



## **Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism**

*Charles Clover*

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Charles Clover, award-winning journalist and former Moscow bureau chief for the Financial Times, here analyses the idea of "Eurasianism," a theory of Russian national identity based on ethnicity and geography. Clover traces Eurasianism's origins in the writings of White Russian exiles in 1920s Europe, through Siberia's Gulag archipelago in the 1950s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and up to its steady infiltration of the governing elite around Vladimir Putin. This eye-opening analysis pieces together the evidence for Eurasianism's place at the heart of Kremlin thinking today and explores its impact on recent events, the annexation of Crimea, the rise in Russia of anti-Western paranoia and imperialist rhetoric, as well as Putin's sometimes perplexing political actions and ambitions.

Based on extensive research and dozens of interviews with Putin's close advisers, this quietly explosive story will be essential reading for anyone concerned with Russia's past century, and its future.

## Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism Details

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### Wisconsin Alumni says

Charles Clover '91

Author

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### Daniel Alfi says

A worthwhile and clearly well-researched account of the rise of nationalist views in Russia today. Despite the ambitious undertaking, the transition between the author's associations of previous and current players, beginning in 20th century Russia, and their impact with Kremlin thinking today was well written. I did find certain sections of the book to be repetitive and did not mind. Understandably, the legitimacy and/or motivations of certain events are questionable given large amounts of undocumented history. Regardless, the author did a good job of tracing the origins of Eurasianism, "a theory of Russian national identity based on ethnicity and geography," from earlier writings and events during Soviet-Russia up until recent times. Above all, this book is entertaining and does encourage further reading.

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### Matti Paasio says

Everyone and their dogs should read this one. No excuses - read it!

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### Philip Girvan says

A sweeping examination of the concept of Eurasianism that provides historical context and illustrative portrayals of the philosophy's present day gurus, particularly Aleksander Dugin.

Book does a formidable job of demonstrating how disillusionment with the fall of the Soviet Union, often most keenly experienced by those imprisoned and otherwise punished by the regime, led to Eurasianism's gaining currency within the military and eventually with President Putin. Also quite revealing re its influence on nationalist movements in Europe.

Clover has good contacts who are willing to speak to him openly. It's a revealing book and a compelling read.

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### **Rebecca says**

If you're looking for a book on the far right in contemporary Russia which is not only focused on Putin, and which provides historical context, this is a very good place to start. It's written in a journalistic style, includes interviews with key players, avoids hyperbole and sensation, and is well-documented if you want to read further. It starts with the early Eurasianists in pre-Revolutionary Russia and concludes with the 2014 conflict over the Ukraine. It's published by a university press, but would work well for a non-academic audience.

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### **Elaine Aldred says**

There is no doubt that Russian authors were, and still are, not short of material on which they can draw on extensively for their novels; some of it in epic proportions. The content of Black Wind, White Snow reinforces this opinion.

Although a non-fiction book, it reads like a sweeping epic with secret organisations, spies, flights across war-torn Russian territories to safety, major political figures, gulags and dispossessed Russian nobility. It is a book rich with details, where Charles Clover also finds time to focus in on the human stories of love, hate, arrogance and the inability to fit in. With this in mind Black Wind, White Snow is a wonderful of starting point for a writer in any genre, as well, as being an absorbing read for the curious.

At the centre of the book is the Russian concept of Eurasianism, which is one perception of Russian national identity. It is something that has come and gone, then been recently revived by Vladimir Putin, particularly with regards to the annexation of the Crimea.

Eurasianism was a movement Started by the Russians exiled from their homeland in the 1920s, the idea was nurtured again in the 1960s, then again by Putin as a rationale for extending Russia as a nation.

However, his reference to the concept was made in such an oblique way at an annual gathering of Russia's handpicked elite, that blink and you would have missed it. The idea that Putin uses messages embedded within his speeches (or dog whistles as they are known in US politics because only certain people can hear them), is only the start of a book that is a switchback of changing loyalties and the painful legacies of successive governments with people tossed around like flotsam and jetsam.

This is quite an internal contemplation of the subject with little comment made about the possible effects of the West on Russia. However, for anyone wanting to better understand the shifts in Russian mind-set over the last few years or just wanting a really good book to lose themselves in, Black Wind, White Snow is in many ways better than a novel.

### **Egor Prosvirnin says**

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### **Mubeen Irfan says**

Russia is an intriguing country. Possibly because of her Soviet past, closed society and culture of secrecy propagated by the country's establishment. However, when she opened her gates in 1990s all hell broke loose and the country ended up making certain Billionaires who were later reined in by the deep state. This book however is upon Russian nationalism or a concept known as Eurasianism.

Frankly, I had never read about this term before starting this book but it has become a very popular political movement in Russia. The sudden rise of nationalism in many of the European countries, after this concept was banished post second world war 2, has been a cause of concern for world en masse. This book details the birth and adaptation of Russia's own nationalism and how it is playing a big influence on Putin's actions in Europe. Cases in example are Crimea & Ostessia. It is a detailed account on the Russian philosophers who birthed this concept of Eurasianism and how their sphere of influence kept growing which in turn led to Kremlin owning their ideas.

First half of the book, which is on the evolution of these ideas, is really boring. It picks up pace later when the author details different actual events which happened in USSR & Russia and possible theories and motives behind them. I especially liked the account of 1991's coup (or was it?) against Gorbachov. Read it if you are a geo-politics fan but it might take a hundred and fifty pages or so to get any interesting.

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### **Alex Kondrashin says**

Captivating account of Russian ideological struggles and eternal search of national identity.

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### **Hadrian says**

*Ten years ago, any symmetrical scheme with an appearance of order - dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism - was enough to hold mankind in thrall. Why not submit to Tlön, to the immense, meticulous evidence of an ordered planet? It is useless to reply that the real world too is ordered. Perhaps it is, but in accordance with divine laws - that is, non-human laws - that we shall never comprehend. Tlön may be a labyrinth, but a labyrinth contrived by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men.*

-Jorge Luis Borges, Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

In a 2013 speech, Vladimir Putin referred to his Russia as a 'civilization state', and talked discussed the preservation of a 'peoples' identity' as part of a 'historical Eurasia'. This term is a callback to an obscurer intellectual tradition, a background to Putin's ideas. Such a 'project', as the international community would later learn, involves the occupation of the Crimea and the barely disguised proxy war in Donetsk. These terms have their roots in a previously obscure intellectual tradition, and understanding their origins is a method of illuminating the more mystifying aspects of Putin's thinking, and his grand strategy.

This story begins on the fringes of Russian exile, and the long conflict between Slavophiles and Westernizers in Russian history. After the fall of the Russian Empire, they had taken a sober look at the state of Russia as a force and civilization opposed to Western Europe, and concluded it had more in common with the steppe peoples and the Huns rather than France and Germany, a successor to the steppe warriors like Genghis Khan or Timur. But their ideas, already on the margins of the already isolated emigre community, were snuffed out by Soviet intelligence.

The plot picks up in the 1960s Khrushchev thaw, with the historian Lev Gumilev, son of the poet Anna Akhmatova. He had come up with a theory of civilizations' rise and fall which avoided the stages and class analysis of Marxism, called *passionarnost*, translated elsewhere as 'passionivity'. This was a non-quantifiable immaterial hash of creativity, expansionism, conquering ruthlessness, and subsuming the individual to a common cause. This passion was enough to explain the rise and fall of peoples, not technological progress or moral sophistication. Though such ideas had spurious backing from the academy (his history books were said to read like novels, from how much seemed invented in them) they were different from the established norm, and Gumilev became a person of interest for intellectuals and dissidents as the glamour of Marxism-Leninism waned.

One of these figures was Aleksander Dugin, who objected to the strictly materialist focus of Marxism, but also became a fellow-traveller of the 'Nouvelle Droit', a European far-rightist circle who opposed American-style market liberalism, ethnic heterogeneity, and 'globalization', and also had a passing interest in the geopolitical theories of Sir Harold Mackinder, who spoke of a 'world island' opposed to the 'Atlanticist' and 'naval' powers of the United Kingdom and the United States. He wrote a textbook, which then became reading in the Russian military academy. He describes it himself as filling an intellectual void which came after the fall of the Soviet Union and later disillusionment with market liberalism which came around after the humiliating war with Chechnya, the late 1990s default, and NATO grinding down Serbia in 1998. It gave the military an enemy again.

After all this, Putin himself only begins to appear in the story around page 250, and his usage of Eurasian terminology is often guarded, using specific terms as 'dog-whistles' to attract the interest of those who know. Such an ideology may influence his thinking, or it might not - this is one of the areas which Clover leaves out, as he cannot know - but there is still the question how much rhetoric, public opinion, or the cold logic of economics will allow them to behave - or if they are true believers idea they constructed. The Russian leadership class may take these ideas as a sign of wanting to move up, or they may be 'eaten' by them, as Dostoyevsky said in his Demons.

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## Geza Tatrallyay says

A very insightful analysis of where Russia is today, given historical trends. Clover does a masterful job in explaining the rise of nationalism in Russia, and how it has come to be the centerpiece of current Russian political ideology. It helps explain much of what is happening in the Ukraine and indeed the recent efforts by

Putin and his gang to exert influence on the USA. A must read for anyone interested in East/West relations.

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### **Matthew Griffiths says**

This was an interesting account of a political philosophy which in recent years has gained increasing purchase. The book does a lot to explain the intellectual background and development of the Eurasianist and modern Russian Nationalist thought starting from the time of the Revolution right through to the collapse of the Soviet Union and into current events. The setting of the scene that the book starts with is a little long winded and would definitely put off all but the dedicated reader but the discussion towards the latter end of the book looking at how much of this political thought has been applied since Putin's rise is worth sticking around for.

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### **William says**

A very detailed history of why Russia is so nationalistic. Begins about 1900 and ends not too long ago. Book could have been about three-fourths the size without losing any narrative arc.

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### **John Goodell says**

First off, Clover's book is about as close to an un-biased portrait of Putin's Russia as I have encountered. Whether discussing the Crimean situation or the U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan, Clover presents all perspectives and cites sources from both sides. Granted, towards the end he begins to side more with the Western view that Putin's rise and Russia's actions should be condemned, but he largely stays true to the historical texts and people who influenced the Eurasianist ideology.

Any Westerner who wants to better understand the long, often fraught relationship between the U.S. and Russia, especially as it stands today, must pick up this book. It's a very accessible read, regardless of your background in Russian history and politics, and reads more like a novel than anything else given the enigmatic characters involved in this truly incredible history.

Clover masterfully traces Eurasianism from its early roots in pre-Soviet times, to its slow dissemination by professors and underground groups alike throughout the later Soviet period, and then finally its infiltration into the ranks of the Kremlin under Yeltsin and Putin. Considering the suppression of orthodox Christian values during the Soviet era and a weakening sense of what it meant to be Russian, it is no surprise that Putin's nationalist sentiment has begun to take wind in recent years. He timed it well with a rise in commodities prices during the 2000s, a period which saw the livelihoods of Russians increase substantially. Of course, we can only speculate where Eurasianism will go from here, especially amidst the strengthening ties between Russia and China, and the financial rating agency the two countries have developed as a rival to the Western agencies responsible for deciding the quality of assets everywhere.

"Eurasianism is a forgery that has superseded the original - not because it is a good forgery, but because it is so audaciously false that it undermines the true"-Clover

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## Marks54 says

This is a good book about some strange people and some stranger ideas. It is the intellectual history of "Eurasianism" that has developed as an expansive mutation of Russian nationalism and came into vogue to support the consolidation of power and foreign policy of Vladimir Putin, especially since he assumed a third term. The basic argument (such as it may be) is a geopolitical argument for an enhanced Russia as the central power on the Eurasian land mass. This idea is tied to the work of Halford Mackinder in political geography and the book features a famous illustration by Mackinder as used in Alexander Dugin's 1997 work on geopolitics. The book profiles the work of a number of minor Russian scholars most of whom suffered under the Soviet regime, including Nickolay Trubetskoy, Lev Gumilev, and Alexander Dugin. It then suggests how these ideas help motivate Russian political and military actions in Ukraine, the Crimea, and the Caucasus region.

Why is this interesting?

To start with, the recent actions of Putin have put Russia back into the limelight as it has not been since Communism went out of business. A new generation has grown up since then and it is worth while to learn more about Russia since 2000. The book is a nice history that way and what is important to me was not the ideas of Eurasianism but more how these ideas have been used to support the reestablishment of Russian autocracy.

This book is useful in clarifying the audience for half-baked political ideas. I had always assumed that political ideas were targeted towards the masses. Clover's book shows that this is not the case. The point is for the ideas to unify Putin's cronies so that everyone supporting the Putin regime can use these ideas to make sure that everyone in the ruling elite is "on the same page". This strange nationalist ideology is a management tool to enhance cohesion among rulers and administrators. It does not make any difference that the ideas are bad ones - anyone who followed 2016 US presidential elections knows that whether ideas were true or reasonable had little to do with whether they were useful to the political class. Clover's book also clarifies that Putin is no simple autocrat or closet communist but has crafted a blend of ideology, simplified Russian history, and dreams of global Russian expansion. This is not to say that Putin is not a power hungry autocrat but rather that he has made use of a wide range of resources in gaining and enhancing his power. The book is also valuable as one of many potential sources about the investigations of the Trump administration and its dealings with Russia.

It is not surprising that these odd geopolitical ideas can still influence people. Mackinder's work, even if discredited now, was very influential in its day. This is true for the US where Mackinder's influence can be seen in association with the work of Alfred Thayer Mahan.

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