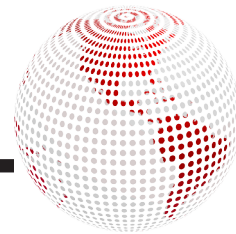


The Modern Foreign Policy of Russia



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Over the two decades of post-Soviet history of modern Russia, its foreign policy has gone through several distinct periods and long-term trends.

The periodization of the new Russia's foreign policy includes a "romantic" or "Kozyrev's" period, during which the leaders of a democratic Russia tried to integrate the country into a system of institutions and partnerships with the leading Western states. Kozyrev's departure from his post as foreign minister in January 1996 and the arrival of a new foreign minister, who would later become the Prime Minister, a "political heavyweight" of modern Russia Yevgeny Primakov, marked a change in the strategic direction of the country's foreign policy. The key definition of this period was "multipolarity."

The arrival of Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin in early 2000, marked a new stage in the development of Russia's diplomacy. At first it was characterized by attempts to build relations of partnership on an equal footing with Washington and NATO countries in the anti-terrorist coalition, and then, from about 2003, by a gradual build up of contradictions between Russia and the United States. During this period (2000-2008) a special feature of Russia's foreign policy was its increased assertiveness in relation to the neighboring CIS countries. After the election of Dmitry Medvedev as president in March 2008 Russia has been busy searching for a new strategy for its foreign policy, which would retain some of the achievements of previous periods, but would also be more cooperative toward the leading nations of the world. Such policy should create a favorable external climate for the modernization of Russia's political system and its national economy.

Russia's Foreign Policy – Basic Features

Despite some differences between these periods, two trends are constantly present in the foreign policy of the post-Soviet Russia.

The first is the desire to get integrated into the transatlantic community by joining Western institutions and taking a place worthy of Russia's status of a great power.

The second is the striving for a multipolar world where Russia would be one of the poles, negotiating on an equal footing with other centers of power in a traditional Realpolitik style. It is in trying to establish itself as one of the poles of world politics that Russia attaches importance to developing relations with countries in the post-Soviet space. Moscow has sought to retain the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS),

as well as to create in the framework of its "specialized" international associations the potential for cooperation and ability to copy over time the integration strategy of the European Union. Thus, Russia is seeking to strengthen the authority of the CIS and its structures, thus monopolizing the right to represent its interests on the international scene.

The trend towards integration and multilateralism in Russia's foreign policy has almost always operated in parallel, but the balance of power between them is constantly shifting. In the first half of 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century the first trend was predominant, while in the second half of 1990s and in recent years – the second trend took over. However, the predominance of one of the trends has neither ever been nor

is absolute now. Both trends are permanent, at times louder, at times fainter, but almost always closely intertwined. It should be noted that some modern Russian politicians do strive for multipolarity, considering it to be the most advantageous architecture of international security for Russia. Some other politicians, however, use this slogan as a means to wrestle from the West more favorable conditions for inclusion in the transatlantic community.

Such inconsistency in conducting the strategic line of Russia's foreign policy by the state leaders can be explained by three factors. First of all, Russia is undergoing a period of transition that is very difficult and painful, while at the same time it is currently still in the very initial stages of the long road to a free market economy and democracy.

Secondly, the fluctuations in the foreign policy of Russia are related not only to the fact that Russia's elite are fragmented and there are groupings with different economic interests, different political and ideological orientations, but also to the fact that the ruling group is convinced that Russia's advantage is in her ability to keep her hands free, maneuvering between the great nations and their blocks.

Thirdly, a significant impact on Russia is being made by a policy of ambiguity of other centers of power in contemporary international relations – the United States, the European Union, and the People's Republic of China. At times, the West exhibited a lack of attention to Russia, ignoring her views on some major international issues. Under these circumstances Russia is trying to respond to the challenges of her own safety on an ad hoc basis, especially when convinced that her legitimate interests are being disregarded by other states.

World economic crisis and Russia's diplomacy

The current global economic crisis has had an enormous impact on Russia and its politico-economic system. At the

early stage of crisis of 2008-09 Russia's elite was optimistic about the future of national economy. As Chairman of the State, Duma Boris Gryzlov stated, Russia will come out of the crisis stronger, while the United States and most European Union countries would be weakened. More cautious assessments were basically ignored. However, as the crisis unfolded, the mood in the ruling circles began to change. The speeches of President D. Medvedev stated quite clearly the thesis that the economy was at an impasse, that the crisis was systemic in nature and that immediate measures were required for a transition from a raw materials economy to a more innovative model of development. Therefore, the objective of foreign policy became the creation of favorable conditions for the modernization of the country.

It should be noted that none of the political elite or big business members has spoken openly against the appeal of the Russian President to modernize the state and the economy. However, much of Russia's upper stratum of society is quite happy with the status quo of Russia supplying raw materials to markets in developed countries. They are more in tune with the slogans of stability, which partially conceals nostalgia for the Soviet times, than with the call for modernization where their ability to compete should be constantly challenged. It is likely that this conflict will soon spread from the domestic sphere to the field of international relations. That is why a significant element of uncertainty will remain in the foreign policy of Russia for 2010.

An important indicator of Russia's readiness to introduce a qualitative change in the foreign policy will be her course of action toward the leading international organizations. In the nearest future Russia will be unlikely to vote for radical changes to the existing system of global intergovernmental organizations. Most domestic politicians and experts believe that Russia has more to lose than gain from such changes. First of

all it refers to the UN, which is still regarded in Russia as the leading international organization, the axial structure of the entire system of international relations and international law. Officially Russia supports the UN reform, but in practice, it seeks to delay the process, as any change in the composition and authority of UN institutions, including the Security Council, would reduce Russia's role in international affairs.

On the other hand, Russia will promote the role of the G-20 where she feels more at ease than in other similar clubs for sovereign states devoid of rigid rules of intergovernmental organizations and enforceable decisions. The G-20 has now become the most representative forum where the leading nations of the world discuss critical and pressing issues. That is what motivates Russia to actively participate in its work, and to advance her own initiatives or support the ideas, broached by others, that match the current stage of reforming the national politico-economic system. Russia's interest in the G-8, from our point of view, will be decreasing in the coming years. This will be happening primarily due to a significant difference in the status of the seven older members of the Group and Russia. All member-countries of the former G-7 are also parties to the leading Western institutions. They all enjoy a higher standard of living, a well-functioning system of democratic institutions, and their economies, unlike Russia's, do not heavily depend on the fluctuations in commodity

prices. The Russian ruling elites are chafing under the regular threats of exclusion from the G-8 and the miniscule impact that Russia exerts on the Group's activity and the process of taking key decisions. As the frustration with the G-8 rises, Russia's interest in other forums grows stronger, particularly in the BRIC. Surges of Russia's interest in this group almost always follow the appeals of political figures in the United States and the EU to exclude Russia from the G-8 as a form of punishment for her actions, both in domestic and foreign policy fields. However, the best of times within the BRIC are over for the Kremlin in 2010 – Russia's economy is in a much worse state than that in China, India, or Brazil. The gap between Russia and Brazil in terms of economic parameters of the GDP for 2009 is rapidly declining due to the incremental growth in Brazil and a steep fall of Russia's GDP by about 7.5 percent. At the same time there is a fast growing gap between the continuing rapid expansion of Chinese and Indian economies and recessionary socio-economic indicators in Russia.

The outflow of capital from its domestic market and a significant devaluation of the Ruble in the late 2008-early 2009 dealt significant blows to Russia's international prestige. The crisis has clearly demonstrated that Russia's economy is one-sided and depends on the export volume of oil and gas, and their prices in the world markets. The potential for sustainable economic growth driven by domestic demand remains extremely low in Russia.

Nonetheless, the crisis has not brought about a curtailing of Russia's presence in some regions of the world. On the contrary, Russia acted as a creditor and provider of financial assistance to some CIS States (Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) and intensified cooperation within the EurAsEC, Customs Union and the CSTO.

In 2010 Russia will continue negotiations to join the WTO that have unsuccessfully dragged on for over 15 years. The initiative proclaimed by Vladimir Putin on



Russian-Ukrainian relations have been strained as a result of Ukraine's Western ambitions

June 10, 2009 for Russia to accede to the WTO as part of the Customs Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, instead of each country joining the WTO separately, in our view, has no chance to be successfully implemented. In times of crisis Russia's ability to provide extensive assistance to Belarus and the desire to open its national market for industrial products from Kazakhstan is limited, as it would imply adverse consequences for Russian business. Thus, in the years to come Russia will have to continue negotiating individually on its accession to the WTO. However, until the end of the current global economic crisis and the return of Russia's economy on the path to sustainable growth, Russia will not make the decisive move to a full WTO membership, remaining the largest economy outside the world's liberal trade system.

U.S.-Russia Relations

So far, cooperation between Russia and the United States – the widely publicized “reset of relations” – has not moved beyond the strategic security issues: nuclear arms reductions and the establishment of regional or global missile defense systems. However, apart from issues of military security, there are many issues of bilateral relations which are still awaiting solutions.

In the early 2000s, a view that the bilateral agreements on nuclear arms reductions should be done away had become dominant in the United States. During the George W. Bush presidency, U.S. leaders seemed to believe that the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons could be ensured solely by U.S. efforts, without recourse to the mechanisms of multilateral diplomacy. Regime change in the so called “rogue states” became the main focus of attention, as well as the establishment of a new generation missile defense system able to neutralize the threat of nuclear attack.

It was thought that arms control could prevent the U.S. from opting to use military force when and where a threat to American

interests or the interests of its closest allies emerged. In addition, many pundits predicted the collapse of Russia's economy, the obsolescence of armaments and the gradual decline of Russia into a power of the third world. Russia's leaders had to go to great lengths to prove that the U.S. leaders were wrong in their views. Putin's Munich speech at the conference on European security in February 2007 became the most vivid example of such efforts. Over the past decade, Russia's armed forces were able to carry out successful flight tests of maneuverable strategic warheads, develop a new type of intercontinental ballistic missiles (R-24), etc.

Already back in 2008 it became clear that the G.W. Bush Administration's plans to push for regime changes or building a new generation of missile defense could not be implemented as scheduled. Thus, the new team in the White House has had to acknowledge the right of other states to develop their own models of democratic institutions and governance; at the same time, Russia has once again become an attractive partner for negotiations on nuclear arms reductions.

A series of events such as the March 2008 election of Dmitry Medvedev, a supporter of further liberalization of the politico-economic system, and the departure from U.S. public office of “hawks” such as Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice helped turn a new page in the bilateral relations. So far the U.S. and Russia have not been able to overcome the structural problem that has been hampering their relations during the entire period following the end of the Cold War. It lies in the fact that, despite good personal relations between the leaders of the two countries, the mutual understanding and willingness to cooperate inherent in the relationships between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton and Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush, Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama do not always cross to other levels of government. The track record of relations and negotiations

between the ministers, parliamentarians, regional leaders, representative of business circles and civil society is replete with conflicts and mutual distrust. The presence of mutual understanding and sympathy at the highest levels of state power not only made relations between Washington and Moscow predictable, and guaranteed the impossibility of a global conflict, but also entailed the possibility to keep up the tension even in those matters that could be relatively easily resolved.

Therefore, in 2010, the relations between Russia and the United States, in our opinion, will improve. Pushing the "Reset" button, promised by the administration of Barack Obama, will have a positive effect, although to a limited extent. Most likely, a mechanism of consultations and negotiations, agreed upon during the July 2009 Summit, will be created and will produce first results in 2010. However, most pressing challenges will linger on. The U.S.-Russia relations remain largely strategic and, to a great extent, depend on whether a new START agreement will be signed this year. Some controversy over the situation in the post-Soviet space appears to be abating; there are also prospects for converging views on the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs. Nevertheless, Russia's ruling elite will continue to react negatively to the fact that the U.S. cares less about its relations with Russia than Russia does about the relations with the United States. For the Russian political figures the relations with the United States remain the main concern just as during the Cold War, whereas for the United States these relations are no longer a priority. Thus, one should not expect a qualitative shift in Russo-American relations.

Russia will seek to consolidate its influence in the post-Soviet space. However, the main emphasis will not be placed on the CIS (the latter will increasingly become a club), but on such organizations as the CSTO, EurAsEC, and the Customs Union. Attempts to dislodge the US dollar from the foreign trade

transactions will continue, but the desire to prop up the Ruble will be sluggish due to Russia's own economic difficulties.

Great attention will be paid to the presidential campaign in Ukraine in 2010. This time Russia's tactic is likely to differ from that in 2004. Russia will not bet on any particular candidate, but will try to hamper the most unacceptable team (Viktor Yushchenko and his supporters) and negotiate with whoever wins the race.

Georgian-Ossetian conflict and its implications for Russia

As for the conflict between Georgia and its two breakaway regions, Russia took the position that only the Russian army could ensure the preservation of peace. Undoubtedly, for several years, from the time of attempts by leaders of the "Rose Revolution" of Georgia to solve the Ossetian and Abkhazian problems by military means back in 2004, the leadership of Russia had viewed the scenario of renewed hostilities in the region as quite probable. At the same time the status quo that existed before the August 2008 war, in general, suited Russia, since over time the political and economic position of Russia in the two regions had grown stronger. At the same time, the stalemate in the position of the parties over the years implied the decreasing of the already small chances of Georgia to restore its territorial integrity by gaining control over the territories of the two breakaway regions.

Thus, Russia's current policy toward Georgia and the conflict between Georgia and the two now independent countries (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) is based on several principles.

Firstly, the recognition of sovereignty of these states is final. Any review of it would be impossible for as long as the reason that prompted Russia to recognize their sovereignty is not removed. This reason is the precedent set by the United States in its recognition of Kosovo in February 2008.

Secondly, Russia's leaders will never

agree to a dialogue with Saakashvili and his closest associates. Having ordered the use of weapons against Russian peacekeepers, the Georgian President became a “political corpse” for Russia. This means that until 2013, as long as M. Saakashvili stays in office, there will be no diplomatic relations between Moscow and Tbilisi; some economic sanctions will also remain in place.

Thirdly, the conflict over the breakaway regions of Georgia significantly changed the balance of power in the Caucasus. It led to a noticeable decrease of the U.S. influence in the region, and forced Armenia and Azerbaijan to conduct a multi-vector policy, which includes expansion of energy cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan and the rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia.

The events of August 2008 can be regarded as a moment of birth of Russia’s peculiar “Sinatra Doctrine.” Under this “doctrine” Russia attempts to indicate the zone around its borders, toward which it will conduct its foreign policy without regard to the U.S., and where it is ready to use all means at its disposal preventing any further possibility that this territory could become a source of threat to its security.

Indeed, Russia among the great powers is “a hard case” for Washington. The United States and the European Union are tied together by an alliance and a common strategy in the international arena. The U. S. and China enjoy enormous trade relations that are reinforced in times of crisis by a shared interest

in the global monetary stability. The U.S. and India are brought together by common values of democracy, which allows resolving many issues of bilateral relations without undue politicization. By doing it “my way,” as the “Sinatra Doctrine” assumes, Russia displays its status of a regional power in Eurasia and tries to maintain an equal dialogue with the USA.

Conclusion

In the coming year Russia will preserve the main traits of its current foreign policy – the desire to maintain the status quo, both globally and in bilateral relations with Washington. Internationally, Russia’s primary mission, something that the current leadership pays great attention to, is to uphold the existing system of international law with a strong emphasis on respecting sovereignty and non-interference by states in the internal affairs of other states. At the same time, Russia will endeavor to give impetus to integration processes in the CIS. Its main objective is to achieve the status of the leader in the post-Soviet space and to attain a mandate to represent the interests of states within this space internationally. The resources of Russia’s diplomacy in 2010 will largely depend on the shape of its national economy. However, the implementation of the aforementioned two goals (maintaining the status quo and leadership in the post-Soviet space) will be a priority for Russia regardless of the state of its economy.

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“Medvedev, Putin and Tymoshenko.” Wikimedia. 31 Oct 2009. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Medvedev,_Putin_and_Tymoshenko.jpg