

Russian geopolitical analysis

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Abstract: The geopolitical environment is one of the most important factors to measure the comprehensive strength of a country. It is also an important reference source for a country to formulate its internal and foreign policies, which directly affects the country's stability and development prospects. Since the 21st century, Russia is facing a geopolitical situation that is completely different from the Soviet era. This article will stand from the perspective of Russia and start from the perspective of geopolitics, analyze Russia and its surrounding geographic environment, and summarize Russia's geopolitics and its strategic choices.

1. Geography of Russia

Russia, the full name of the Russian Federation, covers eastern Europe and northern Asia, with a total area of 17.098 million square kilometers, a population of 146 million (2020), and its capital, Moscow. It borders the Baltic Sea, the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean from west to east, with a coastline of 34,000 kilometers. Its terrain is high in the east and low in the west, with plains accounting for about 70% of the total area. The Ural Mountains to the west are the Eastern European Plain, and to the east are the Western Siberian Plain, the Central Siberian Plateau and the Eastern Siberian mountains. The main rivers in Russia are the Volga, Ob, Yenisei, Lena and Amur (Heilongjiang), among which the Volga is 3,530 meters in length and is the mother river of Russia and the longest river in Europe. The lakes include the Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, among which the Caspian Sea covers an area of 371,000 square kilometers, making it the largest lake in the world. The depth of Lake Baikal is 1,620 meters, making it the largest lake in the world. Most areas of Russia have a temperate continental climate, only the northwestern coastal areas have oceanic characteristics, and the Pacific coast of the Far East has monsoon climate characteristics.

From a geographical perspective, about three-quarters of Russia's territory is located in North Asia, but in terms of human history, political and economic relevance, and the self-recognition of the Russian nation, the European part is the core area of Russia, so Russia It is widely regarded as a European country.

2. Review of Russia's geopolitical situation from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union

During the Mongol Empire, Russia's predecessor, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, was only a vassal state of the Golden Horde. At that time, the entire Rus region (including present-day Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and neighboring regions) was under brutal Mongol rule and experienced The disaster-ridden

national crisis. In the same period, Western Europe was facing a two-hundred-year-old Black Death, a great famine and a serious social crisis. At this time, both sides of Europe are facing a huge geopolitical crisis. In this regard, the two sides have adopted different coping strategies.

The Western European countries facing the Atlantic chose to open new routes and expand through the oceans. After the gradual loosening and disintegration of the Mongol Empire's rule, in order to achieve its own security and maintain national stability, Russia pursued offensive diplomacy and adopted peripheral expansion. The policy hopes to establish a large-scale buffer zone by continuously expanding the territory outwards, and to achieve the purpose of guaranteeing its own security by expanding the depth of defense.

The famous Russian historian Klyuchevsky once pointed out: "Immigration and the development of the country are the main things in our country's history, and all the other things have a close or distant relationship with them." From the first generation From Tsar Ivan IV to the last Tsar Nicholas II, the continuous expansion of nearly 400 years has made Russia a huge empire spanning Europe and Asia. By the time of the Soviet Union, it was 10,000 kilometers long from east to west and about 5,000 kilometers wide from north to south. It bordered Norway, Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Mongolia, and North Korea, and bordered Sweden, Japan, the United States and Canada face each other across the sea, covering an area of 22.4 million square kilometers, accounting for about 15% of the total land area of the earth.

During the Cold War, the overall strategic goal of the Soviet Union was to drive American power out of Eurasia. As a result, the Soviet Union took the lead in forming the Warsaw Pact, the Economic Mutual Association, and vigorously developing nuclear weapons, missiles, and submarines, while vigorously expanding its global military presence. And influence. The Soviet Union also stepped out of the traditional central Eurasia, found a foothold in Africa (such as Angola), Latin America (such as Cuba) and other places, becoming one of the global poles. However, geopolitical factors will continue to change with changes in the outside world. As a Western scholar said, "Empires are inherently unstable politically, because subordinate units almost always like to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy. In this sense, the empire will not be conquered, but will only fall apart. This is the case. The disintegration is usually very slow, but sometimes very fast." The subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union can be said to be a specific manifestation of this situation. In other words, it was the Soviet Union's strategy of hegemony that planted the bane of its final disintegration.

3. Russia's dilemma after the disintegration of the Soviet Union

In December 1991, the geopolitical pattern of Eurasia underwent drastic changes. At the same time, Russia's political and ideological circles also caused great chaos. Russia is now facing a new choice in geopolitics. In this regard, Brzezinski, a well-known American expert on international issues, detailed it in his book "The Big Chess Game." In summary, there are the following aspects:

1) As a political entity, the disintegration of the Soviet Union has severely weakened Russia's power: the economy is seriously declining, politics is in turmoil, resource reserves are sharply reduced, ethnic conflicts are on the rise, ideological chaos, and the people are in an identity crisis.

2) The collapse of the Soviet Union changed Russia's western borders, and its geopolitical influence was also drastically reduced. After the independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Russia's strategic access to the Baltic Sea was restricted, and its western border had retreated to the era of Ivan the Terrible in the 17th century. Eastern European countries quickly fell to NATO and the European Union, depriving Russia of an important western buffer zone. These are the foundations on which the Soviet Union used to maintain its superpower status and geopolitical balance.

3) Ukraine's independence not only caused Russia to lose more than 52 million people who are very close to them in race and religion, it also lost its dominance in the Black Sea. Together with the

independence of the Caucasus region, Russia's borders in this region were also lost. Back to the 19th century, it also aroused Russia's strategic concerns about the return of Islamic influence. The independence of Central Asian countries means that Russia's southeastern border has retreated more than 1,000 miles north, losing a vast market and hinterland.

4) Although the Far East has not changed its political boundaries, Russia is facing the most dynamic and developing Asian countries in the world economy, and increasingly active in the international political arena. Lukin, the first Russian ambassador to the United Nations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, wrote: "In the past, Russia lags behind Europe, but thinks it is more advanced than Asia. However, Asia is developing at a much faster rate and we find that we are no longer in modernization. It's in a strange middle ground between Europe and backward Asia."

In short, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia's geopolitical environment has become extremely unfavorable, its international status has declined, and its scope of influence has shrunk.

4. Modern Russian geopolitical strategy

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, three geopolitical propositions have emerged in Russia, namely pro-Western Atlanticism, neighboring and peripheral propositions focusing on the spatial scope of the former Soviet Union, and neo-Eurasianism.

Neo-Eurasianism reflects Russia's realistic attitude towards geopolitical interests, a reflection on the original pro-Western Atlanticism, and a more comprehensive diplomatic strategy than "close neighbors and periphery". The geostrategy still starts from Russia's geographical location and cultural traditions, emphasizing the status of a great power and the geopolitical interests of the East and the West that are equally important. Regarding the connotation of Neo-Eurasianism, former Russian Vice President Ruzhkov said: "From the perspective of my country's geopolitical situation, Russia clearly represents the only bridge connecting Asia and Europe. Who has become this piece? The owner of the land will become the master of the world." Goncharov of the Russian Federation's Far East Institute pointed out: "If starting from the geopolitical category, then Russia's foreign policy must start from two more important directions besides the West. —Islamic world and China to realize the fundamental interests of the country. These two directions now play an important role. Firstly, they directly affect us in the security field, not only in the purely military aspect, but also in terms of our domestic stability."

From the perspective of Neo-Eurasianism, Europe without Russia cannot be called a complete Europe; Asia without Russia cannot be called a complete Asia; and the world without Russia cannot be called a complete world. Secondly, New Eurasianism is also based on the realistic geopolitical environment. Russia's face to the East is a compelling choice, and it is also a posture to balance the West.

In the past 10 years, distrust between the United States and Europe has deepened. Russia hopes to reintegrate the geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union and pave the geopolitical foundation for its revival. In the security field, Russia has accelerated the development of the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization, including the construction of collective peacekeeping and rapid reaction forces and the construction of a unified air defense system. In the economic field, starting from the actual operation of the CIS, we will accelerate the establishment of a customs union and unified economic space with Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The 2008 financial crisis objectively improved the international status of emerging economies and accelerated the pace of transformation of the international landscape. The launch of the customs union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in July 2010 greatly enhanced Russia's confidence in the spatial integration of the former Soviet Union. . It is against this background that President Putin formally proposed the idea of creating the Eurasian Union in October 2011. He said: "We will not stop there.

We have set ourselves a more ambitious goal to move towards the next higher level. Advance the integration stage and establish the Eurasian alliance. This will be a powerful and supranational alliance model, which has the potential to become a pole in today's multi-polar world."Most media and experts believe that Putin's move What is being pursued is more about political goals than simple economic integration; it has also been suggested that this marks a readjustment of Russia's foreign policy, and Europe will no longer be the focus of diplomacy.

With the acceleration of the integration of the Eurasian continent, both Russia and the European Union pointed the finger at Ukraine, which eventually triggered the biggest geopolitical crisis in Europe after the end of the Cold War. After the Crimea region entered Russia in 2014, the economic sanctions and political isolation imposed by the United States and Europe on Russia have continued to increase. Under strong international pressure, Putin decided to shelve their differences and push Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to reach an agreement on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. In accordance with the provisions of the three-nation treaty, the Eurasian Economic Union was launched on January 1, 2015, and the free flow of goods, services, capital and labor will be realized by 2025. The Eurasian Economic Union has achieved certain results in the past few years, and established corresponding decision-making, implementation and dispute resolution mechanisms; clarified the mid- and long-term development plan, and the creation of various unified markets has begun; breakthroughs have been made in expansion of staff, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan Join; Free trade agreement negotiations with countries outside the zone are progressing smoothly. While reaching a free trade agreement with Vietnam, negotiations with Iran and Singapore have also made positive progress, and free trade agreements with India and China will also be signed. Under the ever-increasing economic sanctions and strategic pressures of the United States and Europe, the Eurasian partnership plan thrown by Putin's team has attracted great attention from the international community.

5. Conclusion

As a global power, Russia's future geostrategic choice will have a huge impact on its surroundings and the world, but if it is not positioned correctly, it will eventually continue. At present, it is in Russia's interest to promote the docking and cooperation between Eurasia (for example, participating in the "The Belt and Road" initiative), but considering the geopolitical reality of Eurasia, how to effectively promote economic cooperation while ensuring that this integration does not fall into confrontation The situation will be a huge test for Russia.

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