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A new "gathering of Russian lands": Russia's return to imperialism

Introduction

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, Russia has considered itself one of the key decision makers of world politics, whose voice should be heard and counted by other great actors. The methods that were to convince Russia's smaller and larger partners in the international arena were to be: a vast territory that epitomises an empire, victorious war campaigns, an active attitude of the Russian state's leaders to shaping the balance of power at the global level, and active involvement in numerous planned international security systems. The experiences in this area, starting from the nineteenth century, have proved the effectiveness of the assumptions of Russian foreign policy.

By adopting a pro-European vector in foreign policy, Russian decision-makers automatically made efforts to become part of Western civilisation from the very beginning. Some of the concepts of the Russian balance of power that have been developed over the centuries have directly aimed at building a system in which Russia would be one of the most important actors. At the roots of this conviction was the paradigm of the European character of the "Russian Empire." Doctrines pointing to the Eastern-Asian vector were in opposition to it. Regardless of the adopted optics, there was one goal, i.e. development and duration, followed by the return to the idea of an empire of Russia.

This article is devoted to the resurrection of the idea of imperial Russia using all the strategies, tactics, methods and instruments that will bring the Russian Federation closer to its goal. Starting from the involvement in building the security system at the international level, through the construction of the European "Russian Empire," to the practical application of the ancient Roman strategy *divide et impera*, they fully correspond to the assumptions of contemporary Russia's return to imperial politics. In this study an attempt has been made, at least in part, to provide legitimate answers to the questions that are troubling scholars, such as e.g. What will the Kremlin's tactic of "gathering Russian land" be used over 30 years from now? What will its assumptions be? Where will it find the ideological foundation for its implementation? What dimension will it take in practice?

The European system of international security and Russia

Following in the footsteps of the thoughts of seventeenth century rulers from Western Europe regarding the consolidation of the international order won in wars, one needs to recall a few examples of such actions. The first attempt to balance forces in the matter of international security was the Treaty of Westphalia, concluded in 1648, which in the history of modern Europe became an order that functioned until the Napoleonic wars. It was then, for the first time in modern history, in the international forum that the rules of the security system were developed with the acceptance of the diversity of states.

The second opportunity to reconstruct international relations along with the developed standards of collective security was related to the attempt to restore the *status quo ante* after the defeat of Napoleon I Bonaparte. This task was undertaken with the beginning of the Congress of Vienna in 1814. As a result of the deliberations of this "dancing congress," which was held from 1814 to 1815, its participants agreed on the issue of security and signed a document that went down in history under the name of the Holy Covenant (1815). Although initially the authors of this agreement were three countries – Russia, Austria, and Prussia – eventually all European countries were included in the ranks of its members, without the Papal States, the United States, Turkey, and Great Britain.

It would seem then that the agreement concluded at that time on the generally accepted principle of world equilibrium would survive for many years, becoming the foundation for the emerging new reality. However, it quickly turned out that it would be impossible. For not only the countries and nations that once tied their fortunes with Napoleonic France from the very beginning questioned the order established by the Holy Covenant. In the ranks of successive states and nations there were also those that could not imagine a return to absolutist system solutions. Not only were the position of ruling houses questioned, demands were made for the adoption

of a constitution that on the one hand would limit the power of monarchs, but also empower other social groups, allowing them to participate in state management processes. As a result of changes in the social structure and economic transformations, the postulates relating to the issue of political rights gained more and more supporters, regardless of the state or society. The dichotomy of the struggle between liberalism and conservatism triggered democratisation processes that turned out to be unstoppable.

On the other hand, the principles of the Holy Covenant relating to the issue of preventing the emergence of a hegemon among the signatory states, began to be challenged by the signatories of the agreement themselves. Unable to achieve territorial advantage in the area of the old continent, the competition for colonies began. Taking advantage of the benefits of the industrial revolution, the economies of individual countries began to be shifted onto new tracks, seeing in the development of capitalist relations primarily as an opportunity for internal modernisation of the state. The economic development was supported by activities for the development of heavy industry, including metallurgy, which would stimulate the dynamic development of the defence industry. The militarisation of the economy thus became a fact.

The determinants that favoured the militarisation of the policies of individual countries were the wars fought, so far local in nature, but as a consequence changing the balance of power both in Europe and in the world. The arms race was started to be won by those countries that had adequate raw material, human, financial and armaments resources; they initiated changes in the internal model of the functioning of society quite quickly. The events that undermined the principles of the Holy Alliance in the field of international relations turned out to be: the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Prussian-Austrian War (1866), the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and the establishment of the German Empire – Second Reich (1871). However, the final blow to this alliance was the Great War (1914–1918), which, abolishing the old order, became the de facto source of a new armed conflict, also on a global scale.

The last attempt at arranging international relations, guaranteeing the maintenance of peace, was to be the Versailles-Washington Treaty (1919–1922), as a result of which not only did there be any real development of effective mechanisms for the development of international security rules. It became the nucleus of further feuds, but this time involving not only the so-called the big five, as the five powers (Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany and the United States) were called, which were to decide the fate of these smaller countries as well.[1] Their group was supplemented by all those states whose needs, expectations and ambitions were not met by the provisions of the Paris Conference in 1919, and later by the Washington Agree-

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[1]   M. Lenz, *Die großen Mächte: Ein Rückblick auf unser Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Paetel, 1900.

ments. The dominant tendencies of the interwar period in the field of international relations turned out to be revisionism and the policy of appeasement, which found food for the degree of influence in the form of the progressive crisis of representative democracy and the Great Economic Crisis at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. The actions taken by members of the organisation established to guard peace – the League of Nations – to develop collective security mechanisms turned out to be purely tactical ploys, which were to divert attention from the progressive process of militarisation of social, economic and political life in each country.

After the end of the hostilities brought by World War II (1939–1945), instead of concluding a global agreement on international security, the world was divided into two parts. It became possible as a result of the activity of the members of the Great Antifascist Coalition, with the deciding votes being three countries: the US, Britain and, above all, the USSR. It is as a consequence of subsequent conferences, the so-called "Big Three" agreed upon the rules that were to apply after the end of hostilities on all the fronts. Also in this case, without taking into account the opinions of other countries and nations, the post-war world was divided into spheres of influence, according to the own concept launched by the Big Three leaders.

Soon after the defeat of the Axis countries and their allies, the Yalta-Potsdam Agreement entered into force. For the post-war world, however, it did not mean peace, but another hard struggle; this time, two victorious powers – the United States and the USSR – competed for the title of "hegemon." While the former arranged the world according to itself, taking into account the developed political and legal order deriving from the sources of democracy and humanism and guaranteeing the successful development of states and societies dependent on him, the latter implemented a policy of sovietisation towards the territories subordinated to it, striving to establish the entire area of *Pax Sovietica*. Speaking in the American city of Fulton on March 5, 1946, former British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill described the international order that emerged after World War II in the following way: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."[2] This balance of power shaped the world and Europe for many years, because it was only in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the Iron Curtain ceased to divide the world.

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[2] W. Churchill, *Sinews of Peace*, speeches delivered at 5 March 1946 at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, National Churchill Museum, https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html [accessed: 22 May 2022].

European "Russian Empire"

The Russian state actively participated in all the previously mentioned activities aimed at developing a new security system at the international level, starting from the Third Northern War (1700–1721). Beginning with the rule of Peter I the Great, Russia's leaders diligently implemented the assumptions of foreign policy in such a way that it would become one of the decision-makers regarding the balance of power in the forum, first of Europe, and then of the world.

After the end of the process known in historiography as the "gathering of Ruthenian land" by the Moscow tsars (Ivan III the Stern, Vasil III and Ivan IV the Terrible) around 1550, the principle was established according to which the Grand Duke of Moscow, assuming the title of "Tsar of All Russia" he made himself the self-lord of all the united Russian land. When Constantinople was conquered by the Turks in 1453, referring to the common heritage with the Byzantine Empire, the Russian tsars named themselves as Basileus' heirs, and Russia – as the continuator of the political existence and centre of religious life of Byzantium orthodoxy. Complementing this belief was the fact that it remained one and only independent Orthodox country in the world. In these circumstances, alongside the idea of "Holy Russia," the concept of Moscow, the Third Rome was born; according to it, the church of the first ancient Rome fell as a result of heresy, the second Rome – Constantinople – as a result of a betrayal of the true faith, the third Rome, which is Moscow, stands and lasts, and the fourth will be no more.[3] As noted by Krakow researcher Dymitr Romanowski, this is how a concept arose not so much of a political nature as of a religious and historiosophical one. This results in a close relationship between the Church and the reality of the state, because "[...] the ruler and all powers are responsible for the Christian world [...],"[4] whose duty is to ensure the freedom of its functioning. Such power, in the opinion of the creator of the concept, the monk Philotheus, can be described as just. Under these circumstances, what the nascent Russian state took as its foundation was the conviction that the Moscow Church remained faithful and orthodox, and that Moscow became the last Christian empire as "the Roman Empire is indestructible because the Lord was enrolled in the Roman land"[5] became the foundation of the nascent Russian state. Well, "the declaration of Russia as the Third Rome was the form by which the young Russian state announced its allegiance to the first centuries of Christianity and general councils, and tried to make itself aware of its place in world history."[6]. As Grzegorz

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[3] J.H. Billington, *Ikona i topór. Historia kultury rosyjskiej*, transl. J. Hunia, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, [cop. 2008], p. 54.

[4] D. Romanowski, *Trzeci Rzym. Rozwój rosyjskiej idei imperialnej*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013, p. 20.

[5] *Послания старца Филофея*, с. 301 quoted after: *ibidem*, p. 21.

[6] D. Romanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Pełczyński notes, in these very circumstances Russia was endowed by God himself with unique qualities. This was because she was entrusted with extraordinary tasks to fulfil. Throughout history, they have been described in various ways, but they have always been of considerable importance and concerned the happiness of not only the Russian people, but also other countries, even all people on earth.[7]

Although this concept, derived from the heritage of the Middle Ages, aimed at emphasising the rightness of the Orthodox faith and never became an official political doctrine of the Russian state, in practice it created an ideological foundation for Russian foreign policy. This was possible thanks to the enormous popularity of the concept of Moscow III Rome, which it enjoyed especially at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Anticipating the recognition of the Russian state as the heir of the Eastern Empire, the uniqueness of Moscow was thus emphasised. It happened both in the field of religious and political power. Neither in the first case nor in the second was the grievances of the tsars met with approval from the outside world. As the Krakow researcher Joachim Diec sums up this period, "what strikes the idea of Moscow – the Third Rome [...] is its similarity to perceiving the capital as a peculiar centre of the world, *axis mundi*, through the conviction of its own uniqueness, excepionality. At the same time, however, this belief is devoid of inner certainty, no lasting peace [...]. The outside world is perceived as a threat, but also as an environment that needs to be convinced of its own superiority. Hence, a strictly monocentric doctrine constantly struggles with the awareness of the lack of recognition on the part of the international environment."[8]

Entering the seventeenth century, the Russian tsarist empire in international relations based on three assumptions which, as practice has shown, turned out to be exceptionally long-lasting. The first was the syndrome of the "abandoned flock." It consisted in associating the breakdown of a strong central government with various problems on the international scene. In the light of the trauma of the Time of Troubles, the departure from autocratic leadership is associated with the threat of weakening the state and, consequently, of the invasion of foreign powers. The second element shaping relations with other countries was the "Stranger" syndrome, i.e. the conviction that the state would inevitably turn out to be unsuccessful in the event of submission to external political influences. The third syndrome of the "dangerous West," on the other hand, was based on a historical tradition referring to Alexander Nevsky's experience of fighting against the Order of the Knights of the

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[7] G. Pełczyński, "Kilka uwag na temat specyfiki religijnej Rosji, *Studia Historica Gedanensia*, vol. VII, 2016, pp. 205–206, https://doi.org/10.4467/23916001HG.16.010.6395.

[8] J. Diec, *Geostrategiczny wybór Rosji u zarania trzeciego tysiącleci*, vol. 1: "Doktryna rosyjskiej polityki zagranicznej. Partnerzy najbliżsi i najdalsi", Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, [cop. 2015], pp. 37–38, https://doi.org/10.4467/K9306.33/e/15.15.3906.

Sword, personifying the West.[9] All these syndromes have become a permanent feature of the Russian state's foreign policy strategies, regardless of the changing international conditions.

The decision of the Ruling Senate of 1721 to recognise Tsar Peter I Romanov as the "All-Russian Emperor" should be considered a symbolic beginning of the transformation of the Russian tsarist empire.[10] The consequence was the recognition of the Russian state as an empire. Significantly, Peter accepted the title as soon as he achieved a new, imperial position for himself and his state in Europe – after the conclusion of the peace in Nystad on September 10, 1721, which ended the Third Northern War, establishing de facto Russia's supremacy over the eastern half of the continent. In response to Romanov's adoption of the title of emperor, successively, although with a certain degree of restraint, individual states recognised his title: the United Provinces of the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Prussia (1721), Sweden (1723), the Ottoman Empire (1739), Great Britain (1742), France and Spain (1745). The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth recognised the imperial title only in 1764 on the basis of the provisions of the Convocation Sejm and the ratification of the Declaration of Russian Ministers.[11] In this way, the international recognition of the titles of Russia's emperors permanently introduced the Russian state into the game of great power, which did not intend to ever give up this privilege.

The Russian Empire, which functioned in the years 1721–1917, systematically enlarged its territory, mainly through constantly conducted wars. Choosing the directions of external policy – European, Eastern–Asian, the tsars who ruled the empire joined the state to new territories: Abkhazia, Alaska, the Nadamur region, Armenia, Ashgabat, Azerbaijan, Bessarabia, Georgia, Bukhara, the Caucasus, Crimea, Dagestan, Finland, Poland, and the Kars region, Khabarovsk, Khiva, Merv, Nikolaevsk-on-Amur, Ossetia, Sakhalin, Kuryle, Samarkand, Ussuri, Vladivostok. The area was inhabited by 34 ethnic groups.[12]

As Piotr Eberhardt rightly points out, the borders of the Russian state have been unstable over the years. "The Grand Duchy of Moscow around 1500 had a population of 2,231.2 thousand km². After one hundred years (1600), the territory of the state was 8,924.8 thousand km², in 1700 – 15,060.0 thousand km². At the time

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[9]   *Ibidem*, p. 39.

[10] W.A. Serczyk, *Piotr I Wielki*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1977, p. 217.

[11] Ratyfikacya deklaracyi Ministrow Rossyiskich względem tytułu: Cały Rossyi Imperatorowy, [in:] *Volumina Legum. Przedruk zbioru praw staraniem XX. Pijarów w Warszawie od roku 1732 do roku 1782 wydanego*, vol. 7: "Ab an. 1764 ad an. 1768", Petersburg: J. Ohryzko, 1860, pp. 95–96, https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/show-content/publication/edition/65269?id=65269 [accessed: 23 May 2022].

[12] J. Paxton, *Imperial Russia: A Reference Handbook*, Houndmills, Basingstoke – New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 144–148, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230598720.

of the death of Peter I (1725), Russia numbered 15,173.6 thousand km². At the time of the death of successive rulers, the Russian Empire grew larger and larger. At the end of the reign of Empress Anna (1740) – 16,220.9 thousand km², Elizabeth (1761) – 16,427.0 thousand km², Catherine II (1796) – 16,837.7 thousand km², Aleksandra I (1825) – 18,714.1 thousand km², Nicholas I (1855) – 20,690.9 thousand km², Alexander II (1881) – 21,436.0 thousand km²."[13] It reached its peak of power in terms of territorial range in the years 1885–1895: it had 23.7 million km² and was the third largest country in human history, after the British Empire and the Mongol Empire.[14]

An important issue was to base the foreign policy of the Russian Empire on solid ideological foundations, especially in the conditions of the progressive Europeanisation of the state and society. In addition to the previously mentioned one of the most fundamental for the following centuries of the existence of the Moscow state on the international scene – the theory of Moscow III Rome and the concept of Holy Russia, alive especially in the religious sphere, other strategies have emerged. They were in line not only with the established system of the state's system – selftenure, but above all constituted the ideological justification for Russia's role as an empire. Acting in a number of other countries with the same status, over time, she became one of the main decision-makers in matters of the balance of power on the international forum, especially in the area of initiating the construction of international security.

Ideological concepts of the duration of the "Russian Empire"

Alongside the dichotomous nature of the Occidental strategy of the policy of the Russian Empire (fear of Russia, equal partner), starting with the rule of Peter I the Great, other concepts emerged that gave, if not the direction of Russia's foreign policy, at least an ideological justification for the continuity of the empire itself. Table 1 offers an outline of these paradigms.

By arranging the issues justifying the development of the "Russian Empire" over the centuries, the doctrines cited above can be characterised by the following arguments.[15]

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[13]   P. Eberhardt, "Zmiany podziałów administracyjnych w Cesarstwie Rosyjskim, w Związku Sowieckim oraz w Federacji Rosyjskiej", *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. XLV, 2010, p. 239, note 1, http://rcin.org.pl/Content/45985/WA303_56295_A453-SzDR-R-45_Eberhardt.pdf [accessed: 23 May 2022].

[14]   P. Turchin, J.M. Adams, T.D. Hall, "East-West Orientation of Historical Empires", *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2006, pp. 222–225.

[15]   J. Diec, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–63.

Table 1. Ideological concepts of the duration of the Russian Empire

Name of doctrine	Author	Key characteristics
Eastern Empire	Fyodor Tiutchev (1803–1873)	Assumptions: "a) conviction of the messianic vision of Russia, and thus the ideologization of international relations; b) the necessity to fight the international Revolution, the domain of which have become the states of the European West; c) imperialism, justified by a divine mission, leading to a continuous increase in the territory of the state." (p. 42)
Pan-Slavism	Juraj Križanić (1618–1683); Nikolai Danilewski (1822–1885); Ivan Aksakov (1823–1886); Yuri Samarin (1819–1876)	Assumptions: "a) condescension – awareness of the right of Russians to speak out about the interests of other Slavic nations and the obligation to defend them; b) the belief that the rest of the world is alien and even hostile (which is clearly visible in the politics of Western countries) towards the Slavs, and Russia in particular; c) obliging all Slavs to unity; d) the right to judge and bring back on the right track those Slavic communities whose international behaviour does not fit in with the principle of Slavic solidarity." (p. 46)
Pan-Asianism	Esper Uchtomski (1861–1921)	Assumptions: "a) belief in a greater kinship of the Russian spirit with the peoples of Asia than with the West; b) the belief in the non-colonial nature of Russian expansion; c) the necessity to constantly expand the empire's geographical space as a condition for its survival (this time the expansion in the Far East variant is presented)." (p. 49)
World Revolution vs. export of the revolution from one country	Lev Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev vs. Joseph Stalin, Nikolai Bukharin	Assumptions: a) the universal triumph of communism in the world; b) an example of geopolitical monism; c) their geostrategies were different, the goal was the same; d) atheistic messianism. (pp. 53–55)
Eurasianism	Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938), Piotr Sawicki (1895–1968); Lev Gumilev (1912–1992); Alexander Panarin (1940–2003); Aleksandr Dugin (1962–)	Assumptions: "a) belief in the natural, cosmically conditioned multipolarity of the international world; b) conviction about the necessity of a global restraint of the West as an aggressive and law-imposing civilisation; c) positioning Russia as an important Eurasian power pole between the European West and the East Asian world." (p. 59)

Name of doctrine	Author	Key characteristics
Brezhnev doctrine	Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982)	Assumptions: "[…] despite the international subjectivity, the states of the socialist community are entities of „limited sovereignty", so the USSR has the right to react by force in the event of a threat to socialism in one of the barracks of the eastern camp." (p. 60)

First, according to the doctrine of the Eastern Empire, there are three concepts of building an empire: Russia-1, the empire within its current borders; Russia-2, enlarged mainly by the countries of Eastern and Central Europe; Russia-3, "encompassing almost the entire Eurasian continent, excluding China, and first and foremost, the Mediterranean Sea with domestic Europe (above All with Austria and Germany)."[16]

Second, according to Danilewski's Pan-Slavic concept, "it is in the interest of Russia to create the All-Slavic Union, i.e. a federation of independent states grouping all the 'Slavic nations', perhaps with the exception of Poles, who were most troublesome."[17] The capital of the Union was to be located in Constantinople, the liberated capital of the Orthodox Church. The project assumed the inclusion in the federation, apart from Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians, of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, as well as Greeks, Romanians and Hungarians, who would be subordinated to the Slavic element. The solution to the Polish issue was seen in the inclusion of Poles into the federation: in this way they would gain independence and protection against being absorbed by the German element, and thus would finally cease to threaten Russia. Ivan Aksakov, on the other hand, perceived the Polish element as Catholic, and thus as one that belonged to a foreign civilisation, and constituted the focus of influences that diverged from the interests of Russia and the Slavic cause. Therefore, he proposed to strive for the decatholicisation of Poles through Polish-language services in churches. He also wanted Poles to be forced beyond the Bug River in order to deprive the Belarusian and Ukrainian population of the influence of the Polish nobility.[18] The third theorist referring to the analysis of the functionality of the Russian empire was Yuri Samarin, who considered it

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[16] В.Л. Цымбурский, "Тютчев как геополитик", *Общественные Науки и Современность*, № 6, 1995, с. 93.

[17] Н.Я. Данилевский, *Россия и Европа. Взгляд на культурные и политические отношения славянского мира к германо-романскому*, Санкт-Петербург: Издательство С.-Петербургского университета, Издательство «Глаголь», 1995, с. 331.

[18] И.С. Аксаков, Полное собрание сочинений, [in:] *idem*, т. 3: "Польский вопрос и западно-русское дело. Еврейский вопрос. 1860–1886. Статьи из «Дня», «Москвы», «Москвича» и «Руси»", Москва: Типография М.Г. Волчанинова, 1886, с. 400.

necessary to free the Ruthenian people from both cultural influences and exploitation by the Polish elite, which he blamed for the distortion of the national character of the population of Western Ukrainian territories.[19]

Third, for the doctrinaires of the concept of pan-Asianism, "Asia has always been spiritually close to Russia, and Russia should by no means stray from its historical path."[20] There is a connection between the Russian and Asian understanding of absolute monarchy as a condition for maintaining unity in the situation of ruling over vast areas. Further expansion of Russia's borders is essential. Only in this way can Russia fulfil its vocation and oppose Western states, which would sooner or later strangle it through their superiority. The fate of Russia and its development are tied to Asia, and from there always came historical impulses for the development of the state.[21]

Also, the issues of building and functioning of the empire were perceived quite differently after the Bolsheviks took power. Two concepts began to compete with each other: the export of the revolution and its final victory around the globe, the creator and ardent promoter of which was Lev Trotsky vs. the conviction held by Joseph Stalin that in conditions of necessity one should reconcile with building socialism in a single state.

According to Trotsky, "socialism built in only one state would succumb to the onslaught of the world bourgeoisie. A successful revolution is a work completed, a permanent revolution,[22] both qualitatively and spatially. The bourgeois revolution has to be followed by the proletarian revolution, only the victory of the proletariat will lead the masses to full socialism. In the international dimension – a revolution in one place must lead to a world revolution."[23] He did not believe in the possibility of a lasting victory for socialism in the world by exporting it from one country.

In Stalin's opinion, however, the delaying of the revolution on a global scale should not destroy the idea of creating the Soviet state. The consistently conducted foreign policy was to initiate and support the revolutionary process in other countries thanks to the capabilities of the USSR. Thus, building socialism in one state was not so much an end in itself as a means to an end.[24] He was inclined to build socialism in one country and to take control of other territories (preferably armed).

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[19]   H. Głębocki, *Kresy imperium. Szkice i materiały do dziejów polityki Rosji wobec jej peryferii (XVIII–XXI wiek)*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Arcana, 2006, p. 159.

[20]   Э.Э. Ухтомский, *К событиям в Китае. Об отношениях Запада и России к Востоку*, Санкт-Петербург: Паровая скоропечатня «Восток», 1900, с. V.

[21]   *Ibidem*, с. 85–87.

[22]   Л.Д. Троцкий, *Перманентная революция (Азбука революционера)*, Москва: Издательство АСТ, 2005, с. 432.

[23]   *Idem*, *История русской революции*, т. 2, Москва: Терра, 1997, с. 338.

[24]   И.В. Сталин, VII расширенный пленум ИККИ, [in:] *idem*, *Сочинения*, т. 9: "Декабрь 1926 – июль 1927", Москва: ОГИЗ, 1948, с. 22.

As Joachim Diec notes in the summary of these two positions, "the defeat of the USSR in world rivalry and the mass departure of societies from Marxist ideas are perfect proof that despite the apparent realism of the Stalinist doctrine of mastering the world and imposing real socialism on it, Trotsky turned out to be gloomy, but honest. a prophet of the fate of the revolution. The so-called 'workers' state ultimately lost in the confrontation with world capitalism, and the attempt to dominate the great camp of states ended in a disaster of a scale Russia had never experienced in its history. Nevertheless, in terms of historical consciousness, it was Stalinism that became a model of combining strong leadership and great importance on the international arena."[25]

The doctrine of Eurasianism, born in exile in the second decade of the twentieth century, took a completely different character at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, becoming one of the main determinants of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Referring to the overall views of its creators and supporters, it can undoubtedly be considered in the contemporary world as a discourse related to the attempt to restore the entire post-Soviet space.[26]

The last of the doctrines labelled as "the doctrines of limited sovereignty" was devised in the second half of the twentieth century in the conditions of the process of international recognition of the balance of power in the era of Cold War rivalry. On the one hand, it brought the archetype of an inviolable sphere of influence, and on the other, the idea of international stabilisation, the division of the world into mutually controlling subsystems. At the same time, the existence of a growing influence of non-aligned states that did not fit into the bipolar system was recognised. This pact survived until the paradigms of the foreign policy of the two rival powers changed. The strategy of the USSR, based on the Brezhnev doctrine, was opposed by elected President of the United States in 1981, Ronald Reagan, who objected to the doctrine of repelling Soviet influence in all parts of the world. He used all the available instruments of influence, ranging from financial and material support, through armaments and the arms race, to the sphere of the so-called ending with soft power (mass culture). As a result, the Soviet Union found itself in a situation, as if repeated from the 1920s, when it was treated by the democratic world as a pariah. He was denied the right to be an equal partner on the international forum. The situation began to change only when Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the country in 1985.

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[25]   J. Diec, *op. cit.*, p. 54–55.

[26]   А. Панарин, "Евразийство. За и против, вчера и сегодня (материалы «круглого стола»)", *Вопросы Философии*, № 6, 1995, с. 11.

Divide et impera?

The basis for the revision of the current strategy of arranging a new balance of international forces was provided by the experience in the institutionalisation of international security gained over the centuries; it has always been the result of a state of war or peace between individual states, especially superpowers. Starting from the classical system of equilibrium (1648–1789), through the European concert of powers (1815–1914) and attempts to create a collective security system (1919–1939), to the evolution of the bipolar system (1945–1989), we witnessed a way of modelling the shape and nature of cooperation international in selected epochs.[27] Each time, the subjects of reflection were the following issues: security on a global scale and the division of spheres of influence among the most important actors of world politics.

With the collapse of the bipolar system, it seemed that the commonly binding elements of the collective security system developed over the course of the twentieth century would be a constant determinant in shaping international relations. Prohibition of the use of armed force between members, peaceful settlement of disputes, application of general principles of international relations, application of sanctions against the aggressor and making decisions on their use by appointed bodies, control and limitation of armaments, presenting the system in the form of an international organisation established on the basis of a treaty or agreement were to be treated as the foundations of a functioning multipolar system.[28] The unfulfilled Soviet project of arranging mutual relations on the international forum in the new conditions was the concept of the "Common European House," in which its creator, Mikhail Gorbachev, postulated a peaceful coexistence of states "from Vancouver to Vladivostok," regardless of the political and systemic or economic solutions in force in them.[29]

However, the practice turned out to be different. From the very beginning, the multipolar system with the dominant position of one of the superpowers – the United States – was subject to criticism. These opinions were also shared by the newly established Russian state, which, in both internal and external politics, returned to the *divide et impera* strategy proven in recent years. This old Roman doctrine of "divide and rule" is also true today. Its essence comes down to seizing

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[27]   H. Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*, transl. S. Głąbiński, G. Woźniak, I. Zych, Warszawa: Philip Wilson, [cop. 1996].

[28]   E. Cziomer, Istota i instytucjonalizacja bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego, [in:] *Zagrożenia i instytucje bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego*, ed. *idem*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2016, pp. 13–27; I. Popiuk-Rysińska, *Ewolucja systemu zbiorowego bezpieczeństwa Narodów Zjednoczonych po zimnej wojnie*, Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2013, pp. 32–33.

[29]   A. Jach, *Rosja 1991–1993. Walka o nowy kształt ustrojowy państwa*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2011, pp. 45–46.

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and consolidating power using the tactic of conflict management: when you need to control any group of people the easiest way is, at the beginning, under any pretext, to divide them, to challenge them. Later, act as a mediator and thus win over the quarrelling groups without necessarily eliminating the animosities that divide them. In the case of the Russian Federation, from the very beginning (1991), it acted as an arbiter and guarantor of peace agreements, which in turn meant that the former metropolis retained its dominance. As French researcher Alain Besançon sums up Russia's return to this strategy, the aim of the application is to restore Russian domination over an area which, in the opinion of its decision makers, belongs to the exclusive sphere of influence.[30] Until the leaders of the rest of the world understand this, they will pursue policies that will only benefit Russia itself.

In this case, the justification of its application is important: a growing sense of threat from the outside world. In these circumstances, one does not talk about aggression, but about preventive actions – to insure a potential attack. This "gathering of Russian land," as opposed to the medieval concept of "gathering Ruthenian land," is not intended solely to include neighbouring countries into the Russian state, but to make them dependent. This is in line with the tactic of vassalisation, which completely exhausts the assumptions of imperial policy towards these states.

On the other hand, the second method of consolidating Russian influence in the Eurasian area is tactics applied to countries and areas which, firstly, are of strategic importance for the Russian Federation (including geographic location, access to raw materials) and, secondly, have been considered hostile countries towards Russia. Its essence boils down to two types of actions: dividing the seized territory and then leading, through a quasi-democratic election of the inhabitants of a given area, to first proclaim sovereignty, then independence, and, consequently, final incorporation into the Russian state. This policy is not a novelty in the reality of building and consolidating the gains of the Russian empire, regardless of its political nature. Such actions were exemplified in the referenda of 1939, as a result of which the western part of Belarus and the western part of Ukraine, which were part of the Second Polish Republic, officially became part of the Soviet Union. Poland's fate was soon shared by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which, after the "voluntary" election of citizens of these countries, became part of the red empire. In the modern world, also over 30 years, we can find countries that have fallen victim to this tactic. In 1993, this fate hit Georgia, from which Abkhazia and South Ossetia were separated. The second example is Ukraine, where as a result of the Russian government's activity, Crimea was separated from it, and the two eastern provinces of Lugansk

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30   A. Rybińska, "Alain Besançon: 'Tu nie chodzi o Krym. Tu chodzi o rosyjską dominację. Putin sprawdza jak daleko może się posunąć' [NASZ WYWIAD]", wPolityce.pl, 1 March 2014, https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/186863-alain-besancon-tu-nie-chodzi-o-krym-tu-chodzi-o-rosyjska-dominacje-putin-sprawdza-jak-daleko-moze-sie-posunac-nasz-wywiad   [accessed: 30 May 2022].

and Donetsk announced withdrawals from the Ukrainian state. While in the case of Crimea, the referendum on joining the Russian Federation was conducted immediately after the armed occupation of this territory by the Russian army (March 16, 2014), two rebellious Ukrainian republics are getting ready to carry out this act.

It is impossible not yet to pay attention to the disputed territories between the states created after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and which show the practice of applying the strategy of *divide et impera*. Examples of such situations and countries are: Azerbaijan and Armenia, which are engaged in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, or the conflict over the Fergana Valley between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Although Russia is not actively participating on either side openly, its presence is still perceptible; very often it takes the form of a stabilisation mission in areas affected by a crisis of military operations carried out by institutions that are part of the international security system.

The adopted strategy of restoring the hegemony of the Russian metropolis over the post-Soviet area by means of the Roman motto of practicing foreign policy, regardless of the choice of instruments necessary for its implementation, does not arouse opposition, but recognition among the vast majority of citizens. It cannot be denied that the acceptance of Russian citizens results from a deeply held belief in the rightness of decision-makers' actions, strengthened by the very effective propaganda seeped in for a long time, and contained in the so-called the decalogue of a true Russian:

1. Crimea is ours.
2. Why is America allowed and Russia not?
3. If they are not afraid, they do not respect.
4. America is to blame. Always.
5. Russia "fights for peace".
6. Russia has interests in other countries and must defend these interests.
7. Sanctions will strengthen Russia (and Russians).
8. Democracy is a lie.
9. There will be strangers' spit in our face.
10. Putin is Russia.[31]

From the very beginning, the arguments cited above justified Russia's strategy of restoring and maintaining its superpower position, taking its rightful place, thus rebuilding the old hegemonic system. Table 2 presents examples of the implementation of the tactic of subjugating the countries of the so-called near abroad (the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS countries), which fully corresponds to its imperialist ambitions.

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[31] J. Prus, "10 przykazań, które powinien znać każdy mieszkaniec Rosji", *Polityka*, 22 September 2015, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1633659,1,10-przykazan-ktore-powinien-znac-kazdy-mieszkaniec-rosji.read [accessed: 29 May 2022].

Table 2. Examples of the implementation of the *divide et impera* principle in the so-called near abroad

Country covered by the strategy	Years	Characteristics	Result
Moldova	1991	Internal destabilisation and division of the state	Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, internal struggle for power
Georgia	1992–1993	Internal destabilisation and division of the state	Abkhazia, South Ossetia, internal struggle for power
Tajikistan	1992–1997	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Azerbaijan	1993	Internal destabilisation	Nagorno-Karabakh, the internal struggle for power
Belarus	1994	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Belarus	1996	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Uzbekistan	1999–2000	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Uzbekistan	2005	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Kyrgyzstan	2005	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Belarus	2006–2007	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Ukraine	2009	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Belarus	2010	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Kyrgyzstan	2010	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Ukraine	2014	Internal destabilisation and division of the state	People's Republic of Lugansk, Donetsk People's Republic, Crimea, internal struggle for power
Uzbekistan	2016–2018	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Armenia	2018	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Belarus	2020–2022	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Kazakhstan	2021/2022	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power
Moldova	2022	Internal destabilisation	Internal struggle for power

Source: own work.

As can be seen from the Table 2, the assumed goals were, above all, internal destabilisation at the level of interference in the internal processes of alternation of power, or, in circumstances favourable to Russia, carrying out "partitions" of states that had been classified as "hostile" states. The category of "hostile" states was given to those of the post-Soviet republics of the CIS that attempted to become independent from Russia. Thus, apart from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia (which are members of the EU and NATO) and Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have also been targeted by the Russian security services. In this case, in view of the failure of the actions taken earlier to restore the system of dependence on Russia by implementing the Roman strategy of *divide et impera*, force was used. Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2022 faced a much more powerful enemy, their former metropolis – the Russian Federation. Just as Georgia emerged more consolidated from this attempt, it can already be said that Ukraine will also share the fate of its predecessor.

Which does not mean the end of a number of problems that the Ukrainian authorities will have to deal with over the next long decades. An exemplification of the described strategy is included in Table 3.

Table 3. Russia's armed actions in "hostile" states

Country covered by the strategy	Years	Characteristics	Result
Georgia	2008	Military intervention	The 5-Day War: The Partition of Georgia is Perpetuated
Ukraine	2022	Military intervention	The war since February 24, 2022 – ongoing

Source: own work.

Conclusions

Attempting to respond to the task undertaken in the study became very demanding. By no means have the results of the research presented in them become obsolete; on the contrary we can talk and write about what is happening, basing on experiences and knowledge from the past, trying to diagnose the challenges of the future.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, Russia has considered itself one of the main decision makers of world politics, whose voice should be counted by other great actors. The methods that were to convince Russia's smaller and larger partners in the international arena were to be: a vast territory – the empire, victorious war campaigns, the active attitude of the Russian state's leaders to shaping the balance of power at the global level, and involvement in numerous planned international security systems. The experiences in this area, originating in the nineteenth century, have proved the effectiveness of the assumptions of Russian foreign policy.

Returning to the questions regarding the resurrection of the idea of imperial Russia, it should be stated that the Kremlin's tactic of "claiming Russian land" adopted more than 30 years ago, despite some successes, has a short-lived character. The reasons for this state of affairs lie in the lack of acceptance at the international level, both among states-decision makers and among much smaller countries. The so-called "*russkij mir*" (Russian: русский мир), which in practical terms implies the recognition of Russia's hegemony in conjunction with the current practice of generating conflicts and winning them both at the internal and international level of individual states, is definitely discouraging. Russia is more and more often perceived not only as an unstable state, but even as an aggressive one. The militarisation of internal life, which is accompanied by the rebuilding of the empire also by armed forces, meets with increasing resistance. This in no way translates into recognition of the Russian state as an equal partner on the international forum, but a constant source of destabilisation.

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A new "gathering of Russian lands": Russia's return to imperialism
Abstract

This article looks at the contemporary rebuilding of the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation, which covers the area of the so-called "near abroad". The choice of the tactics results from the possible influence of the Russian state in this area. Thus, in addition to using the techniques of the so-called soft power, the catalogue includes primarily those activities that enable Russian decision-makers to manage conflict. The process of 'claiming Russian land back', initiated since the collapse of the bipolar system, should be interpreted as a political imperative to return to imperial politics. The instruments for their implementation were both traditionally understood leadership in the world, when the fate of all states and nations was decided by the greatest powers, to which Russia belonged from the first half of the nineteenth century. Another very effective tool for restoring the *status quo ante* of the 'Russian empire' turned out to be the ancient Roman strategy of *divide et impera*, an approach that has made it possible, from the very beginning, for the Russian Federation to strive to restore its hegemonic position in the territory of the countries that once formed the Soviet Union with it. The inability to impose sovereignty by such a soft influence or to inspire and extinguish potential conflicts has led to the armed assertion of its rights by Russia. Consequently, the policy adopted by Russian decision-makers may not only cause an armed conflict on a large European scale, but also other artificially induced cataclysms, difficult to predict, the consequences of which will have to be handled by the future generations.

Key words: Russia, empire, "claiming Russian land back", *divide et impera*