

## Foreign Policy Restores Russia as a World Power

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The process of Russia's resurgence could not but impact on its place and role in the world arena. Gone is the time when, following the breakup of the USSR, Russia was, not without a reason, seen as a country prepared to be led as long as that gave it a pass to "civilized society."

The principal distinguishing feature of the foreign policy course that the country took under President Putin was the priority given to national interests. Furthermore, Russia seeks to attain this goal not through confrontation with any one party, without any attempts to strengthen its positions by creating military blocs, but by developing multilateral relations with states on different continents. That does not mean, however, that Russia is unable to offer an effective rebuff to any encroachment on its vital interests: The country defense capability has grown significantly with its Armed Forces rising from the ashes of the 1990s.

Foreign policy is being increasingly geared at restoring Russia's positions as a world power. That creates an important condition for ensuring the country's integrity, the continuity of the course followed in the past several years, stability on the regional and global level, nuclear nonproliferation, and effective action to counter international terrorism.

Russia's foreign policy course is based on a multipolar world order, into which it fits neatly. Those who ignore this objective reality are doomed to failure. A case in point is the world's largest economic and military power - the United States. It launched a military operation against Iraq in circumvention of the UN: As it turned out, Iraq did not pose a threat either to the US or to its allies since it had no nuclear weapons and did not produce any. The outcome of the US's unilateral action is evident: Iraq was plunged into years long chaos, brought to the verge of fragmentation and turned into a terrorist base. The US may not have pursued such goals, but this is precisely what its unilateralist policy has led to.

The US also does not rule out the use of military force against Iran - true, that would be far more difficult to do after the failure in Iraq, as well as following the publication of the US National Intelligence Estimate which said that Iran stopped developing nuclear weapons in 2003. Russia's interests are also affected by the reckless persistence of the US and some of its allies that Kosovo be granted independence. The secession of a part of Serbian territory is, in effect, a forcible separation of an autonomous area from a unitary state. That could become a precedent that separatist forces will use to undermine hard won stability in many countries. The US also does other things that arouse our concern. These include the utterly unjustified deployment of strategic missile defense elements in Central Europe in close proximity to our borders, the attempts to establish US control over Georgian and Ukrainian politics, the expansion of NATO, and plans to station US military bases in proximity to Russian borders on a permanent basis.

It is hard to imagine that these actions are being taken to prepare a war against Russia. However, it is even more difficult to regard them as defense against Russian aggression, which no sensible politician considers possible. The only conclusion that can be made is that the US is doing all this to exert pressure on Russia with the aim of preventing it from restoring its lead role in international affairs on par with other powers. Such policies increase the chances of a fatal accident.

At the same time there is reason to believe that the US policy goal is not limited to exerting pressure on Russia. Following the failure in Iraq, the prevailing view in the US administration is that the failure was not due to the untenable doctrine of unilateralism but the fact that the US's one-sided operation had not received automatic backing and support from the US's leading European allies. Such automatic reaction was a feature of the Cold War era, when the US assumed the function of ensuring security in Western Europe. However, after the end of the Cold War, there was an economic rapprochement between Western Europe and Russia: Trade and reciprocal investment increased substantially, and joint projects were implemented. The attempts to restore "bloc discipline" in a new environment also include terrorizing Europe with Russian "energy expansion," deploying missile defense elements "to defend Europe against Iran's missile threat," and relying on new NATO member states, which, unlike the old ones, do not talk back to Washington.

Russia pursued its foreign policy course in 2007 in very difficult conditions. Military bases in Georgia were closed, but our peacekeepers remain in zones of disengagement between Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian forces. While refusing to become involved in an arms race, Russia is strengthening its military capability to meet threats that may arise. While insisting on the need for all European countries to ratify the Adapted CFE Treaty, which rules out any military advantages for some countries over others, Russia has declared its readiness to conduct constructive negotiations. Moscow is looking for mutually acceptable solutions on strategic missile defense. Most important, Russia is working hard to prevent its disagreements with the US or the EU from restarting a Cold War. That would be disastrous, utterly unacceptable to the entire international community, especially in a situation where without the US, Russia, China, and the EU, it is impossible to counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons and fight international terrorism.

The foreign policy picture of 2007 would be incomplete if nothing was said about Russia's line with respect to the CIS countries. The situation now prevailing in the CIS area is rather complicated. Centrifugal forces have proved to be stronger than centripetal forces. In these circumstances, Moscow has focused on integration processes in the Eurasian area, the Customs Union and the Shanghai Group of Six. These measures are designed to preserve the CIS.

Such is, in general outline, the course that Russia followed during the last year of Putin's presidency. I am convinced that commitment to this course will become a criterion in electing a new president. V. V. Putin's preservation in big politics will enable a new president to ensure the continuity of this course while also dealing with outstanding problems, as well as with those groups that would like either to throw Russia back to the 1990s or to plunge it into a command-and-administer environment.