moscow received support from the Russian Church, which helped in the unification process. As a result, these principalities joined together around Moscow, and Russia emerged as a major player on the historical stage during the period of Ivan the Third (1462-1505) (Kamalov, 2004, 306).

The gradual establishment of Russian identity was shaped by the state and its systems, serving as the foundation of the empire's power. The spread of Orthodoxy beyond religious circles and into the social and political spheres paved the way for Ivan the Terrible (Grozny) to become the first Tsar of the Russian empire, crowned by the Metropolitan in the Uspenski (Ascension) Cathedral. In the 15th century, the Roman Theory became a state policy, serving as a source of legitimacy for the Tsars in their governance. During the reign of Ivan IV, the Russians adopted the titles of Tsar and Patriarch, which were approved by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This was a significant step towards becoming the protector of the Orthodox people after the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, during the sixteenth century, a shift in Russian political culture occurred, which created a small differentiation between Russianness and the Empire. This shift impacted all aspects of Russian society and combined with authoritarianism to create the perception of the leader as an authorized supranational power. The belief in the justice of the tsar emerged, and to Russians, the monarch was considered a sacred, heaven-revealed supernatural entity (Prizel, 2000, 336). It was believed that the country's prosperity depended solely on the emperor and his wisdom. These characteristics are significant in defining Russia's political identity (Ateed & Özel Özcan, 2023).

Furthermore, the Russians implemented a policy of rapid expansion, and as a result, it began to become a multi-ethnic or multi-national socio-cultural structure. While Ivan assumed control over various Turkic and Finno-Ugric communities, encompassing both pagan and Muslim populations within the Kazan Khanate, Russian expansion extended to encompass the middle and lower Volga, the Urals, as well as the regions of Don, Kuban, and Terek (Cohen, 1996, 37). After its formation, the state transitioned into an empire with a diverse population rather than a single-national formation due to its structure. Following the death of Ivan the Terrible, the country entered a brief interregnum. This brought about a struggle for the throne as the Rurik dynasty came to an end. The period from 1584-1613 was marked by chaos for the Russian Tsardom. In 1613, Michael became the first Tsar of the Romanov Dynasty and ascended to the throne.

Empire and Shaping Russian Identity

Although, language, religion, and geography play essential roles in forming Russian identity, this situation creates diversity between Europe and Russians. It is crucial to be mindful of the shifts in Russia's identity, especially in light of the influence of nationalism that arose with the advent of the French Revolution. Although, the French Revolution began in July 1789 and was initially seen as a mere economic and social upheaval, it was, in fact, a more profound transformation. It marked an era when people began questioning political power structures within their societies. The idea of a sovereign-equal state dates back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which has given rise to a distinct sense of identity and boundaries in the dynamics between people and their government. This paved the way for developing a nationalistic ideology that places great emphasis on the significance of one's home country and its people.

At this point, it is imperative to understand the nature of nationalism. Nationalism can be understood as a political and social ideology, emphasising the importance of a nation, its culture, and its people. Hobsbawm (1993) points out that nationalism can be understood by examining the ideas of ordinary individuals representing the society, not from the works of leaders who produce ideas or create policies about nationalism. While Kedourie (1971, 1) argues that nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe in the early 19th century. He claims that it has, in a sense, created its system in terms of power. During the Pan-Slavic period, emotions were manipulated for foreign policy purposes as a manifestation of nationalist sentiment, similar to Russian nationalism.

Nationalism, in terms of its idea and widespread acceptance, has created a structure that is inherent in the Russian identity. In the 18th century, a

change in intellectual thinking caused Russian identity to become caught between the West and the East. The inclination of Russians, particularly under the influence of figures like Peter the Great, to align themselves with Western Civilisation was juxtaposed by the perspectives of numerous thinkers who stressed the importance of maintaining distinctiveness from the West. This difference manifested itself on the axis of Pan-Slavism.

Indeed, the international reflection of this situation should also be considered within the scope of the Russians' historical aim of territorial progress. Russians no longer aim regionally but to create as much expansion space as they can. In the 19th century, Russia became a great power in Asia and rapidly annexed new regions and lands to its borders. The annexation of Kazan Khanates in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556 ended the traditional control of the Central Asian peoples and states on the steppe road leading to the Black Sea. It is evident that Russians later expanded their influence from Eastern Europe and Siberia into the Central Asian grasslands, particularly focusing on the Kazakh steppes (Barisitz, 2017, 182).

When we look at gaining a Western identity, we can see that many things changed in Russian lands with Peter the Great. Starting in 1703, merchants, artisans, imperial officials, and servants were subjected to compulsory settlement. St. Petersburg was established on the lands next to the Neva River, which were taken from Sweden. This led to the division of Russian lands into two centers. St. Petersburg became the capital, while Moscow became the most significant center for domestic trade (Tilly, 1993, 265). During this period, the redesigned Russian army and navy became new tools of imperial expansion, elevating Russia first to the status of a European and then a global superpower (Cohen, 1996, 46). After the death of Ivan, the Russian state could not reach the empire stage. However, under the reign of Peter the Great, Russians began a transformation process, and in 1721, the state was recognized internationally as an empire. During this period, Russians understood the importance of having access to warm waters and made it a critical foreign policy goal. This goal has continued to shape their foreign policy till today. In the 1730s, Russia began to participate actively in wars across Europe, thanks to its Westernized armies. In Tilly's (275) words, Russia became a valuable ally and a terrible enemy during this period.

Throughout the period of Westernization, the impact extended beyond socio-cultural realms to include military transformations as well. The transformation of the Russian mental world into military power began with Peter the Great and brought about changes in the military. Examining this military change that occurred during the Westernization process is essential. Tsar Feodor's sister, Sophia, used *strelety*, initially established for defense

purposes, against Peter and created various problems for the government. During that period, admission to the streltsy was based on inheritance. Despite this, there was widespread distrust and dissatisfaction among the populace. This military organization appears to be more of a hindrance than a help. The Streltsi Rebellion, stemming from a power struggle in March of 1682, stands out as a particularly pressing issue. Another factor is undoubtedly that this union carries the characteristics of the old regime for the Western-style empire that Peter wanted to create. Peter abolished the streltsy and established a new standing army to win wars and defend the country effectively. Therefore, in 1725, the Russian Empire boasted a standing army of 250,000 individuals, bolstered by an additional 100,000 foreign mercenaries and 24,000 sailors. While military service was originally a lifelong commitment, it was shortened to 25 years following a reform in 1770. Notably, military service brought the invaluable benefit of emancipation for servicemembers and their families. Russia's formidable military might would be fully showcased during the Napoleonic Wars after the French Revolution (Taylor, 2003, 41).

After Peter died in 1725, the problem of succession arose. When the Tsar had his son killed and left no male heir behind, his accession to the throne could not continue within the framework of specific rules. Thus, in 1762, the German princess ascended to the throne of the empire. This princess took the name Catherine the Second after ascending to the throne. During this period, Russian territory was expanded. The Ottoman-Russian War, which took place between 1768 and 1774, can be considered a turning point for nationalists. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, signed in 1774, marked the initial move by Russia towards annexing Crimea. This annexation was finalized in 1783, granting Russia access to the Black Sea.

Pan-Slavizm and Russia

According to Levine (1914, 665), Pan-Slavism is traced to the fall of the Eastern Empire in the 15th century. The marriage of Sophia Paleologue to Ivan III in 1472 inspired the Grand Duke of Muscovy to make Constantinople the capital of a great Slavic empire, but neither Ivan III nor Ivan IV ever pursued it. However, during the era of Peter the Great, a sense of identity dilemma arose due to an approach caught between the West and the East. While Petersburg was constructed as a Western city and looks magnificent, it is still being determined to what extent the Russians' unique understanding and approach to the world have been integrated into it. Moreover, the pan movements that emerged in Russian lands before the establishment of nationalism should be dealt with on the foreign political

axis. Pan movements are movements aimed at integration. The basic situation here involves the coming together of a society with an ethnic element or religious and linguistic ties. In this respect, it can be said that this movement carried nationalist cores when nationalism was not gaining strength. The proponent of spreading the concept of Pan-Slavism in Russia was Croatian Yriy Krijanic. Initially tasked with enhancing Russian spelling in the palace library, Krijanic later became instrumental in advocating for Pan-Slavic ideals within Russian circles. Krijanic stated that the Slavic tribes could achieve a union under the leadership of Russia. However, it cannot be said that Pan-Slavist views found strong support in Moscow at the first stage. The development of Pan-Slavism in Russia was in 1725 when the “Russian Academy of Sciences” was established. Subsequently, there was a growing focus on Slavic languages and history, particularly with the founding of Moscow University in 1755. This institution played a significant role in fostering interest in Russian language and history among scholars and intellectuals. Schlözer, a German scholar, guided the Russians in these areas (Kurat, 250).

On the other hand, Pan-Slavism has persisted as a strong force for a century. Slavs scattered across regions believe in race solidarity. Russia’s government has aimed to create a great state where all Slavic peoples can live together (Levine, 1994, 665). Meanwhile, the Pan-Slavic movement in Russia was limited to the activities of a few Slavophiles and never received official support. Although Alexander II met with prominent Czech figures like Palacki and Rieger during their visit to Moscow, he remained distant from them (Guin, 1949, 127). According to Levine (1994), the Slavic peoples between the Black and White Seas, as well as from the Adriatic to the Pacific, have long valued the notion of racial solidarity. However, this idea gradually transformed into Slavic Imperialism, which involved the unification of all Slavic nations into a singular Russian Empire (Guin, 1949, 127). The Russian Empire demonstrated formidable strength during the Coalition wars against Napoleonic France. After the Defeat of Waterloo, Russia emerged as the victor over a great European Empire on its soil. This solidified Russia’s reputation as the “gendarmier of Europe,” further strengthened in 1849 when Nicholas I dispatched his troops to suppress the revolution against the Habsburgs in Hungary. While Russian nationalists may have taken pride in this display of Great Power chauvinism, it was short-lived. The Crimean War of 1854-1856 marked a turning point for nationalists and the Pan-Slavism movement. This war is a critical instance of Russia’s marginalization amidst the European balance of power, as evidenced by Europe’s united front against Russia to safeguard the Ottoman Empire. This defeat, as noted by Tuminez (2000), was a significant blow to

Russian pride and fuelled the flames of nationalism within the country (Tuminez, 2000, 61).

With the Treaty of Paris signed after the Crimean War, Russia lost its dominance in the Black Sea and destroyed its military ports and shipyards. Furthermore, the patronage of Orthodox communities within the Ottoman Empire, secured as part of the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty signed with the Ottoman Empire in 1774 during Catherine the Great's reign, was also rescinded (Karal, 1995, 54). The Russians felt that the privileges they had obtained under the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774 were virtually taken away from them by the Treaty of Paris of 1856, and they made various attempts to invalidate these articles. The most noteworthy one was undoubtedly the diplomatic mission led by Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov; his effort to bring the issue back to the table between the great powers can be seen as an important reflection of Russian nationalism. Gorchakov planned a significant move to solve the so-called Black Sea problem (Clark, 1942).

While the policy of Pan-Slavism provided a political basis to unite all Slavs under Russian rule, it also became a tool of the policy of provoking the Slavic peoples living in the Ottoman Empire against Muslims and Turks. Especially since the mid-19th century, Russians took Bulgarian youth to cities such as Moscow, Petersburg, and Odessa and tried to implant Pan-Slavist ideas into their minds (Asker & Özel Özcan, 2016, 34). During the Crimean War, the Russians adopted the same policy as the West to safeguard the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire by opposing Russia. This made Russia realize the situation. Despite Russia's involvement in all European wars, it became isolated due to the collective actions of the Western great powers, particularly England and France. Thus, while the Russians were questioning their Western identity after the Crimean War, they entered a process that revealed this fact in the administration field by focusing on their differences within themselves. During the reign of Nicholas I, the principles of "orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality" (Pravoslaiye, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost) were revived. These three concepts have revealed their influence on Russian nationalist ideology. Simultaneously, the robust leader formulation created itself with autocracy. For this reason, the power center of Russian nationalism, including the Soviet period, can be seen as progressing with the cult of the leader. During the reign of Nicholas II, Russification policies and religious pressures gradually increased. In addition, during this period, Russians began to identify different ideologies besides nationalist ideology. Liberalism and socialist movements in Western Europe also became influential in Russia. When the Russian translation of Marx's Capital was published in Russia in

1872, “Marxism” began to spread rapidly in Russia. In this regard, he played a pivotal role in disseminating Marxism throughout Russia, ultimately catalyzing the Bolshevik Revolution (Riasanovsky, Seinberg, 411-416).

Creating a Power Empire: Soviet Era and Identity

Nationalist ideology is difficult to define, but its structure can be analyzed alongside other ideologies. In the Soviet world, nationalism was created outside the Marxist-Leninist framework and heavily influenced by Stalinist logic. Under this topic, I will specifically discuss the impact of nationalism during the Stalin period. Undoubtedly, the answer to whether it was Karl Marx’s proletarian revolution ideas or the inherent issues of a semi-colonial, non-fully industrialized Russia that led to the downfall of the Romanov dynasty lies in the ideas championed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who proposed solutions to these challenges through the Bolshevik Party. During the early 1900s, the Bolsheviks separated themselves from the Social Democratic party and united under the guidance of Lenin. He pledged to the citizens of the empire that he would address their issues and facilitate social liberation. Although Lenin endorsed the concept of the “right of nations to self-determination,” he also manipulated it for his own purposes. According to Cohen’s (1996, 69) analysis, the Bolsheviks strategically employed the concept of “right of nations to self-determination” to undermine the Tsarist regime. However, behind the scenes, they were actively working to prioritize the interests of Russians over those of non-Russian minorities, thereby consolidating their control over the revolution and its vanguard.

Hence, it could be argued that the October Revolution of 1917 did not create an entirely new state but rather transferred the geopolitical advantage of Russian imperial expansion, along with its dependence on state-controlled production, to the Communists. Because, despite the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, Russian authoritarianism persisted under Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ rule. The rise to power of the Bolsheviks in October 1917 initially sparked discontent among the populace. Over the subsequent years, the charismatic leadership that initially attracted public support waned as Bolshevik leaders suppressed opposition to consolidate their authoritarian rule (Ateed & Özel Özcan, 2023).

In the period leading up to World War I, the Russians became a society fighting among the ruins of a tired empire. It can be said that nationalist approaches were in silence during the Bolshevik Revolution of Lenin and his comrades. The Russians abandoned the conservative structure of a great historical empire for the Proletarian Revolution that Marx predicted for England. In February 1917, rebellions began within the army in Russia and