

Russia's Foreign Policy Philosophy

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ON FEBRUARY 12 OF THIS YEAR, Russian President V.V. Putin approved a new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. The guidelines for the document, work on which lasted several months, were set by a presidential decree that was signed the day the head of state was inaugurated. The draft concept was discussed with the government agencies that are most actively involved in international activity, and considered in various departments of the Russian presidential administration. The Russian expert community was involved in its preparation, including members of the Foreign Ministry's Scientific Council. We are grateful to all those who have put forward their proposals and considerations, including in the pages of *International Affairs*.

The main outcome of those discussions is the understanding that today our country's independent foreign policy course has essentially no alternative. In other words, we cannot even hypothetically consider the option of Russia's "attachment" in a subordinate role to some other key player on the international arena. The independence of Russia's foreign policy is predetermined by its geographic size, unique geopolitical position, age-old historical tradition, and culture and mentality of our people. This course is also a result of the country's development over the past 20 years in new historical conditions, at a time when – through trial and error – a foreign policy concept was formulated that at present responds to Russia's interests to the maximum degree possible.

The new Concept preserves the key principles not only of the previous version (2008) but also the basic approaches of a document that V.V. Putin approved in 2000. Those are, above all, pragmatism, openness, a multi-vector approach, and the consistent advancement of Russian national interests but without confrontation. These principles have proven their relevance and effectiveness. Furthermore, they are increasingly acquiring a universal character, i.e., are being adopted in practical politics by a growing number of states.

Russia's chief international activity goal is to provide a favorable external environment for an economic upturn, putting the economy on an innovative footing, and improving the living standards. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this approach not only arises from an analysis of the country's current situation but is also the only natural one for Russia in the historical perspective. In this context I would like to quote a circular letter to the Russian ambassadors to the courts of foreign powers that was sent on March 4, 1881 in connection with the enthronement of Emperor Alexander III. It stated that Russia "has reached its natural limits; it has nothing more to wish for, nothing to seek from anybody. It only needs to consolidate its status, protect itself against an external danger and develop its internal, moral and material resources, accumulating reserves and improving its wealth." In 1893, Alexander III reaffirmed that approach, when he wrote that "the peaceful development of Russian power should be the exclusive subject of state concerns and an incentive for a peaceful policy."

During the past century, wars, revolutions, and the bipolar confrontation did not allow our country to fully concentrate on the implementation of a constructive agenda. At present, when Russia is not in conflict with anybody, firmly stands on its feet and is confidently implementing development plans, new opportunities are opening for that.

Obviously, the goal of ensuring the steady buildup of the country's capability can only be achieved in the conditions of international stability, so ensuring universal peace and security is both Russia's obligation as a global player, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and a key factor in the realization of its own interests. In this connection, we often have to hear reproaches of conservatism with regard to our foreign policy, our purported wish to adopt a clearly no-win position of protecting the imminently changing status quo. That is an obvious distortion of Russia's foreign policy doctrine.

It is true that we do not support the attempts to change the geopolitical situation in different parts of the world with the use of revolutionary slogans, including those related to the accelerated advancement of democratic processes. There are quite a few reasons for that. People in Russia know only too well the destructive power of violent coups, which do not lead to the achievement of earlier proclaimed goals but often throw respective societies decades back in their development. As a matter of fact, in the past 15 years, none of the cases of outside intervention involving the use of force has produced the desired result but only aggravated

the existing problems and deepened the suffering of the civilian population for whose protection the decisions to intervene were originally made. Finally, the increasing number of areas of instability as a result of the use of force and regime change operations leads to a dangerous expansion in zones of turbulence in international relations, strengthening the elements of chaos there. And that is a direct path to the loss of control over global processes, which could seriously affect all members of the international community, including the initiators of outside intervention. At the same time, nothing could be further from the truth than the assertion that Russia is trying to “freeze” the status quo. We act on the premise that the world is at a crucial turning point, that it has entered an era of deep change the result of which it is practically impossible to predict.

That involves both new risks and new opportunities, and in some respects helps make a new start from a clean slate. Having shed the ideological blinkers of the past, we may understand that better than others – those who whether by inertia or on purpose continue to follow an ideological course that no longer responds to the realities of the 21st century. If we take an unbiased look at international events it turns out that Russia is not the one to pursue archaic bloc-to-bloc approaches in international affairs, making futile attempts to build oases of calm and security isolated from others, and upholding protectionism in the military-political sphere at the expense of the principles of equal and undivided security.

The tectonic shifts in the geopolitical landscape connected to the realignment of forces on the world arena require a very serious assessment – from the position of intellectual honesty, without any wishful thinking. The Russian leadership has repeatedly stressed that Moscow does not experience satisfaction, let alone malicious glee over the West's historically diminishing ability to play a key role in the global economy and politics. The world community is faced with wide-ranging, strategic issues, including those pertaining to the obvious limitations on the economic system based on the unbridled pursuit of profit without appropri-

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ate state and public controls, to the recognition of multiple development models in the modern world, and the need to search for new sources of growth in the context of a new technological level of development.

There is special concern over the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa. They should also be assessed objectively, in their entire complexity and diversity, avoiding primitive black-and-white clichés. Evidently these processes will last for years and will most likely be accompanied by a painful transformation of the geopolitical map of that region that emerged in the previous period.

There is more and more evidence that civilizational identity and the growing trend toward the formation of a kind of civilizational blocs is becoming an increasingly important factor in the present-day conditions. In this situation, the choice is obvious: Either an exacerbation of intercultural, intercivilizational friction with the prospect of its transformation into an open confrontation or the deepening of mutually respectful, equal dialog with the aim of advancing toward a partnership of civilizations. Shortly before his resignation, Pope Benedict XVI said that the achievement of peace through dialog is today not only one possible option but a necessity that has no alternative. This position is in synch with Russia's approaches.

The Foreign Policy Concept formulates a clear-cut, consistent philosophy oriented toward the resolution of increasingly complex problems of the present-day world. It does not carry even so much as a hint at isolationism, non-participation in solving equations with many unknown quantities that global politics abounds in today. Quite the contrary, we are fully committed to invigorating our efforts to organize collective action by the international community in searching for responses to common challenges. We are confident that the most reliable method of preventing global competition from transforming into a kind of forceful confrontation is to work consistently in the interest of ensuring the collective leadership of the world's leading states, the leadership fully representative from the geographic and civilizational viewpoints. However, in order to ensure the success of that effort it is necessary to recognize the general rules of the game and rely on the principle of the rule of law not only in national but also in international affairs. Is it logical when the states that are committed to the robust, even forceful promotion of democratic principles in other countries evade their recognition on the international arena?

Russia's foreign policy is constructive and forward looking. Russian

diplomatic activity is aimed at producing a positive impact on global processes in the interest of forming a stable, ideally self-regulating poly-centric system of international relations where Russia by right has the role as one of the key centers. Today, the majority of serious experts and politicians agree that the main purport of the current period of international development lies in the consistent strengthening of a multipolar world order.

We are ready for serious, comprehensive dialog with all of our partners concerned, on the understanding that no one can claim monopoly for the truth. Obviously, a long-term, true partnership should be based on a foundation of common values. However, such common approaches cannot be dictated by anybody. The attempts by the West, with messianic insistence, to promote its own value systems bring to mind O. Spengler's remarks: "All these are local and temporary values – most of them indeed limited to the momentary intelligentsia of cities of West-European type. World historical or eternal values they emphatically are not." A genuinely common moral foundation of international relations should be a product of equal dialog based on the common spiritual and moral denominator that has always existed in the world's main religions. The rejection of traditional values that have evolved over centuries, separation from own cultural and spiritual roots, and the inflation of individual rights and freedoms – that is a recipe for the loss of all reference points both in national and foreign policy.

Russia is an avowed advocate of the network diplomacy method that assumes the creation of flexible, including overlapping associations of states in accordance with their shared interests. One successful example of such associations with the participation of states from different continents is BRICS. Through its rotating presidency in 2013-15 at the G20, the G8, the SCO and BRICS, our country pursues a proactive line toward enhancing the effectiveness of the contribution by these multilateral formats to the consolidation of global governance. That is one practical evidence of the multivector character of Russia's foreign policy course. I do not think that it would be a good idea trying to build some rigid, formalized hierarchy of ties with our partners along various geographic directions. The flexibility, maneuverability, "polyphony" of Russia's foreign policy is our obvious advantage, enabling us to take into account the fast flowing, changeable nature of the international situation.

We act on the assumption that our participation, in conjunction with our partners, in developing all-round cooperation in the CIS area, the con-

sistent advancement of the Eurasian integration project is a major contribution to the creation of a new international architecture whose building blocks are regional integration associations. From this perspective it is absurd trying to protect “one’s own” integration but at the same time counter integration processes in neighboring countries. Especially considering that in the present-day world there are some generally accepted principles of integration efforts, above all the WTO standards. The bringing closer together of integration projects, their consolidation – that is the way to ensure sustained development on a global level. This is the premise Russia acts on in proposing the creation of a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific as a strategic goal, working toward our country’s active involvement in the integration processes in the Asia Pacific region.

In line with its tradition, Russia will continue to play a role as a balancing factor in international affairs the need for which is confirmed by most of our partners. That is due not only to this country’s international stature but also to the fact that we have our own opinion of the ongoing developments that is based on principles of law and justice. Russia’s increasing appeal is also related to its growing “soft power” capability as a country combining a very rich cultural and spiritual legacy with the unique opportunities of dynamic development, and advancing constructive interaction with the Russian World, numbering millions.

Moscow is confident that there are more common than dividing elements in the views of the world’s leading players on the most pressing issues, especially insofar as concerns ultimate goals, not tactical approaches. After all, today everyone is interested in narrowing the zones of international and internal state conflicts, addressing the problems of the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and curbing terrorist and extremist forces. Therefore, the idea is to overcome individual or group egotism in deed, not in word, and understand the general responsibility for the fate of human civilization. We regularly receive warnings as to how fragile it is, in the form of massive natural and man-made disasters, including the recent space “invasion” near Chelyabinsk, which could have had far more serious consequences had it taken place in another, more densely populated area.

We welcome the emerging trend toward the bringing closer the approaches of the world’s most influential states, above all members of the UN Security Council, in the interest of pooling the efforts in the resolution of conflicts in different regions by political means, relying on

international law. This also applies to the understanding that there is no alternative to settling the Syria crisis through negotiations.

The new Concept formulates in a coherent and detailed way the Russian leadership's foreign policy views of the present stage of the world's development, based on the striving for the maximum possible use of the country's capabilities through broad and constructive international cooperation, collective resolution of crises, and consolidating the positive, unifying agenda in global politics. We are counting on adequate, constructive reaction from our partner.

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