1 *Introduction*

September 6, 2019. Moscow International Book Fair, Center for the Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy (Vystavka dostizhenii narodnogo khoziaistva, VDNKh), Moscow. Aleksandr Prokhanov, eighty-one years old, sits at the center of the stage, his face inexpressive, behind the table where his latest book, *The Fifth Stalin*, is displayed. Above the stage, a massive screen projects a loop of illustrations from the book: a series of black-and-white drawings that blend religious medieval iconography with Soviet aesthetics. They portray Joseph Stalin in various situations: alongside Orthodox saints; as a schoolteacher facing Vladimir Putin and Dmitrii Medvedev, who sit in the front row sheepishly copying the lesson's title marked on the blackboard in capital letters: "Mobilization"; or on a large nuclear warhead with the inscription "Za stalina" ("For Stalin").

The book's editor, Sergei Dmitriev, director of the publishing house Veche, takes the floor. As he explains, the book commemorates the upcoming 140th anniversary of Stalin's birth. It is a collection of articles by Prokhanov and illustrations by Gennadii Zhivotov, originally published in the newspaper *Zavtra*, fervently glorifying Stalin.

In the conference room, about twenty "Night Wolves," members of Russia's largest motorcycle club, are seated in three rows. They are easily recognizable: shaved heads, biker vests adorned with various pins, and the club's symbol – a wolf's head roaring in a lunar white circle with its mane twirling in orange and red flames – on their backs. Besides them, the audience includes several men with long beards, dressed in black, mimicking the style of the Eurasian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, and a few other smart men in suits. These are probably the "technocrats from the defense industry" that a journalist identified among the conference's participants, in a report later published by *Zavtra*.[1]

[1] Vladimir Vinnikov, "'Russkii reaktor' na VDNKh," *Zavtra*, September 12, 2019, https://zavtra.ru/blogs/pyatij_stalin_gryadyot. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from Russian or French are mine.

"This book is not a commemoration," remarks Prokhanov, "it is a premonition. Premonition of a new appearance of Stalin. Stalin is coming!"

He further elaborates on the book's title. In Russian history, as he explains, four empires have arisen: Kievan Rus, Muscovite Russia, the Romanov empire, and the Soviet Union. Each of them, Prokhanov claims, gave birth to a Stalinian leader: Prince Vladimir, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Joseph Stalin.

"But the Stalinist empire," he continues, "of which I consider myself a son, was destroyed in 1991 … And now again, in some miraculous way, a new Russian state has started to emerge from this 'black hole.' I call it the fifth Russian empire."

On the stage, the roundtable speakers also include a prominent figure from the younger generation of communist politicians, Iurii Afonin (1977–), deputy chairman of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and a member of the State Duma. Next to him sits Aleksandr Zaldostanov, the leader of the Night Wolves, known as The Surgeon, who is personally acquainted with Putin. Decked out in the same gear as his gang, he, however, is the only one to sport long, curly hair, held in place by a tight black cap. During his speech, he explains that, at Prokhanov's request, he has passed a letter to Putin asking for the restoration of the name Stalingrad to the city of Volgograd. He smiles and adds: "In front of me, Putin read Prokhanov's letter to the end and said: 'Someday this will happen.'"

This event, which I attended during my fourth field research visit to Russia, illustrates several defining attributes of the Russian hawks: They seek to reconfigure the relationship between Orthodox conservatism and Soviet military-technological might, they span various social sectors and generations, and their ideas circulate from ideologues to policy circles through a network of actors made up of disparate members of the intellectual and political elite.

1.1 Who Are the Russian Hawks?

"Hawk" is originally a Cold War expression used in the American context to refer to those who support a well-financed, aggressive military. By contrast with doves' emphasis on cooperation to avoid war, hawks maintain a competitive understanding of international politics.

They argue for constant military buildup to establish a posture of superior strength and to deter the opponent.[2] As providers of justification for the use of force to defend national security interests over the adversary's, hawks are known as the war machine's chief ideologues.

In the post-Soviet context, the term has occasionally been used to describe Stalinist ideologues advocating for the restoration of a Russian empire,[3] as well as members of the "party of war" within the political and military elite who promoted the use of military force against Chechen secessionists in 1994.[4] I also use this term to designate the group of ideologues examined in this book, including Prokhanov and others, who from the beginning of their careers in the Soviet Union have portrayed the military as the natural carrier of their ideas. At the core of their ideology is a reflection on the modernization processes of the Soviet Union and subsequently Russia. In stark contrast to Western modernization theories, which began to spread during Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw and assumed that technoscientific modernization would eventually lead to the Soviet state's liberalization and convergence with the West, they were committed to preserving the uniqueness of the Soviet path. Throughout the period studied, from the Soviet Union to contemporary Russia, these hawks have been adamant about the "wartime" context faced by their country in its confrontation with the West and have focused on reinvigorating a state ideology to mobilize the nation. To them, the military is the quintessential venue for realizing their conception of the Russian national idea, defined in radical opposition to the West and understood as a blend of technological power and religious conservatism in service of a strong and imperial state. Further, "hawks" alludes to the symbol of the Russian tsarist empire, the double-headed eagle, which these ideologues have revitalized in the post-Soviet context as

[2] Graham T. Allison, Albert Carnesale, and Joseph S. Nye, "Hawks, Doves and Owls: A New Perspective on Avoiding Nuclear War," *International Affairs* 61, no. 4 (1985): 581–89; Bruce Russett, "Doves, Hawks, and U.S. Public Opinion," *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 4 (1990): 515–38.

[3] Vitalii I. Goldanskii, "Russia's 'Red-Brown' Hawks," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 5 (1993): 24–27.

[4] John B. Dunlop, *The Moscow Bombings of September 1999: Examinations of Russian Terrorist Attacks at the Onset of Vladimir Putin's Rule* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2014), 14.

they have aimed to merge historical narratives and imperial legacies to forge a renewed "fifth empire."[5]

The Russian hawks' advocacy of a mix of technological modernization, religious conservatism, and state patriotism form an ideological language, which I have termed "modernist conservatism." Instead of classic Russian conservatism, modernist conservatism resembles the type of political ideology that Jeffrey Herf identifies in the context of Weimar Germany as "reactionary modernism."[6] As Herf explains, the theorists of the German Conservative Revolution, such as Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, and Carl Schmitt, framed an illiberal and nationalist ideology of modernity by embracing technological progress while rejecting Enlightenment's liberal and secular conception of reason.

Modernist conservatism is still the ideological flagship of the Izborskii Klub, the hawks' central and largest think tank in today's Russia. Created in 2012, the club comprises intellectual, economic, political, religious, and military elites advocating the restoration of Russia's imperial great-power status, drawing on both religious conservatism and techno-military might. While the hawks were marginal in the 1990s, the regime has increasingly relied on their ideas to justify the authoritarian consolidation of strong state power, to enforce a social discipline based on traditional values, and to pursue an imperialist foreign policy, which culminated in the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Since the start of the war, the Izborskii Klub has been actively engaged in propaganda work stressing the "military-technological," "spiritual," and "ideological" dimensions of what they picture as a "battle of civilizations" between Russia and the West.[7]

This book represents an attempt to understand why, despite the prohibition of state ideology in the Russian Constitution of 1993, Russian hawks have endured across the 1991 regime change and have risen to political prominence as the chief ideologues of Russia's confrontation against the West. The ascent of hawks from the fringes to the center of Russian political discourse underscores broader shifts in societal attitudes and governmental strategies. By tracing the trajectory of these

[5] See, for instance, the cover page of issue 1 of the Izborskii Klub's journal, published in 2024.
[6] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[7] "Vremia Dugina. Otkliki Chlenov Izborskogo Kluba," Izborskii Klub website, September 2, 2022, https://izborsk-club.ru/23275.

ideologues and examining the mechanisms through which their ideas were translated into state policies, this study aims to elucidate the continuity and evolution of the interplay between ideology and politics in Russian governance from the end of the USSR to contemporary times. In doing so, it provides insights into the ideological underpinnings of Russia's foreign posture and its implications for international security, regional stability, and the global balance of power.

1.2 Sources

While studies on contemporary Russian conservatism have usually revolved around institutions such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church, the concept of the Russian hawks highlights the role of intellectuals in shaping and spreading beliefs through various intellectual, cultural, and political vehicles. I distinguish between two generations of Russian hawks: The first generation began their activities as public intellectuals in the late Soviet Union, around the 1970s, while the second entered the public scene in the late 1990s. Moreover, although the literature on conservative intellectuals has often spotlighted the Eurasianist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, I place particular emphasis on Aleksandr Prokhanov (1938–), who has held a leading position among the first generation of Russian hawks as the founder of their main media mouthpieces.[8] By contrast with Dugin, whose popularity and visibility in Russia are limited to intellectual circles, Prokhanov is an author of literature well known to the general public.[9] Besides him, I also pay particular

[8] For studies focused on Dugin, see, for instance, Jacob Kipp, "Aleksandr Dugin and the Ideology of National Revival: Geopolitics, Eurasianism and the Conservative Revolution," *European Security* 11, no. 3 (2002): 91–125; Marlène Laruelle, "A Textbook Case of Doctrinal Entrepreneurship: Aleksandr Dugin," in *Russian Nationalism* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 95–133; Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and Perennial Philosophy," *The Russian Review* 68, no. 4 (2009): 662–78; Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Alexander Dugin's Views of Russian History: Collapse and Revival," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 25, no. 3 (2017): 331–43.

[9] For this reason, Prokhanov has been studied in greater detail by scholars in literature rather than in political science. Edmund Griffiths's recently published book is a remarkable exception. See Edmund Griffiths, *Aleksandr Prokhanov and Post-Soviet Esotericism* (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2023).

attention to one of the leading members of the younger generation of Russian hawks, Vitalii Averianov, who is the chief conceptualizer of the concept of "dynamic conservatism," blending technological modernity and religious conservatism. Averianov is also one of the founders of the first conservative think tank in contemporary Russia, the "Institute of Dynamic Conservatism."

Following the social history of ideas approach, I use a mixed method of inquiry that combines discourse analysis with empirically grounded research on idea producers. For the Soviet period, my archival sources comprise the newspapers that were used by the Russian hawks as forums for sociopolitical debates, such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Nash sovremennik*, and *Literaturnaia Rossiia*. For the years 1991–99, my sources include the newspapers founded by Prokhanov, *Den* (1990–93) and *Zavtra* (1993–), which served as the rallying points for modernist conservatives. For the period 2000–20, I also review the online archives of the internet media platforms used by the younger generation of Russian hawks, such as the web newspaper *Russkii zhurnal*, and their personal blogs on the social networking service Livejournal (Zhivoi Zhurnal). From 2009 onward, I use the online archives of the institutions created by Russian hawks, first the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism (Institut dinamicheskogo konservatizma, IDK) (2009–12) and then the Izborskii Klub (2012–), which have recorded their publications and transcripts of roundtables on their websites.[10] I have also reviewed the archives of the Izborskii Klub's monthly journal, *Izborskii Klub: Russkie strategii*.[11]

In addition to ideational content, the archives of the IDK's and the Izborskii Klub's websites record in detail the routine activities of the institutions and their members over the period 2009–20.[12] These data include the list of roundtables and conferences that the organizations have hosted, the list of participants that have attended them and the list of meetings held by the leaders of the organizations with political, economic, or religious actors. Reviewing these archives, therefore, provides important information on the audience and socialization of Russian hawks. In particular, these data enable me to track the

[10] See http://dynacon.ru and https://izborsk-club.ru.
[11] The archives can be accessed here: https://izborsk-club.ru/magazine#2013.
[12] See the section "Materials of the IDK Website (2009–2012)" ("Materialy saita IDK (2009–2012)"): www.dynacon.ru/arh_idk/ and the section "Chronology of the Club's Events" ("Khronologiia meropriiatii kluba") in each issue of the Izborskii Klub's journals.

IDK's and Izborskii Klub's connections with policy circles through the analysis of their mentions of interaction and cooperation with policy-makers or political institutions.

Moreover, by contrast with most studies on Russian conservatism, the interpretation developed in this book benefits from the rich and original materials retrieved during interviews and ethnographic observations, which I gathered during several fieldwork visits in Russia from 2017 to 2019. These materials are especially valuable today as access to the Russian field has been challenged since 2020 owing to Covid-19 travel restrictions and the start of the war.

There were many challenges involved in my fieldwork. The first difficulty was to get in touch with a social group far away from my personal environment in the sensitive political context of hostility and mistrust that prevailed between Russia and the West following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Another difficulty related to the conditions brought about by my immersion in an antipathic cultural milieu as an isolated stranger. As scholars have highlighted, exposure to "extreme" or "repugnant" cultural milieus challenges ethnographic methodological processes, which rely on a certain openness and interpersonal empathy to allow access to the respondents and the smooth running of the interviews.[13] In this respect, I concur with other French female researchers on Russian right-wing political and ideological milieus who have noted that the status of foreigner, "exotic" to the cultural milieu covered by the research, helps to neutralize personal reactions and establish a more professional ethnographic posture.[14]

In total, I conducted thirty-two semistructured oral interviews in the Russian language. The first category of interviewers was composed of members of the two generations of Russian hawks, including Izborskii

[13] Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (1991): 373–93; Magali Boumaza, "L'expérience d'une jeune chercheuse en 'milieu extrême': Une enquête au Front National," *Regards sociologiques* 22 (2001): 105–21; Véra Nikolski, "La valeur heuristique de l'empathie dans l'étude des engagements 'répugnants,'" *Genèses* 84, no. 3 (2011): 113–26; Clémentine Fauconnier, "Enquêter sur le parti Russie Unie : De la défiance politique à l'illégitimité scientifique? L'apport critique de l'étude des objets antipathiques," *Terrains/Théories* 10 (2019).

[14] Nikolski, "La valeur heuristique," 20; Fauconnier, "Enquêter sur le parti Russie unie," 7.

Klub members and "Young Conservatives."[15] Some of the key questions I asked related to the context that led them to start authoring public speech, the reason behind turning points in their intellectual trajectory, the individuals whom they related to as *edinomyshlenniki* (like-minded persons) at specific points in their life, the rival groups that they targeted in their publications, the incentives that led them to coalesce with other ideologues, their routine practices as part of a group of ideologues, and so on. A second category of interviews was aimed at gaining insight into the perception of the hawks by other members of Russia's contemporary intellectual and political elites.[16]

The fieldwork also included ethnographic observations such as attending events organized by the Izborskii Klub as a group or separately by its members. My goal here was to identify the type of audience that Russian hawks attracted in the public space and to get insight into the more affective, emotional dimension of their identity as a group.

1.3 A Social History of the Russian Hawks' Ideas

Whereas studies on contemporary Russian conservatism focus exclusively on the post-Soviet context,[17] I look at Russian modernist

[15] The list of these interviewees is available in Annex 1, but the material quoted from interviews is anonymized.

[16] See Annex 1. Some of them are anonymized. They are identified by a letter (e.g., "A.", "B.") and by their professional occupation.

[17] Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Le rouge et le noir: Extrême droite et nationalisme en Russie* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2007); Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008); Marlène Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (London: Routledge, 2019); Thomas Parland, *The Extreme Nationalist Threat in Russia: The Growing Influence of Western Rightist Ideas* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004); Véra Nikolski, *National-bolchevisme et néo-eurasisme dans la Russie contemporaine: La carrière militante d'une idéologie* (Paris: Mare & Martin, 2013). Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds., *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–15* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga, eds., *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzlaner, eds., *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes, and Perspectives* (Boston: Brill, 2020).

conservatism as an ideological product that was formed over a period encompassing the late Soviet Union to contemporary Russia. In this respect, my research builds a bridge between the historiography of the late Soviet period and the literature on post-Soviet Russia.[18] Moreover, contrary to classic intellectual histories of Russian conservatism,[19] I draw on recent attempts to develop a method for the study of political ideas by combining a contextualist interpretation of discourses with an analysis of the social conditions of their production and circulation.

In the early 2000s, the American sociologists Charles Camic and Neil Gross defined this approach as the "new sociology of ideas."[20] Likewise, in France, a group of scholars has recently laid down the key principles for a new "social history of political ideas."[21] The social history of ideas builds on the historiographical movement formed by the Cambridge School in the 1970s. Representatives of this school have argued that ideas are not purely abstract constructions; rather, they "intervene" in specific historical contexts.[22] Quentin Skinner has particularly emphasized that understanding the meaning of ideas involves the identification of their argumentative context. The study of ideas, he argues, should reveal the "broader networks of beliefs"

[18] Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); James P. Scanlan, ed., *Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994); Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia Partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953–1985 gody* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

[19] Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Paul Robinson, *Russian Conservatism* (Ithaca, NY: Northern Illinois University Press, 2019); Glenn Diesen, *Russian Conservatism: Managing Change under Permanent Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

[20] Charles Camic and Neil Gross, "The New Sociology of Ideas," in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. Judith R. Blau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 236–49.

[21] Arnault Skornicki and Jérôme Tournadre, *La nouvelle histoire des idées politiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015); Chloé Gaboriaux and Arnault Skornicki, eds., *Vers une histoire sociale des idées politiques* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2017).

[22] Quentin Skinner, "Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts," in *Visions of Politics: Volume 1; Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 116.

and "intellectual frameworks" that form the discursive environment in which ideas occur.[23]

A key aspect of this method is to understand what authors were "doing in writing" by retrieving the intention and performative meaning of their discourse. This approach led me to look at the Soviet genesis of the ideas upheld by contemporary Russian hawks, whose lives and professional careers spread over the 1991 change in regime. Their ideology is based on a thread of ideas that has not been systematically theorized through a core set of works but is rather spread across a series of documents including newspaper articles, political manifestos, blog articles, doctrines, and essays. Most of these sources belong to the specifically Russian discursive genre of *publicistika*, which roughly translates as sociopolitical journalism. A central part of the analysis of these texts, therefore, includes the reconstitution of the broader discursive context composed by the articles and authors to which they referred and reacted.

Unlike the Cambridge School's essentially semantic definition of discursive contexts, however, I follow up on the sociological turn in the study of ideas that has also brought to the fore the social processes that shape the production and circulation of ideas. Based on the concept of field developed by Pierre Bourdieu, this sociology of ideas locates discourses within a social space of idea production, structured by specific rules and by the power relations between the groups that compete with each other for the distribution of the field's capital.[24] As Camic and Gross put it, idea producers are engaged in "historically specific struggles with one another" to establish their "legitimacy and respectability."[25]

In this respect, by contrast with studies based on a fixed definition of Russian conservatism as a stream of ideas maintained unchanged throughout history, I focus on the specific trend of Russian modernist conservatism as the doctrinal language of a group whose theoretical definition and relation toward other groups are evolving and contested.

[23] Quentin Skinner, "Introduction: Seeing Things Their Way," in *Visions of Politics: Volume 1; Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4–5.
[24] Pierre Bourdieu, "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur," *Les temps modernes* 246 (1966): 865–906; Pierre Bourdieu, "Le fonctionnement du champ intellectuel," *Regards Sociologiques* 17/18 (1999): 5–27.
[25] Camic and Gross, "New Sociology of Ideas," 248.