

Introduction

The terror of the Roman arms added weight and dignity to the moderation of the emperors. They preserved peace by a constant preparation for war; and while justice regulated their conduct, they announced to the nations on their confines that they were as little disposed to endure as to offer an injury.

Edward Gibbon, *The History of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). Vol. 1, Chapter 1: 'The extent and military force of the Roman Empire, in the age of the Antonines'. Edition provided by the online library of Liberty.

Even though it may not have been up to everyone's expectations, Episode III of *Star Wars, Revenge of the Sith*, is in fact extremely revealing on a political level. Indeed, in the United States, while George Lucas was in Cannes in 2005, a controversy was seeing the light of day: the director declared he had developed his saga in reference to the Vietnam War and felt there was a disturbing parallel between this event and the invasion of Iraq. By comparing the "philosophy" behind his work to the current political situation, he was stating that "most bad people think they are good people, they are doing it for the right reasons"¹ and, as if to underline the polemical aspect of his declaration, he added to the parallel between the American political context and the leitmotiv of his Episode III that "In terms of evil, one of the original concepts was how does a democracy turn itself into a dictatorship", in other words, how a prosperous Republic, albeit in a crisis, becomes a moralistic and militarist dictatorship. A process which some, on the political left, would use to define George W. Bush's policy-making.

Such statements provoked anger among right-wing American groups. The position of the pro-republican group, the PABAHH (*Patriotic Americans Boycotting Anti-American Hollywood*),² was to call for a boycott of Lucas's latest film upon its release in the United States. However, over and above these reactions, one totally unexpected response was formulated by the intellectuals: the conservatives, and more particularly those categorized as the "neoconservatives" went along with Lucas, adding that the director was simply mistaken in his definition of Good and Evil: Anakin Skywalker, who becomes Darth Vader, chose, according to them, the good side, the Empire.

The promotion of an imperial ideal had in fact already begun. As early as 2002, Jonathan V. Last, a journalist at the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, had written

1 Chris Burns, "Lucas on Iraq War, Star Wars", *CNN.com*, 16 May 2005.

2 The group proposes a petition for criminal charges against Michael Moore, for treason. They consider his documentary "Fahrenheit 9/11" (2004) as a support for the enemy in war time.

a long article based on the universe of *Star Wars* to promote an imperial strategy.³ He put forward disturbing arguments for those who recognized in America the anti-imperialistic power *par excellence*. According to him, Empire represents order rather than slavery. Obviously the Emperor is a dictator, but a “kindly” dictator: to underline his point, the neoconservative journalist used the example of Pinochet, a reference that is in itself more edifying than any critical analysis of his vision of the “enlightened dictatorship”. He presents the Republic as a system in decline, following the example of the United Nations, and contemplates the justification of the use of force to subjugate populations and territories, in light of the current global situation.

The analysis of a movie became in turn an unexpected political debate: American intellectuals and political analysts, sometimes in direct contact with those in power, turned out to be supporters of a so-called imperial strategy.

Such thinking would appear to be at work in Russia, only a few years after the fall of the Empire, both externally (the popular democracies in 1989) and internally (dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991).

The Gorbachev years, Yeltsin’s desire to move on from the USSR and post-1991 westernization would clearly suggest a backward surge in imperial thinking.

However, a decline in Russian dominance certainly complicated the consolidation of a democracy and, even if the two notions are not *a priori* incompatible, a strengthening of the State and its power has entered the agenda rather than a continuation of the democratization process.

Thus, the crisis of the 1990s led to nostalgia for a period during which the country was respected, and the Empire was considered as the fitting political form. This nostalgia was expressed just a short time before the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of 9 May 1945 in Moscow: during his speech to the Nation on 25 April 2005, Vladimir Putin presented the collapse of the Soviet Union as the “century’s worst geopolitical catastrophe”.⁴ Likewise, Boris Kagarlitsky, director of the Institute of Globalization and Social Movements (Moscow), considered the fall of the Eastern bloc as a personal catastrophe for many ex-Soviet citizens, with globally negative consequences, including those relating to personal freedom. This renewed interest in the USSR, and for the imperial idea in general, is illustrated by a kind of Russian counterpart to neoconservatism, neo- Eurasianism, of which Alexander Dugin⁵ is the best known standard-bearer.

The neo- Eurasianists would appear to have evolved from political insignificance to a position of ideologists close to the former President, Vladimir Putin, who seems to be seeking a synthesis between Eurasian and Soviet values and the necessities of a globalized economy and the modernization of the country.

3 Jonathan V. Last, “The Case for Empire”, *Weekly Standard*, 16 May 2002.

4 Claire Bigg, “Was Soviet Collapse Last Century’s Worst Geopolitical Catastrophe?”, *Radio Free Europe*, 29 April 2005.

5 A biography of Alexander Dugin is available at the following address - Radio Free Europe: <http://www.rferl.org/specials/russianelection/bio/dugin.asp>.

In both cases, a calling for what could be considered as an Empire lies at the heart of an intellectual and strategic edifice. It is precisely this convergence and renewed interest for a once old-fashioned notion that we have chosen to analyze.

However, whereas the choice of the Americans speaks for itself, why Russia rather than the rising great powers of China or India? The similarities mentioned above are not enough to justify our choice.

It should not be forgotten that, unlike the two Asian giants, Moscow has the experience of a world power, with an international influence and presence. We also take into consideration the pivotal role it has in the coming geopolitical order: the United States will continue to be the first world power for another twenty years at least, and the growth of Beijing and New Delhi in the mid-term is undeniable. But the return of bipolarity is in no way guaranteed. The future of Russia, the world's leading exporter of natural gas and second world exporter of oil⁶ could play a decisive role in the reconfiguration of the international system to come, all the more so as China, India and the United States, in a desire to diversify their reserves, are eager to procure Russian hydrocarbons.

Even if the heir to the Soviet Empire has only the world's seventh largest oil reserves, approximately 5 percent of available resources, this is enough to satisfy demand until 2020.⁷ More importantly, it has the world's largest gas reserves⁸ which will last for at least another 70 years according to the Minister for Natural Resources Yuri Trutnev.⁹ Consequently, Russia is in the paradoxical situation of a collapsed Empire whose role will be decisive in the future division of power. And President Putin knew this. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in May 2006, he denounced the "American fortress". "As the saying goes, comrade wolf knows whom to eat. It eats without listening and is clearly not going to listen to anyone" he declared with some irony before proposing the creation of a unified European strategy for energy resources. Beyond the stakes of nuclear proliferation, we felt the comparison between the United States and Russia would be both enlightening for tomorrow and intellectually stimulating.

However, before beginning a true analytical comparison, let us first explain our theoretical and methodological choices.

In this volume, we make the case for 'analytical eclecticism'¹⁰ in International Relations (IR), combining material and ideational factors in the study of Empire. In doing so, we pretend to avoid the excesses of the two dominant paradigms in

6 Lucio Caracciolo, "The Importance of Being Russia", available at the following address: http://www.eheartland.com/geopolitics_russian_empire_putin.html.

7 Information available at <http://www.iags.org/futureofoil.html>.

8 Information available at <http://www.aneki.com/fr/gaz.html>.

9 He announced this estimation in an interview given on Radio Maïak, 19 November 2005.

10 Peter J. Katzenstein, Nobuo Okawara, "Japan, Asian – Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism", *International Security*, Vol. 26 No. 3, Winter 2001/2002, pp. 153-85.

contemporary IR theory: neorealism and social constructivism.¹¹ Both originally admit the interplay between material and ideational factors in shaping the international scene but they only explain how one of the two aspects can lead to change.¹² Broadly speaking, neorealism focuses on the relative distribution of capabilities among sovereign States, considering the international system as fundamentally anarchic; it deals with the art and practice of power politics. However, it underestimates the role of social forces in international relations, the diversity of socialization processes and provides a narrow view of competition between the different actors. On the other side, social constructivism underlines the role of the ideational factor, that is to say identity, ideas, norms and discursive practices, which provide broad orientation for behavior and policy. Yet, the heuristic potential of the interplay between material and ideational change is rarely fully explored. Thus, we argue that “*the ideas and shared knowledge which are in focus in constructivist analysis never operate outside a specific material context.*”¹³ That is why we will combine an in-depth study of the worldviews of neoconservative and neo- Eurasianist intellectuals considered as political forces competing with others to shape the foreign policy agenda of their country¹⁴ and more material factors. We will do so at two levels. First, in our presentation of these movements, we take into account the material mediations, either institutions, media, or techniques, our two groups of intellectuals mobilize to broadcast their worldview both inside and outside the political sphere. Second, we include in our analysis the geopolitical constraints that weight on the way they formulate their worldview and try to impact foreign policy making.

The intellectual movements we will analyze are commonly referred to as “neo- Eurasianists” and “neoconservatives”. This first approach relates more to designation rather than definition and requires developing throughout our analysis. We have to keep in mind that these categories may result either from an auto – or a hetero- designation. The latter may come from two different sources: neutral observers and actors, whether political or intellectual, who qualify the opposition.

“Neo- Eurasianists” and “neoconservatives” retain, under their respective labels, all their intellectual and social complexity. The status of the subject in question, which calls upon the approaches of historical sociology, the history of ideas and

11 We completely recognize the fruitful efforts of the liberal tradition, the English school and Robert Cox’s neo- Gramscianism for providing balanced theories of material and ideational factors to explain change in IR. They nonetheless remain a minority.

12 Georg Sørensen, “The Case for Combining Material Forces and Ideas in the Study of IR”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 5, 2008.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

14 See the seminal work by Robert O. Keohane and Judith Goldstein (eds), *Ideas and Foreign Policy. Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993.

political philosophy, confronts us with an “epistemological indetermination”.¹⁵ In the face of this complexity, we could call upon the concept of political culture which in the French case is defined as follows:

[a coherent whole] that reflects a true vision of the world for those who adhere to [its] principals. [Its] strength lies [...] in the interiorization of a whole series of parameters whose interweaving guarantees the solidity of the whole and makes any criticism difficult: philosophical bases or doctrinal vulgate, historical references, institutional conceptions, vision of economic relations and social organization, analysis of foreign relations, all expressed through symbols, rhetoric, rituals.¹⁶

We will not refrain from referring to one or other of the social dimensions included in this list but the extension of such a concept is problematic as this would revive an understanding of a whole as a whole via a process of assembling the infinite number of its elements. If we have decided to analyze globalizing conceptions, worldviews, it is through an extremely precise prism: that of the Empire. Our voluntary caution serves our initial ambition, which is to not know a whole in order to perform a localized examination to produce results of a scientific nature and likely to contribute to a better understanding of these intellectual groups. A detour via the concept of political culture warns us against the error of postulating an apparent coherence among the positions under analysis.

We propose therefore the following hypothesis: *Neoconservatives and neo- Eurasianists’ worldviews both evoke the rehabilitation of an imperial strategy.*

The concept of Empire is used here on both an historical and analytical level. However, the neoconservatives are more recalcitrant concerning the term imperial to describe their worldview than their Russian counterparts.

This hypothesis, which we shall develop with a view to validating the comparison, will need to be confirmed later. Because we use the concept of Empire as an instrument for interpretation, it will need to be clearly defined to show whether it is more relevant than great power or hegemony to understand the phenomenon in question.

Our analysis will contain three sections.

The first will be to *understand* the historical construction of the rationalities and imaginations as developed by the actors under analysis. To do so, we shall develop an intellectual genealogy of the neo-Eurasianists and neoconservatives, paying particular attention to the “neo” prefix that is common to both.

Indeed the very definition of our object via this prefix requires a clear distinction from all that is “paleo”. We cannot begin to hope to understand the

15 Christian Delacroix analyzed this notion in *Esquisses psychanalytiques*, No. 18, Autumn 1992, pp. 211-15.

16 Serge Berstein, “Les cultures politiques à la fin du XXe siècle” in Serge Berstein (ed.), *Les cultures politiques en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1999, pp. 391-96, p. 391.

historical players better than they understood themselves; rather, we shall aim at reconstructing how they understood their action, whether political or intellectual, in their time.¹⁷ We thus follow in the tradition of comprehensive sociology, from Dilthey to Raymond Aron, who applies it as follows to the international scene:

The role of the empirical study of foreign affairs involves determining the historical perception which determines how the players act [...]. Any concrete study of foreign affairs automatically becomes a sociological and historical study.¹⁸

The first stage is therefore a presentation of two parallel itineraries, based on the testimonies of the key players at the time of their commitments, without however developing a comparison, and without seeking to analyze any transfer of ideas or persons between the movements. It also aims to measure the contemporary influence of the movements in Washington and Moscow.¹⁹

Once this influence has been established, the neo-eurasianist and neoconservative positions will be confronted to the concept of Empire. This confrontation will allow us to elaborate more precise categories for analysis, which will be included in the third section.

This will use geopolitics to investigate the position of the movements in relation to foreign policy. It will follow a similar pattern as the previous sections by analyzing the influence of the ideas proposed by the intellectuals and also their conformity with the concept of Empire, or any of its variants. This will also be an opportunity to outline an analysis of the status of such discourses, bearers of an ideology²⁰ which leads its instigators to neglect the resistance which opposes the

17 For a greater development of what this implies concerning the unmasking of the authors intentions in the text, as opposed to what is behind the writing, cf. principally Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and Interpretation", *Visions of Politics 1, Regarding Method*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 90-102. For a wider panorama of the debates surrounding intellectual history and the various paradigms available, cf. part two of François Dosse, *La marche des idées, histoire des intellectuels, histoire intellectuelle*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003, pp. 139-320.

18 "Qu'est-ce qu'une théorie des relations internationales?", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol. 17, No. 5, 1967, in R. Aron, *Etudes politiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 367 and 371. Our translation.

19 We take the text as an act, a meaningful speech that has an effect. Thus, we have adopted the findings of the theory relating to speech act. Cf. the works of Lucien Jaume concerning what he refers to as "idéopraxies", and his text "Philosophie en science politique", *Le débat* No. 72, November-December 1992, pp. 134-45.

20 For the conceptions and justifications of empire in the American colonies of the 16th to 19th centuries, we shall refer to Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, 1500-1800*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995. We mention this work since it refers to the imperial figure from a perspective of the comparative study of the history of ideas.

real to those who intend to dismantle it, or legitimizing devices which do not stand up to classical *Realpolitik*.²¹

The lack of research devoted to the neo-urasianists,²² and the almost total absence of related comparative political analyses involving the two sides of the Pacific pushed us to put pen to paper. Convinced of the fecundity of a consistent transdisciplinarity²³ in social sciences, we hope to indicate a deficiency in the literature and create a passage way to future research.

21 The device in question is not indifferent. Its very existence denotes a relation with the holder and the world and a need for recognition. It distinguishes this practice from plain power, unless the device is so unrefined that it is simply another sign of the arrogance of the dominator.

22 With the exception of the works of Marlène Laruelle, which deal with the history of ideas, and some other articles devoted almost exclusively to Dugin, the man, there are some militant analyses by neo-urasianist theoreticians, such as Jean Parvulesco.

23 We use this neologism in opposition to interdisciplinarity which often simply leads to the coexistence of autonomous approaches. We go beyond this coexistence to open a path for dialogue.