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[‘A Hedgehog Empire’ and ‘Nuclear Orthodoxy’](#)



The day of 1 March 2018 will go down in history as the beginning of a new chapter in relations between Russia and the West. In his Message to the Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin announced a new turnaround in civilisation and a revolutionary programme for the country’s technological advancement, the creation of state-of-the-art nuclear weapons systems in Russia that would radically change the strategic balance of power on the planet.

Analysts and experts noted Putin’s departure from traditionalist and populist rhetoric and [labelled](#) this new doctrine as ‘conservative and technological’, where the ‘conservative’ label applies to foreign policy, aimed at strengthening and protecting the country’s sovereignty.

Indeed, the Message makes no mention of traditional values and bonds, Orthodoxy or other religious denominations. Unlike previous messages, this one does not quote conservative philosophers, either. However, one cannot fail to notice that the general mood of the Message is not about turning to the past, towards Russia’s history and a traditional way of life, towards ‘the new middle ages’ and isolation; instead, it was geared towards futurism, the creation of new rules for the global game and a new world order.

The long-term election programme proposed by Putin in this Message presupposes a technological digital

revolution, large-scale industrial projects and infrastructure development, the formation of a Europeanised middle class, the creation of a network of cultural, educational and museum facilities across the country, environmental well-being, an involvement and new collectivism. In foreign policy, the scientific and technological revolution ensures leadership for Russia in the field of military technology, strengthens its status as a nuclear superpower and neutralises the military and strategic hegemony of the United States. The Message emphasises that state-of-the-art nuclear weapons are developed with the supposed aim of neutralising threats and in response to the U.S. withdrawal from the treaty on missile defence. Putin lists six types of new weapons, including the new generation of intercontinental missile systems: Avangard, Sarmat and Dagger. Those names are a symbolic reference to the Russian avant-garde and Scythianism.

'A hedgehog empire'

This 'cosmic, nationalist model where cultural and technological well-being, social order and openness to the world were combined with the idea of 'besieged fortress' and the development of a rigid defence armour is close to a number of doctrines formulated by radical conservative futurists. Starting in the mid-1990s, the models of this type of a country were developed in the circle of 'conservative avant-garde' comprising countercultural columnists, philosophers, artists and musicians in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

For the first time, this kind of development path for Russia was proposed in the mid-1990s by aesthetic provocateurs and the main visionaries of that period, Sergei Kurekhin and Alexander Dugin. After declaring that politics is the only up-to-date form of art, in 1995 Kurekhin joined the National Bolshevik Party led by Eduard Limonov, Alexander Dugin and Yegor Letov. The idea for Russia's development that the National Bolshevik Party wanted to present to the authorities was labelled as 'a hedgehog empire'.

Dugin [writes](#):

The last political project which we engaged in on the eve of Sergei's tragic death was the development of the St. Petersburg's Russian patriotic intellectual and philosophical idea and a meeting with Putin. At that time, we had little idea of who Putin was. We wanted to get involved in big politics, we wanted to make sure that patriotism is intellectual and highly cultured, and that culture is patriotic. This is a summary of Kurekhin's late idea, i.e. the idea of a 'hedgehog empire', which consisted in rigid external politics and the prosperity of arts, poetry, gentleness and delicateness inside. Kurekhin saw his mission in uniting patriotism and culture. We wanted to offer Putin the idea of building this kind of empire.

In another interview, Dugin [explains](#):

We [with Kurekhin] developed a model of a 'hedgehog-like' empire, which turns its missiles, tough tanks and battleships towards the world. At the same time, muses thrive, fauns walk around, and the tails of mermaids flash through the grottoes inside."

The model of the social and aesthetic state, formulated by Dugin and Kurekhin in a somewhat extravagant form, is consistent with the spirit of the times. It assumes a turn towards the ideas of 'modernisation without Westernization' and 'Russia being Europe without the West', and reflected the desire for a synthesis of avant-garde and tradition, a synthesis of high technologies of the West, while keeping hold of Russian patriotism. Such a desire was characteristic of conservative revolutionaries of the 1990s. According to that doctrine, the internal life of the country was supposed to be absolutely free and European, oriented towards the best examples of global intellectual reflection and arts. A tough 'hedgehog-like' foreign policy and anti-Americanism were supposed to ensure the sovereignty and harmonious development of the new Russian culture and society. The call made by avant-garde artists and poets to create an 'iron armour' can be explained by the fact that by the mid-1990s many representatives of the counterculture had abandoned any perestroika-fuelled illusions about the peaceful integration of Russia and the West. As readers may remember, one of the first public statements against the expansion of NATO was the collective action 'Bohemia against NATO' organised by Dugin in 1998.

The new Russian doctrine proposed by Putin resembles Dugin-Kurekhin's 'hedgehog empire' in many ways. Indeed, the contrast in the 2018 Message is difficult to overlook: in domestic politics, the emphasis is on developing a secular, intellectual, free, cultural high-tech society fitting into the global post-industrial

economy; in foreign policy the focus is on a tough confrontation with all forces (primarily America) that represent in Kremlin's view a threat to Russia's sovereignty. Putin [emphasises](#) that the technological revolution in nuclear weapons should not be viewed as aggression or a threat to security but, instead, a measure of protection:

We are not threatening anyone, we are not going to attack anyone, we do not intend to take anything away from anyone threatening them with a weapon: we all have all we need.

It should be also noted that the idea of 'Russia being Europe without the West', which can be traced in the first, 'liberal' part of the Message, is not new: it has [defined the key direction](#) of Russia's cultural policy in the post-Crimean period.

'Nuclear Orthodoxy' and the dictatorship of super-industrialism

Another radical conservative concept of Russia's development path, involving a synthesis of high technology and patriotism, was the ideological model dubbed as 'the Russian Doctrine'. It was presented in 2005 by Vitaly Averyanov, Maxim Kalashnikov and Andrey Kobayakov, who founded the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism (IDK) in 2009. Averyanov [formulates](#) the Russian doctrine as follows:

The essence of our proposed ideology and transformation programme is the formation of a centaur of orthodoxy and innovative economy: high spirituality and high technology. This centaur will express the face of Russia that it deserves to have in the 21st century. This idea should be carried by a new attacking class: an imperial and authoritarian one rather than liberal and democratic one. This should be a class that supports the dictatorship of super-industrialism, which does not replace the industrial system but, instead, grows over it as its continuation and expansion.

Another ideological model that emerges through the Kremlin's bureaucratic language is the Messianic doctrine of 'Nuclear Orthodoxy', formulated in 2007 by the conservative journalist Yegor Kholmogorov. The phrase 'Nuclear Orthodoxy' was coined not by Kholmogorov but by painter Alexei Gintovt, who named one of his paintings in the 2001 'Novonovskiy' cycle with this name (co-authored by Andrei Molodkin).

[According to Kholmogorov](#), the mission of today's Russia as the Third Rome is to protect the world from the Fourth One, which will no longer be Rome but, instead, a Babylonian harlot:

Being 'the third one' is a vocation and an irrevocable place that Russians have in history. The sense of that place is to prevent 'the fourth one' from coming, to stand on the post and drive away all candidates for the Roman sceptre with kicks, batons and nuclear missiles [...] any 'fourth', non-Russian idea has been and will be the embodiment of evil and an excruciating end to the world. This is how the Byzantine idea of *katechon*, the one which withholds, is bizarrely refracted in our imperial minds. It is the one who stands on the bridge that separates the Antichrist from the world and does not let the Antichrist into the world. Today, this is no longer a bridge, but a hatch and its lid starts to move from time to time, and then a vampire, a werewolf, or some ghost killer starts to climb out of it. The Russian tarpaulin boots step on that lid, and then silence reigns for a while because the climbing monster knows that if it pushes too hard then the Russian will not hesitate to blow up the whole world together with it. This is because 'there can't be any fourth party'. If there was a flood before us, only the Apocalypse can ensue after we are gone.

Kholmogorov stresses the need for 'resisting evil through violence' and welcomes the alliance of the Orthodox idea of a *Katechon* (that which withholds) and the military complex of the Russian Federation, seeing this union as an epitome of Russia's *katechonic* mission.

The main element in the concept of 'Nuclear Orthodoxy' is the exposure of the commandment of humility as a serious danger to the Russian nation and Russian statehood:

It is high time we understood that the transfer of the commandment of humility to national and state-level policies does not and can not bring good results [...] The goal of countries and peoples is to be an iron armour, a steel cocoon where people exist, act freely and save their souls [...] The greatest freedom is ensured by those countries that defeat their enemies most severely or are capable of doing so. The humblest of all people are those whose passports are 'read with envy' and whose country will send a couple of aircraft carriers to any corner of the world in response to any harm. A cowardly and downtrodden person cannot be humble, much

like a eunuch cannot be chaste.

For Kholmogorov, developing and strengthening Russia's military shield is a matter of 'sacral industrialisation' and 'hagiopolitics', i.e. a spiritual question. Therefore, the fact that the Soviet atomic bomb was developed in a scientific institute established under Stalin's orders on the territory of the Sarov Monastery (bearing the name of Seraphim of Sarov, one of the main Russian saints) is thought to be estimated as agency of Providence.

The Technological Sublime

The relevance of the various doctrines proposed by conservative futurists formulated in the 1990s and 2000s is not accidental. In the situation of post-Crimean polarisation in relations with the West, these utopian projects, assuming the existence of a direct ideological/metaphysical conflict between Russia and America as the two Messianic civilisations, acquire a new meaning. In addition, the general style of the Message, comprising romantic militarisation and manliness, is characteristic of misogynist conservative right-wing movements, such as national-Bolshevism and neo-Eurasianism.

The rhetoric of 'a breakthrough' and a new 'common cause', the mitigation of religious (female) emotionality, replaced by technological (male) tonality fit very well into the local and global agenda alike. In the Russian context, the Message, as a long-term development programme, reflects the most important task facing the Kremlin today: to create a new technocratic bureaucracy. This was very much the focus of the main personnel initiatives in 2017, i.e. the 'Russia's Leaders' contest and the revival of the mentoring institute. In the global context, the rejection of the rhetoric of 'spiritual fasteners' and the preference for avant-garde militaristic visuality resonates with the new language of military-and-space futurism proposed by America epitomised by Elon Musk and his space adventure.

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