

A Reflection on Fears Concerning “Russian” Artificial Intelligence: Sources of Behaviour

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Having claimed that the leader in the sphere of artificial intelligence (AI) “will become the ruler of the world”, President Vladimir Putin has been cited for bringing AI “to the forefront of international politics” (Horowitz 2018: 45). It has been flagged that “Russian” AI has progressed “with most activity visible in the government, and especially the country’s military” (Bendett 2018: 160). Russia has been portrayed as the “most brazen supporter” of the arms race (Haner et al. 2019: 332-334). “Russian” AI has been associated with “implications both for ongoing global authoritarian learning concerning domestic information control, and for emerging new forms of information warfare and their potential global proliferation” (Kerr 2018: 56). The former has been described as “Russian digital authoritarianism”, an “alternative” to China’s model, and the related criticism has been that Russia “uses a myriad of multilateral bodies to advocate for [...] authoritarian ‘sovereignty’ over domestic information space” (Morgus 2018: 85-88).

Thus, three key fears in relation to international security and political world order can be discerned in association with “Russian” AI: *a race for leadership in the sphere of AI, a strong military(-informational) element and authoritarian sovereignty over information space*. This study goes beyond primitive articulations of such fears and offers their non-normative cultural-interpretive reading, i.e. interpretation of cultural patterns and connections for explaining behaviour interplays (McNabb 2004: 344-345). The concept of *strategic culture* is taken as the basis. Though it is a contentious concept, it is considered herein as a “context [...] divisible into a) national historical behaviour, and b) national character and identity” (Haglund 2004: 502). While there have been studies utilizing this concept to explain “what can often seem to be irrational Russian foreign and security policy decisions” (Eitelhuber 2009: 2) or tracing the “continuity of Russian strategic culture” (Ermarth 2006: 4), there lack insights into this problematic in light of AI. This study fills the gap by analyzing the discerned fears through the lens of Russian strategic culture and explaining the sources of Russia’s behaviour in the age of AI.

Inter alia, Russia’s aspiration for “leadership”, rather “becoming one of the world leaders” in the sphere of AI (Национальная стратегия 2019) is associated with the embeddedness of “the term ‘struggle’ (bor’ba)” in Russian strategic discourse (Adamsky 2018: 52) and “the principle of kto-kovo (literally ‘who-whom’)” in Russian political-military culture (Ermarth 2006: 6). Fundamentally, it is linked to Russia’s long-established objective to consolidate its “great power status” (Eitelhuber 2009: 6-8; Igumnova 2011: 257). The significance of AI for the provision of Russia’s “national security” (Национальная стратегия 2019) and “defence capability” (President of Russia.ru) is attributed to “the enormous importance of the military as an institutional base and legitimizing symbol of Russian statehood and power” (Ermarth 2006: 3-4), and especially to Russia’s deep-rooted mentality of a “besieged fortress” (Igumnova 2011: 264). All of this is discussed through the prism of Russia’s long history of internal conflicts and external military incursions (Eitelhuber 2009: 5). Particular importance of “informational struggle” for Russia is related to its complex conceptualization of “New Generation Warfare”

and its “holistic” (“kompleksnyi/sistemnyi”) intellectual tradition and strategy (Adamsky 2018: 40, 51). The importance of AI for the maintenance of “legal order” in Russia (Национальная стратегия 2019) is considered with regard to Russia’s “vast size and multi-ethnic nature,” “wide range of external and internal threats” and historical propensity for “autocratic leadership” (Eitelhuber 2009: 6-8). However, Russia’s domestic political regime is differentiated from China’s “authoritarian” regime and its model of “digital authoritarianism” (Wright 2018: 16). Russia’s principle of “informational sovereignty” (Adamsky 2018: 42) is linked to its traditional adherence to “the Westphalian principle of the absoluteness of sovereignty” (Igumnova 2011: 256-257).

The main conclusions of this study are as follows: (a) Russia’s behaviour in the age of AI can be attributed to political-strategic and socio-cultural factors that underwrite its strategic culture; (b) this testifies to the continuity of Russian strategic culture; (c) a better grasp of the sources of Russia’s behaviour in the age of AI helps more accurately evaluate its intensions and the implications for international security and political world order.

Источники и литература

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