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A Transforming Eurasian Order

Feng Yujun

In recent years, driven by multiple factors, the international order has been undergoing rapid adjustment, evolution, and reshaping. In Eurasia, the Russia-Ukraine war has triggered persisting upheaval, acting as a pivotal catalyst for shifts in the regional order. Its impact has prompted historic changes in power dynamics, mutual perceptions, national identities, and strategic orientations among Eurasian states—shifts unmatched since the Soviet Union’s dissolution over three decades ago. These transformations are set to profoundly influence the regional order, becoming a central element in current and future global developments.

Five Challenges to Russia’s Status

Though no longer a superpower since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to view Eurasia (the “post-Soviet space”) as a crucial sphere of influence, where it has remained the core and dominant country in the region. Russia not only possesses comprehensive national power that far outgrows other Eurasian countries, but it also continues to wield significant influence over these countries’ internal and external affairs.

Particularly since 2007, under a strategic worldview emphasizing Russia’s rise as a great power, the United States’ inevitable decline, and the accelerating

dismantling of the liberal international order, Russia has worked to expand its geopolitical influence in Eurasia through a series of regional interventions. These include the Russo-Georgian War, the Crimea crisis, the Donbass conflict, Belarus’s political protests in 2020, and Kazakhstan’s January Events in 2022.

Far from isolated or incidental, these actions represent various components of Russia’s broader strategy to “restore former territories.” One might surmise that had Russia achieved a decisive victory in its ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, it could have signaled the dawn of a “new Russian empire.” However, this war, now over three years in duration and mired in prolonged attrition, has dealt Russia a historic, comprehensive setback. Russia now faces five multifaceted challenges.

First, the war did not achieve the swift victory Russia had anticipated, leading to a back-and-forth struggle that extended to attacks on Russian territory.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a ‘special military operation’ against Ukraine, igniting the Russia-Ukraine war. Russia initially captured large areas of Ukrainian territory in a “blitzkrieg,” yet Ukraine launched a counteroffensive in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions in the fall of 2022, reclaiming significant portions of lost land. Although Ukraine’s “spring counteroffensive” in June 2023 did not fully achieve its intended goals, it still

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managed to deal substantial blows to Russian forces, weaponry, and logistical supplies through advanced battlefield awareness and long-range precision strikes. Starting from the end of 2023, Ukraine repeatedly launched attacks on Russian military bases and strategic infrastructure within Russian territory using long-range drones. By mid-2024, these attacks had reduced Russia’s oil refining capacity by 15 percent. On 6 August 2024, Ukrainian forces entered Russia’s Kursk region, occupying over 1,000 square kilometers of territory within less than ten days. Various indications suggest that this Ukrainian

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“surprise counter-thrust” was not a simple hit-and-run operation but rather a meticulously designed strategic counteroffensive that deliberately challenged the “red lines” Russia had continuously set.

Second, Russia has faced unprecedentedly comprehensive economic sanctions from Western countries, significantly hindering its economic development and risking further marginalization from the global supply chain and international economic governance system.

The war has forced low politics like economic cooperation to give way to high politics that take security as its core. Sanctions imposed by the U.S., the EU, and even some neutral countries have been unprecedentedly severe, ranging from financing constraints, export restrictions, and asset freezes, to energy caps and embargoes, and the removal of Russia’s major banks from the SWIFT cross-border banking and financial payments system. These measures have dealt a severe blow to Russia’s economic operations and its connections with the global economy.

In addition to sanctions from Western states and West-led multilateral organizations, thousands of multinational companies have withdrawn investments or ceased

services in Russia. This has had an impact not only on energy, finance, and high-tech industries in Russia, but also on biotechnology and consumer services in the country. This new phenomenon in the international political and economic landscape has further deepened Russia’s economic challenges, significantly affecting not only its economy but also the daily lives of its people.

In the energy sector, the U.S. and the EU have made unprecedented efforts to break their dependence on Russia. The G7 and the EU implemented price caps and embargoes on Russian seaborne crude oil and petroleum product exports on 5 December 2022, and 5 February 2023, respectively. Despite Russia’s attempts to circumvent sanctions through “shadow fleets,” discounted sales, and increased exports to Eastern countries, it still suffered substantial losses. Over the more than two years since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, energy trade between Russia and the EU has drastically decreased. The value of the EU’s oil imports from Russia decreased from a peak of \$16 billion per month at the beginning of 2022 to approximately \$1 billion per month by the end of 2023. In 2021, the EU imported 155 billion cubic meters of Russian pipeline gas, but by 2023, this volume had dropped to 27 billion cubic meters.

Although Russia has gradually redirected its oil exports to Asia, the shift in natural gas exports has proven challenging due to a lack of infrastructure. Gazprom, which at its peak contributed 8 percent of Russia’s industrial output and 25 percent of the national budget, recorded a historic loss of \$6.8 billion in 2023, with losses reaching \$5.5 billion in the first half of 2024. In the mid-term, around 122 billion cubic meters of Russian gas exports per year will have no alternative market. Even accounting for the marginal growth in Russian LNG exports (2 bcm from 2021 to 2023), the loss in volumes is substantial. Over these two years, the EU has significantly reduced its total imports of Russian crude oil and oil products, largely ending its energy dependence on Russia. The close energy relationship between Russia and Europe, established since the Cold War era, has been significantly weakened.

Although Russia reported 3.6 percent of economic growth in 2023, this figure largely reflects a “wartime boom” driven by a surge in military manufacturing and a rebound from the 2.1 percent economic contraction in 2022.

Since the beginning of 2024, sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the EU on Russia have not eased

but have intensified. Moreover, Russia’s economy faces significant challenges, including industrial imbalances, mounting inflationary pressures, and labor shortages. With a worsening domestic and international political and economic environment, Russia’s prospects for sustained growth remain uncertain and fraught with risks. Its position within the global economic system is expected to decline further.

Third, Russia has experienced a security backdraft, with its geopolitical security environment further deteriorating. Since the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Russia has been determined to prevent NATO’s eastward expansion and challenge the U.S.- and NATO-led post-Cold War European security order. However, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, NATO has swiftly revitalized itself from its Macron-proclaimed “brain death” (in November 2019) and reasserted both its presence and power.

This can be seen in several ways. One, most NATO member states have increased their defense spending to the NATO standard of 2 percent of GDP. Two, NATO has rapidly bolstered its forward presence in Eastern Europe, raising troop numbers from the previously planned 80,000 to as high as 300,000. Thirdly, Finland and

Sweden, two traditionally neutral countries, joined NATO, extending Russia's land border with NATO by over 1,000 kilometers, further worsening Russia's geopolitical environment in the Baltic region. Four, the U.S. has used the Russia-Ukraine war to reshape its influence and leadership within the transatlantic alliance. Simultaneously, the push for Europe's strategic autonomy, focused on countering the Russian security threat, has grown stronger. Germany has emerged as one of Ukraine's most committed supporters, and Emmanuel Macron has even suggested that France might consider sending troops to support Ukraine.

More importantly, Ukraine—a nation with a complex and lengthy historical relationship with Russia—has definitively severed ties with its neighbor, even becoming its adversary. In the future, Ukraine could become NATO's strategic frontline against Russia. As former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski predicted in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*,

The loss of Ukraine was geopolitically pivotal, for it drastically limited Russia's geostrategic options. [...] A Russia that retained control over Ukraine could still seek to be the leader of an assertive Eurasian empire, in which

Moscow could dominate the non-Slavs in the South and Southeast of the former Soviet Union. But without Ukraine and its 52 million fellow Slavs, any attempt by Moscow to rebuild the Eurasian empire was likely to leave Russia entangled alone in protracted conflicts with the nationally and religiously aroused non-Slavs.

Fourth, Russia's international image has suffered severe damage due to its military action in Ukraine, resulting in a significant deterioration of its global standing. Since the war began, the UN General Assembly has held four related meetings on the war, each time overwhelmingly adopting resolutions “deploring in the strongest terms the Russian aggression against Ukraine in violation of the Charter of the United Nations,” demanding that the “Russian Federation immediately end its invasion of Ukraine and unconditionally withdraw all its military forces from that neighboring country.”

Russia's membership in the Council of Europe and the UN Human Rights Council was temporarily suspended, and the International Court of Justice ordered Russia to “immediately suspend the military operations that it commenced on 24 February [2022].” The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for

Russian President Vladimir Putin on charges of “the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.” This unprecedented action against the leader of a nuclear-armed state and a permanent member of the UN Security Council significantly restricts Putin's ability to travel to states that are parties to the Rome Statute.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction among UN member states regarding Moscow's frequent abuse of the veto in the Security Council has intensified calls for UN reform, including changes to the Security Council. On 26 April 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution—co-sponsored by 83 member states—titled “Standing Mandate for a General Assembly Debate When a Veto is Cast in the Security Council.” Following this resolution, the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Council will trigger a General Assembly meeting, where all UN member states can scrutinize and comment on the veto. This development effectively curtails the unchecked use of veto power by the five permanent Security Council members since the UN's establishment and reflects the shared

expectation of the 83 co-sponsors that the veto power comes with the responsibility to work to achieve “the purposes and principles of the UN Charter at all times.”

There is reason to believe that for the foreseeable future, Russia will likely remain in a state of widespread international isolation, with its status and influence in global politics and the international governance system further diminished.

Fifth, significant undercurrents in Russian domestic politics create considerable uncertainty about the country's future development, with the possibility of a historic turning point not to be ruled out.

When Russia initially launched its ‘special military operation’ against Ukraine, anti-war protests broke out across multiple locations within Russia. Although these demonstrations were subsequently suppressed by government crackdowns, the repression prompted opposition groups to adopt more radical means of expression. Over the past two years, several staunch Russian supporters of the war have been eliminated via targeted poisonings or explosive “parcel bombs.” Meanwhile, anti-government armed groups such as the “Russian Volunteer Corps,” the “Freedom of

Russia Legion,” and the “Siberian Battalion,” composed of thousands of Russian citizens, have carried out cross-border raids from Ukraine into Russian territory, including Belgorod, with Ukrainian support.

Simultaneously, intense internal political strife has unfolded at the highest levels of Russian leadership. Over the past two years, more than a dozen prominent Russian energy executives—including Ivan Sechin, the son of Igor Sechin, Russia’s de facto second-in-command—have died under suspicious circumstances, highlighting the intensifying power struggles amid the ongoing war.

What had an even deeper impact occurred in June 2023, when the Wagner Group, a paramilitary force previously trusted by Putin and vital on the Ukraine front, launched a rebellion under its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and headed toward Moscow. Although the rebellion was quelled and Prigozhin later died in a plane crash, the mutiny and subsequent purges within the military highlight the fragility of Russia’s political landscape, contrary to its official narrative. Looking back at Russian history, each major defeat in foreign wars has led to transformative political changes domestically. This war will also place Russia at a historical

crossroads once again, more than 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The stark contrast between Russia’s strategic expectations and its harsh reality lays bare many deep-seated issues within the country, particularly the significant disparity between Russia’s waning comprehensive national power and its great-power aspirations. The erosion of strength and influence of this once-central power will undoubtedly precipitate major shifts in the Eurasian order.

Significant Changes in Eurasia

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Eurasian countries have embarked on a comprehensive process of social transformation, striving to forge new identities and establish new strategic orientations within the global political and economic system. However, Russia’s historical rule over these states—of varying durations—and particularly its post-2008 efforts to reassert extensive geopolitical influence across Eurasia, have hindered and complicated these countries’ endeavors to solidify their new identities and strategic trajectories.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, now nearing its third anniversary, is poised to become a pivotal turning point in the post-Soviet evolution of Eurasia. Amid rapidly shifting dynamics, countries in the region are taking more decisive steps to solidify their new identities and geopolitical orientations.

Ukraine is undoubtedly a prominent example of this transformation. A fundamental cause of the Russia-Ukraine war is Ukraine’s rejection of the developmental trajectory imposed by Russia, as it seeks to break free from Russia’s all-encompassing control over its political, economic, cultural, and security spheres—a dominance that dates back to the 1654 Pereyaslav Agreement according to which the Cossack Hetmanate pledged allegiance to the Russian czar in return for security guarantees and a form of autonomy within the Russian state. Instead, Ukraine aims to integrate into the European Union and the transatlantic security framework, aspiring ultimately to become part of the “Euro-Atlantic civilization.”

Russia’s ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine epitomizes the culmination of this struggle between control and resistance. Nearly three years of war have devastated Ukraine, leaving a

trail of widespread destruction, and have resulted in a definitive rupture—and even outright enmity—between these two historically intertwined nations. As Nina Khrushcheva—a granddaughter of Nikita Khrushchev now living in the United States—remarked in a March 2022 interview in *The New Yorker*,

There was once a closer relationship with Russians. [...] I think that’s over because now Ukraine is going to be absolutely Ukraine. When Putin says the West is making Ukraine anti-Russian, he did more to make Ukraine anti-Russian than any American propaganda ever possibly could, because you can’t bomb a nation into loving you. [...] I think Ukraine now, as a nation, is stronger than ever.

On 28 February 2022, just six days after the outbreak of the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy officially signed an application for Ukraine’s membership in the European Union. In December 2023, President Charles Michel of the European Council announced the decision to open accession negotiations for Ukraine’s membership in the EU. In early March 2024, the European Commission approved the negotiation framework for Ukraine’s EU accession. In mid-April 2024, Ukraine’s Deputy

Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Olha Stefanishyna, announced that the negotiation framework and the first Intergovernmental Conference on Ukraine's EU accession were expected to be approved and convened by late June 2024, marking the official start of Ukraine's EU accession negotiations. On 25 June 2024, the EU formally launched membership negotiations with Ukraine.

Ukraine's relationship with NATO dates back to the early 1990s. In 1991, Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and in 1994, it signed on to NATO's Partnership for Peace program. In 1997, Ukraine and NATO signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, establishing the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Following the 2014 Crimea Crisis, cooperation between the two sides in key areas intensified. Since the outbreak of war in 2022, NATO has provided Ukraine with unprecedented support.

On 30 September 2022, Zelenskyy, together with Verkhovna Rada head Ruslan Stefanchuk and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, jointly signed Ukraine's application for fast-track membership in NATO. In 2023, the NATO-Ukraine Commission was replaced by the

NATO-Ukraine Council, where NATO member states and Ukraine sit as equal participants. This shift signifies the strengthening of political relations and deeper integration between Ukraine and NATO. At the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, the Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to Ukraine's future NATO membership, recognized Ukraine's increased interoperability and substantial progress with reforms, and pledged continued support of Ukraine's progress on interoperability. NATO foreign ministers will continue to assess through the adapted Annual National Program, and the Alliance will invite Ukraine to join when all its member states agree and conditions are met.

It is anticipated that, following the conclusion of the war and the implementation of extensive domestic reforms, Ukraine will join both the EU and NATO, integrating into the Euro-Atlantic community. This transformation will signify a new identity for Ukraine, one grounded in common interests and shared values with Europe and North America, replacing its former identity rooted in shared religion and historical ties with Russia.

Kazakhstan is also actively redefining its national identity. Unlike Ukraine, which has firmly aligned itself with the Euro-Atlantic

community, Kazakhstan's focus centers on "de-Sovietization" and the revival of its "historical self-awareness." On 15 March 2024, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced a competition to redesign the national emblem, criticizing the current emblem for being overly complex and having heavily Soviet-era characteristics. He argued that it fails to represent Kazakhstan's nationhood or reflect its future aspirations and values. This is what Tokayev said:

In order to confidently move forward, we must fully understand the scale of our national history, protecting and promoting our cultural heritage. Kazakhstan is the direct successor to the nomadic civilization of the Great Steppe. The Ulus of Jochi, world-famous as the Golden Horde, has always been the recognized pinnacle of state-building in the vast expanses of Central Eurasia. The geopolitical legacy of this medieval power served as fertile ground for the emergence of several Eurasian states, including the Kazakh Khanate. The fusion of various ethnic groups and religions has created a unique model of intercultural symbiosis and state-building in this space. [...] The Ulus of Jochi, like the Roman Empire, set development standards for the states and peoples of the Great Steppe for many centuries to come, and brought public administration to a

qualitatively new level. [...] The Ulus of Jochi occupies a significant place in the tradition of Kazakhstan's statehood as the past, present, and future of our country are closely intertwined with our historical heritage. It is crucial that the perception of the Golden Horde in the world is inextricably linked with Kazakhstan.

Tokayev has also made clear the goal of reviving historical self-awareness in various speeches. One he gave on 23 June 2023 is illustrative: "We must engage in comprehensive promotion of our cultural heritage. To modernize the country, we need to effectively use the capabilities of soft power."

However, this initiative has sparked significant concern in Russia. As one Russian media outlet put it in March 2024, "The most anti-Russian identity is being chosen for a country that has enormous potential for confrontation since the Golden Horde did not represent anything useful for Russia but was exclusively a source of mortal danger and threat." Some commentators even warned that "If the development trends of such a project continue, then Russia will face an all-too-familiar and completely undesirable scenario [such as the prospect of a 'special military operation'] in its relations with the Central Asian republic."

This response highlights Russia's deep anxiety over Eurasian nations forging new identities and distancing themselves from its influence.

As Eurasian countries seek new identities, their geopolitical orientations are also undergoing significant shifts. On the one hand, Russia's 'special military operation' in Ukraine has raised deep concerns about their own security, particularly as Russian officials and lawmakers repeatedly question the independence of these states. On the other hand, these countries recognize that Russia's strength has been weakened by the war, prompting them to gradually distance themselves from Moscow in various ways while actively pursuing a more diversified and balanced foreign policy.

A case in point is Armenia. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia was considered one of Russia's most steadfast allies in Eurasia. Armenia depended on Russian military support to counterbalance Azerbaijan and Türkiye, securing a long-standing advantage, particularly in the conflict over Karabakh with Azerbaijan. In turn, Russia capitalized on Armenia as

a pivotal ally to maintain its traditional strategic influence in the South Caucasus.

However, Russia's prolonged 'special military operation' in Ukraine and its diminished capacity to support its allies significantly altered this dynamic. Armenia ultimately lost its conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, leading to an agreement to fully return the region, which it had occupied for nearly three decades, back to Azerbaijan. This outcome has fueled strong discontent toward Russia within Armenia.

Over the past two years, Armenia has repeatedly skipped summits of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Furthermore, it has directly requested the withdrawal of some Russian troop units stationed in Armenia, its leadership has opened a public debate about applying to join the European Union, and explicitly stated that Armenia is not Russia's ally in its war against Ukraine. Armenia has also reiterated its commitment to respecting the territorial integrity of all states, including Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

As Eurasian countries seek new identities, their geopolitical orientations are also undergoing significant shifts.

On 12 June 2024, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that he plans to withdraw the country from the CSTO. Even one of Russia's once most dependable allies is now moving away from a core national policy of complete reliance on Russia for security. This development signals that Russia's dominant position in Eurasia has reached a precarious juncture.

Central Asian states are also actively diversifying their foreign relations on all fronts to reduce dependence on Russia in political, economic, and security spheres. In recent years, they have established the "C5+1" format with countries and international organizations such as the United States, the European Union, Japan, India, China, and others. Since 2015, the C5+1 between Central Asia and the United States has convened multiple meetings.

On 19 September 2023, the first Central Asia–U.S. C5+1 Leaders' Summit was held at UN headquarters in New York on the margins of the General Assembly annual high-level General Debate. Key topics included security, trade and investment, regional connectivity, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, and reforms to the rule of law and democratic

governance. During this summit, U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans to increase U.S. security assistance for Central Asia and strengthen regional economic connectivity. He also proposed initiatives such as establishing a private-sector business platform to complement the C5+1 diplomatic platform, launching a C5+1 Critical Minerals Dialogue to bolster energy and supply chain security, and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic ties between the newly independent Eurasian states and Russia have considerably weakened compared to the Soviet era, owing to the disruption and restructuring of past supply and industrial chains. Despite Russia's attempts to foster closer integration through initiatives such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the EAEU Customs Union, and the EAEU itself, these efforts have been hindered by Russia's economic fragility and patronizing approach, prompting these countries to become cautious about deeper engagement.

Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war and the imposition of stringent Western sanctions, Russia has resorted to "parallel imports" through Central Asian

and Caucasian countries to secure dual-use equipment and components urgently needed by its military manufacturing. In 2022, trade between Russia and Central Asian nations grew by 15 percent, surpassing \$42 billion.

This unusual surge in trade drew increased scrutiny from the United States and the European Union. By late 2023, both the U.S. and the EU had ramped up enforcement measures against Russian sanctions evasion, prompting countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to cease processing transactions via Russia's Mir payment system. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had already discontinued acceptance of Mir cards by September 2022. These actions have further eroded financial links between Russia and Eurasian states, with potentially significant long-term effects on their broader economic cooperation.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Eurasian countries have embarked on comprehensive social transformations,

aiming to establish new national identities and define strategic roles within the global political and economic framework. Nonetheless,

Russia continues to wield significant influence in the region and has made concerted efforts since 2008 to reestablish its geopolitical presence.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war may mark a critical turning

point in the evolution of post-Soviet Eurasia. In the context of accelerating changes unseen in a century, these nations face the dual challenges of consolidating their identities and navigating new geopolitical alignments.

The Future of the Eurasian Order

The Russia-Ukraine war is a historically transformative event—akin in significance to the dissolution of the Soviet Union—that is poised to bring about structural changes to the Eurasian order. Shaped by the interplay of the aforementioned factors, the future of the Eurasian order is likely to unfold along three key trends.

The Russia-Ukraine war is a historically transformative event—akin in significance to the dissolution of the Soviet Union—that is poised to bring about structural changes to the Eurasian order.

Firstly, Russia is set to gradually lose its position as the central power in Eurasia. The prospects for Russia-led Eurasian integration have dimmed significantly, and its endeavors to restore imperial influence have encountered a major setback.

From a macro-historical perspective, the dissolution of the Soviet Union represents the collapse of an empire, a continuation of the imperial disintegration that began with the breakup of the Russian Empire after World War I. Despite this, Russia maintained substantial influence over Eurasian countries even after the Soviet Union's dissolution. Particularly, beginning in 2007 and 2008, Russia pursued a series of military operations in Eurasia, achieving incremental successes in its strategy to restore de facto imperial dominance.

However, the Russia-Ukraine war is likely to result in comprehensive and profoundly negative consequences for Russia. As its power wanes and Eurasian countries redefine their identities and strategic orientations, Russia's traditionally dominant position in the region will further erode. Its influence across political, economic, security, and cultural spheres in Eurasia will continue to diminish. Institutions of Eurasian integration led by

Russia, such as the CIS, the EAEU, and the CSTO, are also likely to face increasing irrelevance and will probably struggle to produce substantive outcomes.

Secondly, Eurasian countries are likely to pursue varied development paths based on their own national conditions and interests, leading to an increasingly diverse development landscape in the region.

Although all Eurasian countries began their state-building after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, their societal transformations—particularly in foreign policy—were not always autonomous or independent. However, as Russia's control over these countries weakens in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war, Eurasian states are expected to make more autonomous choices of national strategies, falling into several categories:

One, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, etc. These countries increasingly see their future aligned with Europe and are actively seeking integration into the European Union. The EU has also responded positively to these aspirations. On 8 November 2023, the European Commission adopted its 2023 Enlargement Package, recommending that the European

Council open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and grant Georgia the status of a candidate country.

Two, Azerbaijan. Baku has effectively established a comprehensive strategic alliance with Türkiye. With Ankara's support, it secured a historic victory in the conflict over Karabakh. As a result, Azerbaijan has emerged as the strongest supporter of the Organization of Turkic States championed by Türkiye. Currently, Azerbaijan's historical and practical ties to Russia have significantly weakened.

Three, major Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. These countries are striving to pursue a balanced major-country diplomacy while exploring their historical identities. Their goals are still evolving, as they continue navigating between maintaining Soviet political-cultural traditions, embracing Europeanization, and establishing identities as secular Islamic states.

Four, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These two states have historically relied heavily on Russia for economic and security support. As

Russia's economic prospects dim, these two economically vulnerable countries may face increasing challenges. Concurrently, issues like the infiltration of religious extremism could further complicate their security environments.

Five, Belarus. Since the domestic political unrest of 2020 was quelled, Belarus has relied heavily on Russian support for both its internal and external policies, making it difficult for the country to pivot toward Europe and solidifying its role as Russia's most trusted and reliable ally. Nevertheless, as the Russia-Ukraine war turns against Russia, Belarus's stance has also started to waver.

Thirdly, Eurasia's frozen conflicts arising from the dissolution of the Soviet Union will be resolved in different ways.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, numerous "frozen conflicts" emerged across Eurasia, including the conflict over Karabakh, conflict on the left bank of the Dniester, and disputes over borders and water resources among Central Asian countries. While these conflicts all have complex roots,

In the future, "Eurasia" as a transitional geopolitical concept might gradually fade from the spotlight in international politics.

Russia's strategy of exploiting them to maintain its regional dominance has been a significant factor in their prolonged unresolved status.

However, as the Russia-Ukraine war continues and approaches its conclusion, these frozen conflicts are increasingly likely to find resolution through various means. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is expected to end through warfare—the harshest of outcomes—allowing Ukraine to break free from Russian control and pursue an independent trajectory. The conflict over Karabakh has already been resolved militarily, with Armenia agreeing to return the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and seven surrounding territories, where it had long exercised de facto control, to Azerbaijan, in expectation of potential reconciliation between the two nations. Meanwhile, border and water disputes among Central Asian countries are gradually being addressed through peaceful negotiations. Lastly, the conflict on the left bank of the Dniester is likely to conclude as Russia becomes unable to sustain its support for this "unrecognized republic," enabling

Moldova to reclaim sovereignty over the region.

In comparison, the Georgian issue is more complicated. Although Georgia has not given up its sovereignty claims over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, recent elections in that country have proven that there are still strong pro-Russian forces there, and Russia also maintains a huge influence in Georgia. This has cast a shadow on the negotiation process between Georgia and the EU and increased uncertainty regarding the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts.

As Eurasian countries increasingly choose their particular development paths, determine strategic orientations, and resolve frozen conflicts in the region, the aftershocks of the Soviet Union's dissolution may gradually subside. In the future, "Eurasia" as a transitional geopolitical concept might gradually fade from the spotlight in international politics. However, one crucial question remains unresolved for the global landscape and international order: where is Russia headed? ^{BD}

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