

The Current Foreign Policy of Russia

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Putin's Changing Strategy

Russian president Vladimir Putin decisively turned the tendency towards a balanced foreign policy into one of the main pillars of his general strategy. For him, this task was no more difficult in his second term than during his first. Back in 2000, he gained instant popularity that has remained the same through both his terms in office. His popularity rating has stayed well above 52 percent since then. Russians liked his tough approach toward Chechen terrorists including those who emigrated, his attractive personal qualities (youth, seriousness, dedication, intelligence, even his hobbies of judo and mountain skiing) and his determination to satisfy their increasing desire for order and a strong state after the chaos and lawlessness of the 1990s.¹ Putin's popularity, coupled with a degree of fear among segments of Russia's population over his past connection with the special services, resulted in a widespread consent to Putin's new rules of the game and his predominance in all spheres of politics, including foreign policy.

During his first term in office, Putin carried out an upgrading of national security, military and foreign policy concepts to ensure Russia's progress toward a multidirectional, balanced, and pragmatic external

¹ For an interesting analysis of Putin's ascent to power, see Lilia Shevtsova, "Power and Leadership in Putin's Russia," in *Russia after the Fall*, ed., Andrew C. Kuchins (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 62–78.

strategy. During his second term in office, Putin continued to implement his new policy without encountering any serious resistance at home. Addressing the Federal Assembly with his annual message at the start of that term, he said: “It is important to make the foreign policy serve the comprehensive development and modernization of the country.”²

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, a Putin appointee and an experienced diplomat thanks to his many years of service as the Russian representative to the UN and a convinced adherent of the multilateral approach in diplomacy, is best suited to pursuing “the new Russian course” in international affairs. After the Beslan school hostage crisis in September, 2004, he said that Russia saw terrorism as the main threat. At the fifty-ninth session of the UN General Assembly during “the days of Beslan,” Russia put forward a complex program for the development of antiterrorist cooperation.³

Beslan, the two civilian Tupolev airliners brought down in a “terrorist attack,” the unwillingness of Western partners to understand Russia’s concerns, and the growth of anti-Russian criticism concerning Chechnya, as well as the simultaneous increase in instability in the post-Soviet states along Russia’s borders have made Putin choose a hard line. In order to protect the citizens, it has been decided to direct all efforts at strengthening the unity of the country as the main condition for the protection of Russian sovereignty and integrity.

Despite the seriousness of these issues, the new Russian leadership realizes that Russia faces even more immediate and concrete threats and challenges from other directions: extremist Islamic support for Chechen and other separatists and terrorists in the Caucasus; the split of the Commonwealth of Independent States after the “color revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; Russia’s own difficulties with some CIS states (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova); and regional problems in its western part (Kaliningrad) because of the enlargement of the European Union to twenty-five members in May 2004 and in its eastern part, where there is rapid growth of China’s power coupled with increased

² *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, July 13, 2004.

³ Sergei V. Lavrov, “Pered litsom obshchei ugrozi,” *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik* 2004 (2005), 17–20.

immigration of Chinese nationals into sparsely populated and backward regions of Eastern Russia that China claimed as her own in the past.⁴

The sheer diversity, both in character and geography, of security challenges led the Kremlin to develop a multidirectional, balanced strategy. Given Russia's geostrategic position and economic situation, the Kremlin could not afford to plunge into a new Cold War with the West, which Russia needs both as a valuable partner for the political and economic modernization of post-Soviet Russia as well as a balance to counter numerous security problems, which ranged from the real threat of terrorism to the potential challenge of the Chinese giant in the East. At the same time, Moscow realized that close cooperation with China would prevent US and NATO hegemony in world affairs and rebuff Islamic extremism in the south. The CIS zone also required a balanced policy in order to overcome conflicts and instability there.

At the beginning of his presidency, Vladimir Putin also recognized that internal reforms and the modernization drive required "the widest possible integration of Russia into the system of global economic interactions."⁵ Russia still needs the West as a valuable source of technology, capital, and management know-how. However, Russia's leaders realized that in dealing with Western partners, Russia could not expect preferential treatment or easy concessions. Instead, Moscow faced stiff competition and tough bargaining on every economic issue. Putin also understood that the Russian Federation needed to increase economic cooperation in other directions. China and India looked attractive as markets for Russian weapons as well as civilian goods. Russia had to try to collect on debts owed by a score of Arab and African nations. CIS countries could develop into attractive economic partners of the Russian Federation.

The changes in conditions of the energy markets due to the prolonged military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have made the current oil price hike possible. Since 2004, Russia has been able to have a profit in her budget and in 2005, created a reserve of gold and hard currency

⁴ For details, see Evgenii P. Bazhanov, *Aktual'nye problemy mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii: izbrannye trudy v trekh tomakh*, tom 1 (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2001), 237–241, 277–288, 297–301.

⁵ *Kontseptsiiia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (28 iunია 2000)* (Moscow: Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, 2000), 4.

resources in her stabilization fund that as of November 1, 2006, had reached \$ 76.6 billion.⁶

During Putin's second term, it became possible to repay ahead of schedule Russia's debt to the Paris Club. This served as the basis for changes in the tactics of Russian diplomacy in international relations.

Putin continued his strategy to help Russia regain her "great power" position. He did not do this by renewing the confrontation with the US, which Moscow neither needed nor wanted and certainly could not afford. But the lowering of Russia's dependence on Western loans in 2005 and the breach by Western partners of their promise to renounce their discrimination against Russia in world trade (the preservation of the Jackson-Vanik amendment and America turning into the last obstacle to Russia's admission to the WTO) changed the situation.

The changes in Russian foreign policy during the last year have also been related to the domestic situation.

Putin's foreign policy generally garnered Russian popular support, partly because he usually received automatic endorsement by the majority of the population. But Putin's policy was rooted in the genuine needs of Russia and the prevailing mood of the society's elites. Nevertheless, liberals criticized Putin's excessive and unwarranted toughness vis-à-vis the West and "reaching out to those labeled by Washington as 'states of concern'—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Cuba, and North Korea."⁷ Liberals detected in the Kremlin's strategy a retreat into the past. Incidentally, conservatives and extremists saw such a retreat, too, but, unlike liberals, felt good about it.

Putin's aspiration to make Russian foreign policy more independent corresponds to the moods of the conservative part of the Russian elite ideologizing the Soviet past.

Former foreign minister of Russia and present-day president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Evgenii Primakov joyfully greeted the changes in Putin's course in international affairs. He wrote that "the

⁶ MDM Bank, *Ezhednevnyi obzor: rossiiskii fondovyi rynek*, November 2, 2006, <http://invest.mdmbank.ru/files/invest/analitd/20061102.pdf>.

⁷ For an illustration of such reservations, see Dmitri Trenin, "From Pragmatism to Strategic Choice: Is Russia's Security Policy Finally Becoming Realistic?" in Kuchins, *Russia after the Fall*, 187–191.

foreign policy in 2005 was successful in all directions including the American and the European ones.”⁸

Andrew Kuchins, Director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, claims that Putin is striving for partnership with Washington not as a junior partner meekly accepting US hegemony, but on an equal footing. To establish this equality, the Kremlin continues to strive for multipolarity.

“Similar to China, Russia is becoming one among few countries that will pursue an independent foreign policy course and play a significant role in a number of key regions—Europe, Northeast Asia, and the so-called Greater Middle East—the areas with predominantly Muslim populations southward from Russia.”⁹

As the foreign policy concept adopted on June 28, 2000 says, “Russia will seek the formation of a multipolar system of international relations adequately reflecting the multifaceted nature of the contemporary world with its diversity of interests.”

The Kremlin believed this position was necessary not only to satisfy Russia’s own ambitions, but also to guarantee world peace and security. From the Russian point of view, a unipolar world “may destabilize the international situation, provoke tensions and an arms race, and deepen both confrontations between states and ethnic and religious rivalry.”

Having adopted this multidirectional balanced external strategy, Putin is continuing to implement it. He regularly meets with US president George W. Bush, who is currently serving his second term in office. The Russian president intensively courts European leaders and strives to patch up relations with CIS countries. Putin is developing contacts with European leaders. He hurried to invite newly elected heads of state Angela Merkel and Romano Prodi to Russia and established contacts with the new leaders of former Soviet allies in Eastern and Central Europe and the leader of the Canadian conservatives who won the elections in January 2006.

On the other side of the globe, Putin energetically promoted ties with China and India and hosted in Russia the leader of North Korea, a former Soviet ally. He also welcomed Iranian and new Palestinian leaders in Moscow.

⁸ *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 1–2 (2006): 5.

⁹ Andrew Kuchins, “Moskva na pereput'e vetrov s Zapada i Vostoka,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, December 26, 2005.

In reality, Putin did not want to turn back. He did not want to distance Russia from the West. The Russian president remained eager to promote partnership with the West, including the US, but on an equal footing, that would preserve to the extent possible Russia's great power status and interests and retain good relations with other parts of the world and individual countries.

The second Bush administration in Washington was not ready to accommodate the Kremlin's aspirations. It appeared to Moscow that conservative Republicans came to the White House determined to undo Clinton's foreign policy, including its Russian component. The Bush administration criticized Russia for its alleged strengthening of authoritarianism, state regulation of the economy, and control over nongovernmental organizations. As usual, the US president was ready to talk to Russia on topics he considered important (like nonproliferation and arms control), but simply disregarded Moscow's opinions and priorities in other areas.¹⁰

In general, the Republican White House held a rather negative view of Russia. Washington disliked Putin's background, his political entourage, and his attempts to curb the freedom of the media and to recentralize the country. It appeared to Washington that Moscow was maneuvering itself for a new round of geopolitical competition with Cold War era overtones.¹¹

Russia's Goals in the Post-Soviet Space

Changes in Russian foreign policy became known in 2005. A series of "color revolutions" in neighboring countries of the CIS (the last one happened in Kyrgyzstan) have as their consequence the aspiration of the new elites to integration without Russia's participation.

It has become known that the victorious opposition received financial support from the West. Some of the new leaders took an anti-Russian position. They started a rapprochement with the US and Europe and started moving toward joining NATO.

¹⁰ See Gennadii Gerasimov, "W. i ego komanda: dalek on ot Moskvyy i ee problem," *Novoe vremia*, 2001, no. 7: 31–34.

¹¹ Nikolai Zlobin, "Khuzhe kholodnoi voiny," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, May 12, 2006.

In order to make his position clear, President Putin in his annual message to the Federal Assembly accused the West of double standards and paid much attention to the question of strengthening cooperation with the republics of Central Asia. He expressed in much stronger terms Russia's dissatisfaction with the US's allegedly anti-Iran and anti-DPRK missile defense plans and actions, NATO enlargement closer to Russian borders, Western attitudes toward Iran's nuclear program and the situation in Kosovo, EU treatment of Russia in the energy field, US global unilateralism in general and other issues at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on February 10, 2007, where leading political and military representatives of 26 NATO member countries were present.¹²

It looks like a reorientation towards the East, but in reality, it is just a balancing of the multivectoral policy.

Using the resources available, Russia is striving to preserve her influence in the neighboring states. It is the geopolitical aspect of Russia's foreign policy.

The Russian leadership declared that it was in favor of a diversification of its customers and has begun using her energy resources to turn Russia into "a great energy power." It is very important for Moscow to restore Russia as a global center of power that needs the appropriate surrounding.

Russia will not return to her imperial policy of the past, but operates in the sphere of her prevalent interests by economic means of strengthening her influence. Former Soviet republics have been losing their Russian preferences. The CIS has become internally unstable. Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have created the Union of Democratic Choice and orient themselves only to the US and the EU.

Of eleven CIS member countries, Russia has only five allies that are members of either one or both the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC). They are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In November 2005, Russia concluded a treaty of alliance with Uzbekistan.¹³

¹² See Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," February 10, 2007, Munich, *President of Russia Official Web Portal*, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118135.shtml.

¹³ See more details in Sergei Lavrov, "ODKB protiv global'nykh i transgranichnykh ugroz: iskluchitel'noe interv'iu ministra inostrannykh del RF S. Lavrova," *Zhurnal*

These are pragmatic alliances based only on the coincidence of interests, not on a sense of common destiny.

The nature of a political regime in an allied state is of no relevance to the Russian leadership. During the “color revolutions,” the troops at the Russian bases did not interfere in the events in Georgia. Instead, Russia acted as an intermediary in the wake of political crises.

Russia’s political resources in the post-Soviet space are not depleted and she can compete with her main rivals in the struggle for influence—the US, the European Union, and China. These resources are based on the economic and civilizational and cultural attractiveness of Russia. She can live without exploiting her partners’ resources, but rather can share with them her own resources and act as a leader of economic modernization and a guarantor of the security of the common space.

Some of Russia’s partners perceive the shift in world prices as a form of economic pressure. However, it is just the result of their refusal to have close allied relations with Russia that is providing the opportunity to disencumber themselves from Russian guardianship and to act without the support they are accustomed to. In the future, they will have to look for new patrons in the West.

The turn of Russia’s interests toward Eurasia makes her policy in the Asia-Pacific region especially important.

Russia in the Asia-Pacific Region

Developing good relations with the Asia-Pacific region (APR) is another important goal for Russian foreign policy. Moscow’s priorities there are to protect her national security; use the region’s potential to develop Russia’s economy; consolidate multipolarity in international relations; and advance Russia as a respected pole of influence in international relations.¹⁴

The current situation in the APR appears beneficial to Russian interests: there are no hostile blocs or states; Russia is not directly

Voennyi diplomat, 2006, no. 2: 23–27.

¹⁴ See Aleksei D. Voskresenskii, ed., *Vostok/Zapad: regional’nye podsistemy i regional’nye problemy mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 81–104, 370–380, 451–492.

involved in local conflicts; and the Russian Federation is welcomed as a participant in the political and economic life in the APR.¹⁵

However, Russia's foreign policy must respond to various problems in the region that have an impact on Russian interests. The most visible and potentially most destructive problem is the deepening gap in economic development between eastern Russia and her neighboring Asian states. If Russia fails to improve the economic situation in Siberia and her Far Eastern reaches, her neighbors will sense the weakness and begin to exert demographic and economic pressure. Russia cannot single-handedly overcome economic backwardness and must rely on assistance from foreign partners.

At the same time, Russia must develop an understanding of the problems that confront her Asian neighbors: diminished natural resources, environmental degradation, overpopulation, terrorism, drug trafficking, unemployment, and deadly diseases are all problems that transcend the region's national borders. Finding solutions will require international cooperation.

Regional "hot spots," particularly the Korean and Taiwan issues and disputes over islands in the South China Sea, form the second group of problems. Moscow's approach to all such problems is identical and straightforward: she encourages all relevant parties to search for a peaceful, orderly solution to differences. The same position is taken towards the Russian-Japanese dispute over the South Kurile Islands.

The third set of APR problems is connected with the proliferation of nuclear weapons, particularly the nuclear programs of India and Pakistan. Russia also strongly opposes North Korea's missile and nuclear ambitions. She insists on a peaceful settlement in all these cases.¹⁶

Finally, the possibility of an arms race and increased tensions among leading Pacific powers (China, Japan, and US) raises a fourth set of problems. The Kremlin believes this rivalry can be toned down through improved multinational security and economic mechanisms.¹⁷

¹⁵ For details, see Evgenii P. Bazhanov, ed., *Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskii region v usloviakh globalizatsii* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2001), 4–23, 67–82, 136–151, 219–232.

¹⁶ For details, see Bazhanov, *Aktual'nye problemy mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii*, tom 2, 54–57.

¹⁷ Vladimir Fedotov, *Perspektivy formirovaniia sistem mnogostoronnei bezopasnosti v Severo-Vostochnoi Azii* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2003), 67–85.

As for individual countries in the region, Russia's interests focus on China, Japan, and the two Korean states. Russian-Chinese relations have developed into a strategic partnership, and are characterized by both sides as "the best in their entire history." This development has been shaped by a combination of factors: the two sides have learned the bitter lessons of past confrontations; they have managed to solve some long-standing historical disputes over territory and concentration of troops on their common border; they have overcome political-ideological differences and feel an affinity as reforming societies in need of a peaceful, external environment; and they are economically interdependent. Common concerns in the international arena, including similar views on multipolarity, hegemonism, and the UN role, are also powerful driving forces behind the Russian-Chinese partnership.¹⁸

Difficulties still crop up in Russian-Chinese relations. One irritant is the growing number of Chinese immigrants moving into Russia's sparsely populated and economically backward Far East. Another potential problem may result from the changing balance of power between Russia and China. For the first time in modern history, China may become stronger than her northern neighbor. If this possibility materializes, the PRC may exert geopolitical pressure on a weakened Russia. Such worries are already being voiced in Moscow.¹⁹

Japan, unlike China, does not ignite such worries in Russian society. Indeed, Russians perceive Japan favorably and are impressed by the quality of Japanese goods and achievements in science and technology. Moreover, Moscow sees Japan's independent and strong position as a balance against the US and China. Moscow also envisions Japan as one of the most important future economic partners of the Russian Federation in the Far East.²⁰

In 2005, Russia and Japan celebrated the hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of official relations between the two countries. President Putin's visit to Japan in November 2005 became

¹⁸ For details, see Dzhamil' Akhmedovich Asfari, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnosheniia: realisticheskii vzgliad na ikh istoriiu, sovremennoe sostoianie i perspektivy* (Moscow: Diplomaticeskaiia akademiia, 1999), 50–71.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Vasilii Mikheev and Iakov Berger, *Problemy i perspektivy razvitiia Kitaia* (Moscow, 2003), 14–16..

²⁰ See Patoh Shodiev, *Iaponia v sovremennom mire* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2001), 82–122.

another step forward in the development of bilateral relations. His negotiations with the Japanese prime minister resulted in the signing of a package of eighteen documents on economic, humanitarian, security, and other cooperation. At a press conference, the president of Russia said in particular that “much attention was being paid to the problem of a peace treaty . . . Both Russia and Japan are unanimous in their opinion that the solution to this issue should be sought on the basis of partnership and mutual respect and mutual trust . . . At the same time, we realize that the settlement of such complex problems will hardly be easy. It will require goodwill, farsightedness, and statesmen’s thinking.”²¹

On the Korean Peninsula, Russia maintains close and relatively problem-free links with South Korea. As for North Korea, Moscow opposes military or “strangulation” policies, which she believes would have negative consequences for the APR and global security. In the new century, Russia has somewhat improved her relations with North Korea that were practically frozen after the collapse of the USSR. At the same time, the Kremlin insists that North Korea permanently renounce her nuclear ambitions in exchange for genuine security guarantees.²² Russia actively participates in the six-party talks on these problems and welcomes any steps that may lead to a rapprochement between the North and the South, particularly the restoration of the Trans-Korean Railroad that, if linked to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, could bring benefits to the Russian economy, too.

The demand for energy and other resources and the economic growth of China, Japan, South Korea, and India increasingly stimulate the development of the Russian economy and are attractive objects for it. Russia has to step up her activities in the eastern direction of her foreign policy. The growth of Asian economies and the redistribution of power in the world are increasing the chances for the creation of the real multipolarity that Russia aspires to.

Considering the role and place of Russia in the Asia-Pacific region, one cannot but pay attention to its participation in APEC. APEC is a very

²¹ Statements to the press and questions and answers by president of Russia Vladimir Putin and prime minister of Japan Koizumi Junichiro following the completion of the Russo-Japanese negotiations at the highest level, Tokyo, November 21, 2005; see www.mid.ru.

²² See Iurii E. Fokine, ed., *Piatyi Rossiisko-koreiskii forum* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2004).

important forum where meetings of the highest-level representatives of Russia, China, Japan, the US, the ROK, and many other countries take place. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is another forum that offers such unique opportunities, and the end of 2005, saw the first-ever participation of the Russian president to be followed by his visit to the APEC summit in Hanoi in November 2006. These developments show that Russia is increasingly active in building complex relations with all leading Asia-Pacific actors and the creation of an intertwined network of organizations and arrangements in the region.

The Impact of the War in Iraq on the Russian Position

The crisis in Iraq has not significantly changed Russia's foreign policy toward Asia, although she has increased attention to "hot spots" in an effort to settle disputes peacefully on the basis of collective efforts of all parties involved. In 2002–2003, during the Afghan campaign, Russia provided the coalition forces and the US military with secret data and maps of minefields, rendered diplomatic support, and gave her own resources to help deploy US military bases in Central Asia. Yet, the interaction encountered unwillingness to take into account Russia's interests. Hopes for an improvement in relations with the West proved to be futile. Another stage of NATO's eastward enlargement began in late 2002, which is a disputable and touchy theme for a Russian society that has not lost the momentum-generated vision of the Alliance as an enemy. In 2003, Russia sided with France and Germany when it opposed the US military intervention in Iraq without UN backing.

In the summer of 2005, the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) demanded that the US set deadlines for the withdrawal of US military forces from Central Asia. Uzbekistan's leader, frightened by the Western condemnation of his methods of suppression of riots in Andijan, managed to make the US troops leave his country. Andrew Kuchins called this a joint victory for Russia and China as the leading members of the SCO and "the first weakening of US influence in the region where their geopolitical consolidation has been going on for two decades."²³

²³ Kuchins, "Moskva na pereput'e vetrov s Zapada i Vostoka."

Western political scientists often call the Shanghai Cooperation Organization an “anti-NATO” organization. India and Pakistan, as well as Iran and Mongolia, were represented at the SCO summit on June 15, 2006 in Shanghai. Also, a contact group with Afghanistan was created. President Putin said in an interview that since the creation of the SCO on June 15, 2001, it had “rapidly gained weight and turned into an influential organization and an important element of stability in the Eurasian space.”²⁴ Even before the 9/11 attacks, the SCO leaders favored the creation of a regional antiterrorist structure, as they encountered international bands of terrorists in their own territories. At the same time, Russia and China see this region as “a sphere of their interests” and both are interested in regional stability.²⁵

The war in Iraq put pro-Western opposition into motion. Moscow, Beijing, and the Central Asian states are worried that the fire of the “color revolutions” might bring about instability and a loss of legitimacy. Geopolitics is returning to Eurasia. Changes in the balance of power are accompanied by the return of the ideological component in China-Russia-US relations. The SCO leaders implement solutions to their concerns through firm resistance to the actions of the US and Europe for the promotion of democracy, which are starting to look like an export of their ideology in world affairs.

Not opposing openly the idea of democratization, Russia offers its own version of “sovereign democracy.” She insists on the preservation of national traditions that sometimes do not coincide with American or West European traditions. Russia urges “letting the apple become ripe.” She stands for a gradual development of democratic institutions in the countries of Eurasia. The thrust of the US and Europe in “the promotion of democracy” is dangerous, because it serves as a basis for new alliances in the countries that propose gradual steps.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization declares its goal to confront terrorism. The US and the US-initiated antiterrorist coalition in Iraq do the same. It would seem that a joining of efforts could provide security for the whole “Southern belt” of Eurasia and the whole Greater Middle East.

²⁴ Vladimir Putin, “ShOS – novaia model’ uspehnogo mezhdunarodnogo sotrudnichestva,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, June 15, 2006.

²⁵ See “Deklaratsiia piatiletiia Shankhaiskoi organizatsii sotrudnichestva,” *Problemy Dal’nego Vostoka*, 2006, no. 4: 9–12.

However, the aspiration of Russia's Western partners to speed up the "proliferation of democracy" and to support opposition in the post-Soviet states is causing fears that the war against terror might turn into a struggle for the West to gain new spheres of influence.

Partly due to negative objective circumstances and partly through her own fault, Russia has lost her former allies. Now, she is mobilizing all available resources to preserve her partnership with the oil- and gas-rich Central Asian states. This region is turning into an area of great importance for Russia. On the other hand, the reaction of Moscow to the events in Iraq and Central Asia is transforming into an aspiration to increase her control over the internal politics there under the slogan of consolidation against outside forces. Some Western public opinion sees this as a threat to democracy and urges its leaders to put pressure on Moscow, thus increasing Russia's impression of outside threats. The circle becomes complete. Mutual distrust becomes stronger.

But for Russia, it is very important that the war in Iraq caused discord in the camp of the Western allies and touched upon the fundamental issue of international relations. Sharp discussion on the question of forceful unilateral action without UN approval has cast doubts on the traditional principles of the world order. For Russia, these discords between her European partners and the US have had extremely negative consequences. Russia is the staunchest advocate of the UN. She stands for a careful attitude to its reform and for preservation of universally recognized traditions.

The meeting at the summit in Shanghai between President Putin and the leader of Iran, labeled a "terrorist state" by US vice president Richard Cheney, again showed that notions of terrorism are very different. The role of the UN in the definition of terrorism and in the legitimacy of any actions against terrorism has become greater. Organizations with the goal of fighting terrorism should unite different countries.

President Putin notes in his article published in China, India, Pakistan, and Iran that "a spirit of Shanghai" has taken shape and that the organization demonstrates an example of equal partnership of states with cultural and civilizational differences and accumulates the experience of interaction with new observer countries.²⁶ Historically, Iran is similar to

²⁶ Putin, "ShOS – novaia model' uspešnogo mezhdunarodnogo sotrudnichestva."

Iraq in terms of “difficulty” of dealing with, but efforts to engage Iran in discussion without the threat of military intervention are very important.

In the opinion of former Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov, the Iraq crisis confirmed that the period of transition to a new world order is inadmissibly delayed and that this has led to permanent instability.²⁷ There has hardly ever been another period with so many unresolved crises existing simultaneously.

Russia is striving to create such a world order in which every state will bear its share of responsibility for the future of mankind, and the world community in its turn will safeguard the lawful interests of each of its members. The Russian principle of multipolarity is prosperity and security through international interaction and the preservation of national identity.²⁸

The majority of experts are sure it is possible to solve the problem of Iraq through joint efforts and to prevent US-Russian relations from deteriorating.

US-Russia Relations

Conservative forces in the administration of George W. Bush and the “patriots” in the Russian establishment think equally in the category of the zero-sum-game rivalry typical of Cold War times. However, both presidents still adhere to a policy aimed at the creation of partnership-like relations, although they make concessions to critical public sentiments in their countries. The US reoriented its foreign policy to the struggle against terrorism and recognized Russia as a very valuable partner. Russian-US relations, now united by the common goal of fighting international terrorism, began to ascend to new heights.

However, the Iraq crisis provoked new tensions between the two partners. Moscow felt that it was unadvisable and extremely dangerous to use force to provoke regime change without the backing of the United Nations. From the Russian point of view, if “rule of the fist” becomes the

²⁷ Igor Ivanov, “Novyi vneshnepoliticheskii god dlia mira i Rossii,” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 2003, no. 9–10: 10–17.

²⁸ Ivanov, “Novyi vneshnepoliticheskii god dlia mira i Rossii.”

norm, then the world will again slide to chaos, war, and finally, global conflict.²⁹

Now it is Washington's turn to believe in the victorious might of its ideology. The earlier, hegemonic-messianic motives have been augmented by calls for vengeance and a determination to guarantee the absolute security of America.³⁰ Such policies, as historical experience proves, lead to the formation of a united antihegemonic front, and then large-scale conflicts erupt. What will the outcome be this time? Antihegemonic ideas have already surfaced in various countries.³¹

And yet, Russia's leadership believes that the twenty-first century will not witness a repetition of past scenarios. First, the US has already felt negative repercussions of its coercive imposition of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Difficulties will continue to grow. Second, domestic opposition to the US government's hegemonic policies is already growing. The US is a democratic country. For many politicians and citizens, a foreign policy fraught with violations of international law and human sacrifices is unacceptable. Third, Washington lacks sufficient financial resources to pay for *Pax Americana*.

Fourth, and this is probably the main factor, the sheer number and scale of challenges in the modern world make it absolutely impossible for any one state, even one as powerful as the US, to handle them alone. To successfully counter the multitude of threats—terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, regional, local, and internal conflicts, to mention a few—the international community must develop a close and equal partnership led by the United Nations and other multinational bodies and based on international law. As the authoritative diplomatic yearbook, *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik*, published by the Russian Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy, put it, “in our globalizing world, any seemingly insignificant problem in any least important country rushes beyond local borders and undermines international stability through the influx of refugees, terrorist attacks, drug

²⁹ See, for example, Alexandr Sentiabrev, “Irakskii urok – 2003,” *Obozrevatel'*, 2003, no. 6: 45–51.

³⁰ See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: President of the US, 2002), 5–6.

³¹ Evgenii Bazhanov, “Amerika na rasput'e: so vsemi ili protiv vsekh?” *Rossiiskaia Federatsia segodnia*, 2003, no. 11: 58.

trafficking, thefts of nuclear materials, and disruption of transportation and communication links.”³²

Moscow concludes that “despite the growing urge of Washington to achieve unilateral hegemony and to turn other members of the global society into ‘junior partners,’ the realities of modern times push and will continue to push the United States toward more realistic and reasonable cooperative policies.”³³

Russia certainly takes all this into account in determining her own strategy in the international arena and recognizes that the majority of problems that the US tries to solve are equally important to Russia. While the US cannot handle all these problems alone, the Russian Federation in turn urgently needs to cooperate with the US not only in the field of foreign policy but also in order to achieve its internal goals—creating an effective market economy and a sustainable democracy.

Consequently, Russian leadership acknowledges that the US, not as the predominant leader but as the most developed and influential state, plays the world’s most important role in securing global economic progress and political stability.³⁴ “We all depend on the US . . . but the US, and this is the peculiarity of the contemporary globalizing world, increasingly depends on others. There are hundreds of links that bind US and Russia into one system, making them hostages to each other’s stability and prosperity.”³⁵ Moscow will undoubtedly continue its strategy of cooperation with Washington while arguing against hegemonism.

Russia and Europe

President Putin stressed at the ambassadors’ meeting at the Foreign Ministry of Russia on July 12, 2004, that “Europe remains one of our traditional priorities.”

Russia’s relations with Europe have a much longer history than her contacts with the United States. These relations have been controversial, embracing both cooperation and competition, and at times hostility.

³² *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik*, 2003, 22–23.

³³ *Diplomaticheskii ezhegodnik*, 24.

³⁴ Viacheslav Nikonov, “Rossiia v poiskakh mesta v mire,” *Vestnik*, 2001, no. 2: 21–25.

³⁵ See Evgenii Bazhanov, “Neizbezhnost’ mnogopoliusnogo mira,” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’*, 2003, no. 8: 51.

Russian society was permanently split into Westernizers and Slavophiles. While the Westernizers pushed for the full integration of Russia into Europe, the Slavophiles saw an alien and menacing civilization in Europe. They wanted to distance Russia from the West and orient the country toward the East. Russia's debate over her European connections is not over. Similarly, Europeans have not yet completely shed their historical fears and distrust of the giant to the east.³⁶

Another obstacle to improved Russian-European relations is posed by geopolitical differences. Russia is a Eurasian country geographically, but culturally, it belongs to Europe. This is partly thanks to the formation of Russia as a great power as well the European civilization proliferating its influence in the great geographic space reaching the Asia-Pacific region and the shores of Japan, China, and Korea.

Russia has a long history as a great power and will not be satisfied with a minor, second-rate role on the European scene. NATO's expansion will not improve Russia's stature, but at the same time, Russia cannot join NATO: powerful neighbors in the East, particularly China, would vehemently oppose Russia's alliance with the Western military bloc. India, Iran, and Arab countries would also lose much of their confidence in Russia. Suspicions of a conspiracy ("European," "Christian," "White Race," etc.) will grow.

NATO members, for their part, would not welcome Russia as one of their own. Russian membership would be counter to US interests since the US does not want any competitors to its primary role in the alliance. Europe's leading powers (Germany, France, and Great Britain) also harbor apprehensions about Russia's presence within the alliance. As for NATO's East European members, Russian membership would negate the purpose of their own partnership in the alliance. Further, NATO as a whole is wary of the China factor: should problems develop on the Russian-Chinese border, NATO would have—at least legally and formally—to side with Russia if she were its member. The same concerns apply to Russia's conflicts with separatists and extremists in the South. Such a prospect would not appeal to NATO members.

³⁶ For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Nikolai P. Shmelev, ed., *Evropa: vchera, segodnia, zavtra* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 2002), 13–138, 355–388, 481–499, 564–588, 719–736.

NATO enlargement through incorporation of CIS countries spells nothing good for Russia. The intense mutual distrust and suspicion accumulated during the forty years of confrontation makes Russia wary. Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO would mean a growing dependence of her former allies on the NATO decision-making system both in the political and military spheres.

Russia strives for the creation of a Greater Europe united on the basis of common values and the capability to defend them jointly and to resolve regional conflicts (including the “frozen” conflicts in the Balkans, Cyprus, or the post-Soviet space). But it is important to take into account the concerns of all parties. Imposition of variants of fast settlement and forceful pressure is counterproductive as it creates new hotbeds of tension and security risk.

Political-ideological problems also impede closer relations between Russia and Europe. Russia is in the initial stages of building a democratic society. Communists and nationalists who preach undemocratic and anti-Western ideas are prominent in public discussion. Russian officials pursue policies that add to Europe’s anxieties: Chechnya, controls over the mass media, the centralization of political power, and increased supervision over foreign-sponsored nongovernmental organizations, although all these restrictions and controls can be found in the West, too, especially after the 9/11 attacks.

Western criticism cuts to the quick in Russia. Authorities believe that their attempts to safeguard the Russian Federation and to prevent the collapse of the state are purposely opposed by unfriendly forces in the West in order to weaken Russia and to provoke her disintegration.³⁷

Hurdles also remain in economic interactions between Russia and the West. Russia’s fledgling economy creates misunderstandings, tensions, and disputes with Europe over a range of issues that include quality control, pricing, customs duties, and ecological standards. Her economic problems preclude Russia’s entry into the European Union.³⁸ Russia perceives that it encounters discrimination in some European markets,

³⁷ See, for example, President Putin’s interview on Russian TV Channel 1, November 7, 2003.

³⁸ See Gaga Ediberidze, “Integratsionnye protsessy i problemy bezopasnosti v Evrope” (dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk, Diplomaticheskaiia Akademiia MID RF, 2002), 112–129.

while members of the European business community do not yet find Russian markets sufficiently attractive or safe enough for investment.

Russian foreign minister Lavrov said after his meeting with members of the Committee on International Affairs of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on May 18, 2006 that realization of the four “roadmaps” of common spaces would help Russia to conclude a new treaty on partnership with the European Union to replace the expiring agreement. Russia and Europe are not only economic partners, but they also traditionally compete in some areas of trade and economic relations.

Social problems exacerbate economic problems. Corruption and crime scare Europeans away from Russia. Moreover, Russia “exports” criminal elements to Europe and serves as a transit route for the drug trade and illegal immigration from the east. Because of these fears, the problem of Russian access to Kaliningrad and visa requirements in general have become a matter of conflict between Russia and other European states.

Despite these obstacles, there is a great potential for a deeper partnership between Russia and Europe. The most important contributing factor is Russia’s strategy for development.

Globalization makes it impossible for Russia to isolate herself and to embark on any new extravagant social experiment in an attempt to develop along some “third path,” that is, neither capitalism nor communism, which some proponents of its exaggerated uniqueness preach and which would be bound to lead Russia to third-world country status. Leading centers of the contemporary world, notably the West, China, India, and Southeast Asia are becoming increasingly interdependent and are continuing to forge ahead in all spheres. If Russia does not cooperate with this process of globalization, she may simply collapse.

As Russia’s economic and political values align increasingly with the realities of the globalizing world, Russia and Europe will share more security priorities. Russia will accommodate herself to a more definite role in the world. After this, Russia’s uneasiness over NATO’s possible new steps toward expansion will surely diminish, while the European countries will no longer depend on NATO as a shield against Russia. Military deterrence and the balance of power calculations will fade away from the agenda of Russian-European relations.

The two sides are already beginning to realize that they have more in common in their security needs than ever before. They face the same

threats, which require joint countermeasures. Sooner or later, they will create a comprehensive security system for the entire Eurasian continent, encompassing Europe, Russia, and perhaps even China, Japan, and a unified Korea. Russia will become an indispensable partner in this process.

Economic interdependence will also grow. With the Middle East unstable and conflict, Russia will most certainly reinforce her position as a principal supplier of oil and gas to the West. The West and Russia will forge cooperative efforts in the extraction, delivery, refining, and distribution of energy supplies in Siberia, the Caspian Sea, and the Russian Far East. Considering Russia's rich deposits of many other raw materials, Russian-European economic cooperation has endless vistas. As market reforms progress, Russia will eventually be a lucrative target for investments in other areas—from information technologies and science to banking and industry and environmental tourism, and even agriculture (Russia still owning a very sizable share of the world's fertile land) remains promising despite the grave consequences of Russia's mindless social experiments over its peasants in the past.

Economic progress will lead to social progress. Unemployment and widespread corruption will decrease the way it happened in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. There are already some signs that the much-criticized consolidation of power in Russia is not such a bad thing. According to Russian prosecutor general Iurii Chaika, by December 2006, as many as thirty-five thousand officials at all levels of authority “were caught red-handed,” that is, various kinds of legal action had been initiated against them.³⁹ Russia hopes these measures will help suppress routes of illegal immigration and the drug trade and crush organized crime.

To accomplish these tasks, Russia needs European cooperation, and this has already begun to develop in Afghanistan and Central Asia, where Russian-European cooperation is already under way to suppress the drug trade and illegal immigration.

As the social situation and standards improve, barriers to travel and to the movement of labor and students will begin to fall. The Schengen visa agreement will expand to include Russia, and it will help to promote further cultural ties. More and more Russian students will study in Europe and gradually, Russia's political and economic elites will consist of those who studied in Europe and understand and share its values.

³⁹ *Izvestiia*, December 7, 2006.

The process of Russian-European accommodation will develop gradually and experience ups and downs. This partnership will not result in Russia's full incorporation into the Western community. Because of her history, size, power, level of development, geography, security, and economic requirements, Russia will remain a separate entity, a bridge between the West and the East.

Moscow's Interests in the Middle East

Due to the Middle East's vast human and natural resources as well as its geography, the region is strategically important to world peace and the world economy. For this reason alone, it is attracting Russia's attention. The proximity of the Middle East to Russia is further focusing Moscow's attention on protecting four broad areas of interest.

First of all, the security of Russia depends on the security of the Middle East. Any disturbance to the peace and stability of the region may undermine Russia's security, draw her into destructive conflicts, or damage her economic interests. Moscow must also assure that the states, movements, and citizens of the Middle East maintain a positive attitude towards the Russian Federation and not threaten Russia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, or internal peace.

Second, Russia has political goals in the Middle East. She wants to work closely with all states in the region to pursue peace and cooperation, solve global problems, and create a stable, multipolar international system.

The third aspect of Russia's Middle East policy is economic. The Russian government intends to actively participate in extracting Caspian oil and exporting it to world markets. Russia also needs access to the energy resources of the Persian Gulf and other parts of the Middle East. Russia wants to export technology and goods to the Middle East as well as to import their products and attract Middle Eastern investors to the Russian economy. And, of course, Moscow would also like to recover huge debts from Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

Another aspect of Russia's interest in the Middle East is cultural. Russia's Muslim population numbers over twenty million. Moscow must find a path that facilitates religious, spiritual, and ethnic contact between

the peoples of Russia and the Middle East, yet must steer away from any negative political consequences.⁴⁰

To promote Russian interests in the Middle East, Moscow needs to give attention to resolving outstanding security threats. Islamic extremism and international terrorism present the most pressing and dangerous problems. Members of extremist groups penetrate the territory of the Russian Federation, fight in Chechnya, smuggle in weapons and money, recruit local youth, and preach separation of Muslim areas from Russia. Russia will join with the US, international organizations, and other governments in the region to eradicate terrorism and will intensify her efforts to tackle terrorism's root causes: poverty and social injustice.

The Israeli-Arab conflict must also be resolved if we are to achieve lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. In Russia's view, a fair solution to the conflict must include a return of occupied lands to Arab nations, the creation of a Palestinian state, and security guarantees for every participant of the conflict, including Israel.

Russia encourages the negotiation process at all levels and directions and is ready to serve as a peace broker and a venue for negotiations. To help the peace process, all parties must be constructive, flexible, and impartial.

The spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile capabilities threatens not only the peace and stability of the Middle East, but the security of Russia—both directly and indirectly. Russia would certainly be vulnerable to attack if Middle Eastern states acquire either WMD or medium- or long-range missiles.

Consequently, Moscow insists on the total elimination and prohibition of WMD in the Middle East and would also like to see the missile capabilities in the region limited to the lowest level possible.

It would seem reasonable to begin immediate efforts to turn the entire Middle East into a zone free of all WMD. The fact that this is a long-term and difficult objective only increases the urgency to act. Existing anti-WMD measures should be enforced in a reasonable and balanced manner that will not aggravate the threats of proliferation and conflict.

⁴⁰ A comprehensive analysis of Russia's current policies in the Middle East can be found in, for example, Iurii Ionov, "Strategicheskie interesy Rossii v blizhnem vostoknom regione" (dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk, Diplomaticheskaiia Akademiia, 2003).

Russia believes Israeli efforts to acquire WMD and missile capabilities must not be condoned. Israel's neighbors would feel compelled to seek similar capabilities in self-defense. Further, the increase in exports of conventional weapons to this region must be halted. The influx of weapons is fueling an arms race spiraling ever further toward more sophisticated and destructive systems. Another particularly sore subject in the region is the preferential treatment accorded to various Middle Eastern nations on arms acquisition. The practice of generously providing some states with weapons while denying arms to others ignites further jealousy, distrust, and fear.⁴¹

Some New Aspects of Russian Foreign Policy

For Russia, the year 2006 was "the Year of Prestige." Russia presided in the G8 throughout the whole year. In May, she succeeded Romania as the chair of the Council of Europe.

In European organizations, Russia stands in support of intercivilizational concord. The fact that a fifth of Russia's populations is Muslim helps to establish constructive dialogue with Muslim communities in Europe. Russia wants to proliferate in Europe the initiative of "The Alliance of Civilizations" proposed by the UN secretary general, Turkey, and Spain.⁴²

The decision concerning Russia's inclusion into the rotation cycle and her first presidency was taken in Canada in June 2002. Russia considered the decision as a recognition of her growing role in the contemporary world by her partners. That the EU, US, Japan, and the European Three in the G8 generate and coordinate collective approaches to the most important global problems is very important for Russia.

Since 2004, Russia's participation in the G8 has grown into a big and independent direction of the foreign policy of Vladimir Putin who has managed to establish good personal relations with the majority of leaders

⁴¹ For details on Russian approaches to Middle Eastern problems, see Vladimir Dontsov, ed., *Islam i sovremennye mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 2001).

⁴² *Sienogramma vystupleniia Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S. V. Lavrova po itogam vstrechi s chlenami Komiteta po mezhdunarodnym delam Evroparlamenta, Strasburg, 18 maia 2006 goda*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Federation, no. 862-18-05-2006, May 18, 2006, www.mid.ru.

of the industrial democracies and to alleviate the impression left from some unfortunate steps taken by Russia in the past.

The G8 has become for Russia an important mechanism to promote her foreign policy interests. Russia introduced to the agenda such issues as energy security, education, and the struggle against contagious diseases. All parties to the G8 summit in St. Petersburg that took place in July 2006 considered it successful. It is noteworthy that the heads of China and India, the two Asian giants, were present in St. Petersburg at that time. Although they are not formal members of the group so far, they had talks with the Russian president there and even held an unprecedented tripartite meeting with him.

The St. Petersburg G8 summit discussed in a constructive way all items on its agenda. At the closing press conference, Vladimir Putin made a particularly interesting observation that illustrated to a certain extent modern Russia's perception of both the G8 and the present-day state of world affairs that has ceased to be bipolar, yet has not, contrary to the expectations of some, become a unipolarity controlled by one single superpower. He pointed out that after the end of the Cold War, the world has not become more stable and "has not become safe. It has become less predictable. And, as the whole system of international relations in decades past was elaborated to serve a bipolar world, we of course still lack all the instruments necessary to answer the challenges and threats of today."⁴³

In conclusion, I would like to stress the following: the last two years have shown us some definite changes in Russian foreign policy. It remains complex, but now its Eastern component is increasing and the whole strategy appears more balanced at present. Thanks to overcoming latent disintegration trends—most dramatically exemplified by the situation in Chechnya—and positive economic developments in terms of the growing GDP, ahead-of-schedule payments of foreign debts, and active investment efforts abroad, Russia and its foreign policy in the new century have become much more confident. It pragmatically seeks new partners, consolidates relations with old ones, rewards its friends, and does not offer the other cheek to its offenders, successfully ridding herself of defeatism and self-disparagement. To put it in a nutshell, the time has come when it is "more profitable to be friendly and reliably cooperative

⁴³ Vladimir Putin, "Press-konferentsiia po itogam vstrechi glav gosudarstv i pravitel'stv 'Gruppy vos'mi,'" July 17, 2006, St. Petersburg.

with Russia.”⁴⁴ There is nothing special and no privileges are implied, because this is the only way that any big, strong, and influential actor in the world arena should be dealt with.

⁴⁴ See Vladimir Putin, “S sovremennoi Rossiei vygodnee druzhit’ i nadezhno sotrudnichat’,” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’*, 2006, no. 7: 3–11 (Rech Prezidenta RF na soveshchanii v MIDE, 26–27 iunია 2006 g.).