

From Yugoslavia to Iraq: Russia's Foreign Policy and the Effects of Multipolarity

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Contents

Introduction	1
Russia in the Post-Cold War International System	4
<i>Systemic Change and Its Implications for Russia's International Status</i>	4
<i>From Doctrinal Vision to Foreign Policy Practices: the Case of Bosnia in 1994</i>	7
<i>Russia and NATO</i>	10
<i>Russia and the EU</i>	14
<i>The Crossroads of 2000: Multipolarity for the 21 century?</i>	18
Putin's Foreign Policy and Multipolarity	22
<i>Multipolarity with a human face: the case of image-making</i>	22
<i>Systemic shock of September 11 and Russia's response: Unipolarity ad hoc?</i>	24
<i>The Multipolar Option: Russia as great power in counter-terrorism</i>	27
<i>From September 11 to War in Iraq: Back to Multipolarity and Out Again?</i>	31
The Lessons of Multipolarity	36
<i>Multipolarity as an instrumental factor in Russian foreign policy</i>	36
References	42

Introduction¹

The aim of this study is to analyze the evolution and political implications of Russia's doctrine of multipolarity. Multipolarity emerged as one of the earliest doctrinal solutions to the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy dilemma, and has remained essential for Russia's strategic behavior since the early 1990s. The multipolarity doctrine describes the post-Cold War world and Russia's place in it. As I argue in this study, Russian "multipolarity" – (the idea of the multipolar world; the vision of Russia as one of its 'poles'; and the understanding of the principles of international politics in the strict terms of *realpolitik*) is not an ideological resource for Russia's foreign policy but rather, a result of learning how to secure the country's international status given the scarcity of foreign policy resources available, and the drastic change in the international institutional position of Russia. To sum up the central argument of this study: the multipolarity of Russian foreign policy – both a doctrinal strategy and foreign policy practice – has evolved as a template-like foreign policy approach to solve Russia's strategic dilemma since the demise of the Soviet Union: how to secure its place in the new international structure and compensate for the loss of the international arrangements that disappeared with Soviet might and the bipolar international system as a whole.

To explain the evolution of multipolarity, I use an array of cases that trace Russia's experiences during the most crucial and sensitive post-Cold War international events: the wars in Yugoslavia in 1994–1995 and 1999; September 11

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Arkady Moshes for supervision of this study. My gratitude also goes to the staff of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs for providing so supportive and vibrant an environment for serious research. I am indebted to Professor Burkhard Auffermann and all participants of the VAKAVA Seminar in Siuntio, 23-25 May 2003 for insightful criticism of an earlier version of this paper.

and the war in Afghanistan; and the war in Iraq of 2003. These were chosen to demonstrate that the practice of multipolarity, although bearing harmful political implications, has remained a persistent pattern of Russia's foreign policy. At times, multipolarity was thought to be the only solution to exit from the crisis and repair Russia's relations with the outside world.

The case studies progresses chronologically. They begin with a general overview of the systemic changes of the late 1980s and Russia's response to them, showing that multipolarity initially emerged as a doctrinal solution to Russia's dilemma of upholding its declining role in world affairs. The multipolarity of the early 1990s leaned towards Russia's only remaining strengths, in particular its permanent seat in the UN Security Council, nuclear capabilities, and residual influence in the CIS area. This led to formulation of Russia's international status as the world great power. The sections that follow, discuss the evolution of this grand design and its effects on Russia's international behavior.

In the following, I attempt to analyze the complexity of multipolarity. In doing so, I seek to question the scholarly view towards multipolarity – as a completely inadequate, outdated doctrine. I focus on empirical cases and the gap between the doctrinal vision of the multipolar world and actual foreign policy-making process. Hence, I aim to delineate the doctrinal effects, which reveal themselves in present Russian foreign policy and, as I argue, will continue to be manifested in Russia's international behavior in the mid-term perspective. Therefore I question the commonly held opinion that Russia's foreign policy after 11 September was a swift strategic turn away from multipolarity. Furthermore, this study shows that during the international crisis over the war in Iraq in 2003, the Russian position was largely formulated along the lines of multipolarity.

In the concluding section, I look into the midterm future and, in particular, into the most likely role that multipolarity may play in the Russian foreign policy by the end of this decade.

1. Russia in the Post-Cold War International System

Systemic Change and Its Implications for Russia's International Status

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the bipolar international system of 1945 was gone. The Soviet breakup appeared to be one of the constitutive factors for the emerging new world order. Whereas one of the two superpowers crumbled, the might of the other, the USA, endured and it took the preeminent position in the international system. The dissolution of the Soviet Union gave birth to new independent states with Russia amongst them. Many other actors ranging from the Central European countries to China and North Korea faced a problem of accommodating the new systemic realities and reconsidering their foreign policies. The system of various alliances between states and inter-governmental organizations was likewise deeply affected by the change of the international system in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War.²

Not surprisingly, systemic shifts of early 1990s made it necessary for all international players to gain a position in the new international system that would signify their roles and ambitions in world politics for years to come. US has entered the new international system as an unchallenged leader and took the status of the pole state in a unipolar system.³ The predominant position of the US was not challenged within the first years after the end of the Cold War. Other major powers, such as Japan and the European Union, accepted the status quo and became subordinate within the US-centered unipolar system. China, another would-be great power showed no explicit revisionist intentions.

As for the major intergovernmental organizations, the role of UN decreased

² Crockatt R. the End of the Cold War. In Baylis J. and Smith S. (eds.) *The Globalization of World Politics: an introduction to international relations*. Oxford University Press, 1997

³ Mastanduno M. Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and US Grand Strategy after the Cold War. In *International Security*, Vol. 21, No4, 1997, p. 63

and so did the value of UN membership.⁴ At the same time, the US-lead NATO started expanding its power eastwards, which undoubtedly made the status of a NATO country appealing for the states seeking both security guarantees from the US and the role of a US ally. Likewise, other US-led or “western-centered” organizations and clubs, such as the IMF, GATT/WTO, G7 entered the unipolar world order as vibrant international institutions and as marks of success for every state wishing to underscore its significance in the new international setting. Eventually, in Europe the changes of 1989–91 signified a widening gap between those states that openly decided to join the western institutions of EU and NATO and those that remained outside the integration process, e.g. Russia and Belarus.

The brief summary provided above describes the structural factors behind Russian foreign policy in the early 1990s. Like all international actors, Russia faced a challenge of solving the structural dilemma of how to deal with the new world order. The general trend for Russia was that its political leadership defined a country’s status in the world as that of a “great power”, despite this being inconsistent with the structural settings of the unipolar system. Since 1993 Russia has been claiming this status which it believes fits its geographical vastness, strategic interests and nuclear capabilities.⁵ However, the aspirations for great power status were nothing but an ambitious blueprint, as they represented an enormous misperception of what status could be attainable in the new post-cold war international order. The inconsistency became visible at three levels: the global, the regional and the institutional.

At the global level, Russia didn’t recognize the unipolarity as the organizing

⁴ Krauthammer Ch. The Unipolar Moment in Foreign Affairs Vol. 70, No1, 1990-1991, p.25

⁵ As Aron notes, the foreign policy doctrine of 1993 suggested a tripartite vision of Russia’s international place: Russia as regional superpower, Russia as a world great power, and Russia as the nuclear superpower. Aron L. Foreign Policy Doctrine of Postcommunist Russia in Mandelbaum M. (ed) The New Russian Foreign Policy, Council on Foreign relations, 1998, p. 27

principle of the new world order. Instead, the vision of “multipolar world” became prevalent in the Russian diplomatic parlance, especially after Yevgeni Primakov took the helm of Russia’s foreign policy in 1996. According to the Primakov doctrine, the end of the Cold War was the exit to multipolarity with both US and Soviet (Russian) power diminishing and giving way to many other powerful actors like China or united Germany.⁶

In the multipolar world Russia is seen as, first and foremost, one of the ‘poles’ with a status equal to the US, EU, China and Japan. Although neither in fact nor in theory could Russia put itself on a par with these actors due to its economic decline, in the multipolar world Russia’s great power status was taken as a given due to its permanent seat in the UN Security Council and vast nuclear capabilities.⁷ In the bipolar world these two elements used to be a crucial part of the deterrence model in which the US and the Soviet Union were the two superpowers. References to the country’s seat in the UNSC and its nuclear capabilities would become a permanent feature of Russia’s foreign policy practice.

Although the posture of multipolarity presumed the absence of any dividing lines or the spheres-of-interest logic, Russia claimed to be a regional hegemonic power. This doctrine would justify a certain zone of influence and responsibility beyond Russia’s borders. This zone named “The Near Abroad” mainly covered the former Soviet Republics; however, the case of NATO enlargement showed that Russia was extremely sensitive over the idea of Central European countries as well as the Baltic States joining NATO for the first ten years after the Cold War.

The main challenge for Russia’s status as a pole in the multipolar world was that the international system of 1990s was more prone to be unipolar than

⁶ Primakov E. Na gorizonte – mnogopolusnij mir (The multipolar world at the horizon) in *Mezhdunarodnaya Zshizn’*, No10, 1996, pp. 3-13.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.12, see also Primakov E. *Mnogopolyarnij mir i OON* (The multipolar world and the UN) in *Mezhdunarodnaya Zshisn’* No10, 1997 pp.3-9

multipolar. Russia therefore, in order to get recognition of its great power status, would have to remake the international structure. To do this Russian diplomacy was assigned a double task – 1) to pursue the country’s foreign policy interests, to establish crucially important cooperation, and ensure rapprochement with the major Western actors; and 2) to try to regain the great power status by transforming the system to the doctrinal pattern of “multipolarity.”⁸

Seen in this light, multipolarity emerged as a doctrinal solution to Russia’s structural problem of positioning itself in the world.⁹ It relied on capabilities that Russia inherited from the USSR, e.g. the permanent seat in the UNSC, membership of the OSCE, and not least, the country’s own nuclear capabilities,¹⁰ however the doctrine failed to provide for Russia’s genuine integration into the new international system, because it implied balancing the growing power of the new global actors, e.g. the US, NATO and the EU.

This approach negatively affected the coherence of Russia’s foreign policy, as reacquisition of great power status as an ultimate goal inevitably raised tension and suspicions in the West.

From Doctrinal Vision to Foreign Policy Practices: the Case of Bosnia in 1994

It is obvious that, if implemented scrupulously, such an overly ambitious doctrine would require enormous resources to be invested in building an multipolar world. Furthermore, a political practice inspired by multipolarity would be

⁸ Trenin D. Nenadeshnaya strategija, (A fallacious strategy) in Pro et Contra, Vol 6, No1-2, 2001 p.50

⁹ For more details on structural problems and doctrinal solutions of other states, in particularly, Finland, see Heikka H. Maintaining the Balance of Power that Favors Human Freedom: The Finnish Strategic Experience, UPI Working Papers, No 39, 2003

¹⁰ Or as Black nicely puts it: “in terms of international status, the Russian Federation (RF) inherited everything from the USSR except its territorial integrity, secure borders and a sense of being an impregnable power” Black J. *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2000, p. 7

essentially revisionist, utterly offensive and prone to be deterred by other powers by all possible means. Following this argument, Dmitri Trenin, one of the leading Russian foreign policy scholars, sees Russia's foreign policy as "oriented first and foremost towards the establishment of a certain mode of the world order. This didn't serve Russia's national interests."¹¹ Contrary to Trenin's assessment, Leon Aron argues that the controversies of Russian foreign policy fit into the Gaullist non-revisionist paradigm. Just as de Gaulle was verbally fighting with the Americans about the status of France as a great power, Yeltsin and Primakov were preoccupied with the vision of multipolarity that, "while peevish and turbulent", was decidedly nonrevisionist.¹² Seen in this light, Russia's claims for the great power status were not targeted against the existing international order.

While bearing these interpretations in mind when proceeding with the case study, it is necessary to outline the bridge between the doctrine of multipolarity and its political practice. In other words, what was the interplay between the doctrine and Russian diplomacy of the 1990s?

For Russian diplomacy preserving relations with the West was the key priority. Cooperation with wealthy western democracies and multilateral organizations, e.g. the G7 and IMF was crucial for economic reasons. The Russian economy badly needed the external support and there were no other alternatives to seeking financial aid from the EU and the US.¹³ Russian-Western cooperation was also crucial in terms of the European and global security architecture. The EU and NATO enlargements eastward would deprive Russia of taking part in making security arrangements not only for the former USSR allies in Eastern Europe but

¹¹ Trenin p.53

¹² Aron p.31

¹³ For more details, see Donaldson R. and Noguee J. *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*. M.E. Sharp Inc, 1998, p. 197, See also Karaganov A. (ed) *Wither Western Aid to Russia*, Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, Gutersloh, 1994

also for some of the CIS countries. How should Russia solve the dilemma of protecting its interests (defined as potentially clashing with the interests of the West) and securing firm connections to the EU and US? In this light the doctrinal solution of multipolarity is seen as one of the most obvious options for Russia's foreign policy of the 1990s. The plausibility of multipolarity was certainly not in its grand revisionist mission, which Russia would never be able to accomplish, but in its capacity to provide Russia's foreign policy with a practice to sustain cooperation with the West and position itself as an independent and 'great-power' actor in international politics.

The war in Bosnia in 1994–95 and Russia's diplomatic activity with regard to NATO and one of the combatant parties, the Serbs, demonstrates how multipolarity was put to work in order to secure Russia's "parallel claims to strategic partnership with the West, on the one hand, and to the say and weight appropriate to a great power, on the other."¹⁴ Unfortunately for the Russian diplomacy, the military campaign conducted by NATO forces seemed to downplay or even disregard the institutional power of the UN Security Council. When the focus shifted from the UN toward NATO, Russia joined the Contact Group of the five powers¹⁵, as it felt it could not "accept a situation in which the right to interpret Security Council decisions is given to some other organization".¹⁶ Furthermore, Russia deliberately took the Serbian side so to "present itself at home as the champion of the Serb's rights in the Balkans and abroad as responsible, if critical, negotiating partner".¹⁷ Running short of diplomatic means to persuade the conflicting sides to cease hostilities, NATO launched a bombing campaign in August 1995. In return, Russia

¹⁴ Lynch. A. The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy. In *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No1, 2001, p15

¹⁵ The members of the CG in 1994 were Russia, the US, Germany, France, and Britain

¹⁶ Churkin V., the Russian diplomat responsible for handling Yugoslav diplomacy, quoted in Lynch p.15

embarked on fierce criticism of NATO and the US and “accused Washington of conducting expansionist and barbaric policies in the heart of Europe.”¹⁸

This case demonstrates how the doctrine was met by foreign policy practice. The actual implementation involved references to the UN Security Council mandate as the primary option, this respected Russia’s privileged position in this global institution. Of secondary importance were bilateral relations with the leading powers, which were seen as an option to bypass the difficulties of Russia’s non-membership of the EU and NATO. Another striking feature of the practice of multipolarity was the balancing, shown when Russia sided with Serbia, which was done to show to the West (and other actors) that Russia regarded itself as an independent actor. Last but not least, when all seemed to go wrong, quite offensive criticism of the West was employed to demonstrate that Russia was not only capable of publicly criticizing the West but also that it had another, alternative opinion on what solutions should be applied to dilemmas of world politics.

These two last elements of the practice (the balancing acts and open criticism) became most visible features of Russia’s approach towards EU and NATO. More recent cases trace the evolution of this pattern and its effects on Russian-Western relations.

Russia and NATO

In the aftermath of the Cold War NATO became one of the cornerstones for the new world order. Contrary to many predictions, the alliance didn’t vanish with the end of bipolarity; rather it became one of the pillars of the contemporary

¹⁷ Ibid, p16

¹⁸ See the Russian media coverage on the issue in Shiraev E. and Zubok V. *Anti-Americanism in Russia: from Stalin to Putin*, Palgrave, 2000, p. 104

international structure.¹⁹

Throughout the 1990s NATO has been continuously growing both in terms of symbolic power and status. Eventually, the status of a NATO member state grew as of the most important status-indicator in the post-cold war world.

For Russia, the fact that NATO did not only survive the rupture of the Cold War institutional foundations but also intended to enlarge and embrace new countries, meant the end of its status of the second superpower. As soon as the short period of searching for a plausible framework for Russian-NATO dialogue ended in 1993, it became clear Russia would not seek NATO membership. Any future development would be thus seen through the doctrinal prism of Russian multipolarity and great power status. Alongside the doctrine, in its rhetoric when opposing NATO enlargement, Russia drifted from portraying NATO as a remnant of the Cold War to labeling it “a major aspect of American strategy aimed at establishing US domination over the Euro-Atlantic space.”²⁰

NATO, therefore, not only weakened Russia’s great power status, but was also seen as a threat to multipolar world. Given these two perceptions, Russia regarded NATO’s development as targeted against its national interests.²¹

These determinants, e.g. NATO’s wish to enlarge and not to alienate Russia; and Russia’s reluctance, if not resistance, to enlargement and its fear of becoming

¹⁹ Williams M and Neumann I. From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 29 No2, 2000, p.357

²⁰ Aron, p.29

²¹ Kazantsev B. Why We Oppose NATO’s Expansion, *International Affairs* (Moscow) (hereinafter referred as *International Affairs*), No3, 1998 pp. 33-37. However, as Ira Strauss points out, a genuine threat to Russia’s interests was to stay outside NATO, not just in institutional terms, e.g. as a non- member, but also in terms of perceptions, since the lack of cooperation between NATO and Russia would lead to cultivation of the adversary relationship. See Strauss I. NATO With or Without Russia? *International Affairs* No3, 1998, p.37. At the same time Russia’s non-participation in NATO would be harmful for NATO itself, as well as for the world as a whole, as Russia, in that view, would continue its policy of “making the multipolar” world by selling military-related technologies and assisting the non-NATO countries to increase

marginal actor; should be taken into account when assessing the effects of multipolarity.

In 1994 Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program organized by NATO. The concept of using the PfP program as a channel for appeasement of Russian animosity is commonly assessed as problematic.²² NATO's attempts to break away from this distrust, by projecting the friendly and inclusive image to Russia with the help of the Partnership for Peace initiative, were unsuccessful as "Russian observers argued that the primary motivations for PfP stemmed from a deep-rooted anti-Russian bias, and that NATO was still geared toward "containment."²³ It seems that PfP appeared to be a rather weak and ambiguous image for NATO, which wasn't affectively consumed and accepted by Russia because of the inability of PfP to divert Russia's concerns over the expansion of NATO. The misperception of PfP was strengthened by Russia's illusory hopes that the PfP might be a barrier to actual enlargement.²⁴

When these hopes proved to be false, Russia re-embarked on practicing the policy of multipolarity. In 1997 Russia concluded a number of agreements on arms sales with India, Iran, China, and Cuba.²⁵ This allowed some experts to speculate on the prospects of a new "Asian Entente" and "strategic triangle of Moscow, Delhi and Beijing."²⁶ However, Russia's intention were to provide another demonstration of its independence and great power capacity to act unilaterally in the face of NATO's enlargement. The actions took place on the eve of the signing of The

their military capabilities.

²² Gardner H. *Dangerous Crossroads: Europe, Russia and the Future of NATO*, London, Praeger, 1997

²³ *Ibid* p.15

²⁴ Donaldson R. and Noguee J. *The Foreign Policy of Russia, Changing Systems Enduring Interests*, New York, M.E: Sharpe 1998, p.215

²⁵ Black J. 2000, p. 124

²⁶ *Ibid*. p.125

Founding Act between Russia and NATO.²⁷ Although the experts' assessments of the Act varied from cautious support to disappointment, the general opinion on the Act was quite supportive.²⁸ The Founding Act was seen to acknowledge Russia's international status and provide the country with an institutionalized channel to participate in Europe's security debate. Moreover, Russia was even "rewarded" for its cooperative stance with membership of the G7 Club,²⁹ and full membership of Paris Club, and even promised a possible entry into WTO as soon as by the end of 1998.³⁰

During NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999, Russian-NATO relations reached their nadir as the anti-American rhetoric, as well as the rhetoric of multipolarity, approached their zenith – taking over not only domestic public opinion but also in wider circles of state foreign policy-making in the Duma, the MFA, and, finally, the Kremlin.³¹ Seen in Russia as unilateral and unjustified, NATO's decision to use force for humanitarian intervention on a sovereign state, demonstrated not only Russia's humble place in post Cold-War security architecture and its weak involvement in decision-making process on the most topical security issues, but also that the new structures of NATO-Russia relations lived up to none of their promise.³²

In the summer of 1999 Russia behaved as if it was literally repeating its diplomacy on behalf of Serbia from 1994–1995. In particular, Russian diplomats

²⁷ The Russia-NATO Founding Act was signed in Paris in May, 1997

²⁸ Comprehensive press coverage on the issue may be found in Black, 2000, and Shiraev, 2000

²⁹ It has to be pointed out that the membership was not fully fledged, as Russia was stopped from discussing economy-related issues.

³⁰ Black, p.59

³¹ Shiraev E. and Zubok V. *Anti-Americanism in Russia: from Stalin to Putin.*, New York, Palgrave, 2000 p.119

³² As Black points out, Russia had two prerequisites in regard to the implementation of the Founding Act: 1) to be treated on equal basis; 2) acknowledgement that Russia did not approve of NATO expansion. Black, p.75

were tempted to put multipolarity at work by supporting Milosevic and setting NATO forces on alert when a Russian military contingent was deployed in Kosovo ahead of arrival of NATO troops. The most expressive gesture of Russian diplomacy at that time was Prime Minister Primakov's order to cancel his official meeting with US diplomats who were already crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a plane at the time.

Russia and the EU

Like NATO, the EU also appears to be one of the leading institutions of the new post-bipolar international system. As Igor Leshukov notes, the post-Cold War development of NATO and the EU took place in close conceptual and complimentary linkage.³³

In Russia's search for its place in the new world, references to the EU reveal ambiguities and misperceptions over the purpose that cooperation with the EU should serve. Once again, the vision of Russia as a great power in the multipolar world greatly affected Russian foreign policy towards the EU, although in somewhat different way to the case of Russian-NATO relations.

First, Russia failed to recognize the essential linkage between the EU and the US, which derived from to the Cold War era and even strengthened after the end of the bipolarity.³⁴

Instead, Russian foreign policy-makers grounded their strategic calculations on the assumption that some of the EU member states, such as Germany and France would have essential great power ambitions and aspirations to be poles themselves. For this reason, Russia attempted to restore the European system of alliances

³³ Leshukov I. *Beyond Satisfaction: Russia's Perspectives on European Integration.*, ZEI Discussion Paper, Bonn, 1998 p.21

³⁴ Williams and Neumann 2000, also Bordachev T. *Terra Incognita, ili Evropejskaya Politika Rossii in Pro et Contra* vol 6, 2001

proposing a security “troika” of France, Germany, and Russia in September 1997. The timing was self-evident, as this happened only two months after the NATO Summit in Madrid in July 1997, which officially opened the first round of NATO enlargement since the end of the Cold War. Evidently, France and Germany saw in the Russian proposal an attempt to “balance” the enlarging NATO and the “primacy of the US on the continent” with another alliance. The idea of detaching the Western-European democracies from the USA proved to be misled, as at that time both France and Germany were firmly attached to NATO on one hand, and to the EU’s emerging Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) on the other.³⁵ As a result, Russia’s initiative was downplayed and soon abandoned.³⁶

As it was the case with NATO, Russia’s policy towards the EU was an example of “geopolitical maneuvering” based on a mixture of great power aspirations, a doctrinal vision of the multipolar world (with Russia as a pole comparable to the EU and USA), and, what Leshukov defines as “tactics to incorporate Soviet policies into the Western guidelines”.³⁷

Besides the attempts at alliance-making with the EU members that was rejected, Russia undertook efforts to increase its status through cooperation with the EU, and by taking a rather somewhat friendly stand vis-à-vis the EU. As Leshukov notes, “the positiveness of the attitude towards the EU manifests itself at all levels: in Russian political parlance, in the media, in the easiness with which the Lower Chamber of the Russian Parliament – the State Duma – ratified the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and in the grateful acknowledgement of economic

³⁵ See Wallander C. *The International Relations of the Post-Soviet States: Global Parameters and Domestic Determinants*, CSIS 2002

³⁶ Splidsboel-Hansen F. *Explaining Russian Endorsement of the CFSP and the ESDP*, *Security Dialogue* vol 33, no 3, December 2002. As Splidsboel-Hansen notes, Russia continuously backed up further development of the CFSP/ESDP of the EU expressing hopes that the emerging policies will be the pillars of effective multipolarity.

³⁷ Leshukov I. p.25

assistance within Tacis.”³⁸

Russia’s expanding trade with the EU that by 2000 had reached 35-37% of Russia’s external trade exchange is seen as the best guarantee of long-term cooperation. However, as in the previous cases, one has to take into account the destructive effect of multipolarity and the great power predicament of Russia’s foreign policy.

Marius Vahl mentions that even though Russia and EU have grown considerably closer to each other in the aftermath of the collapse of communism, it was foreign policy where the two followed drastically different patterns of interstate behavior. Due to Russia’s conception of itself as a powerful “Eurasian” pole of the multipolar system, Russian dialogue with Europe became strained by misperceptions.³⁹ As pointed out by Bordachev, Russia read the EU’s basic normative response to cooperation, the Common Strategy on Russia, in a quite misleading way assuming that the CSR met Russian wishes to establish a “special partnership” with Europe.⁴⁰ The relationship, in which Russia and EU – two equal partners – would develop the European security architecture mainly under auspices of the OSCE.

At the same time, Russian rhetoric in response to EU criticism over the second war in Chechnya was revolving around the problem of “double standards” with regard to how the reasons and the costs of the Chechen conflict should be interpreted. The way Russia approached the possibility of internationalization of the conflict and the further involvement of OSCE or the Council of Europe, shows that Russia regarded its great power status not only as a prerequisite for cooperation

³⁸ Ibid p.5

³⁹ Vahl M. Just good friends: The EU-Russian Strategic Partnership and the Northern Dimension., CEPS Working Document No166 March 2001, p.7, see also Baranovsky V. Russia’s Attitudes Towards the EU: Political Aspects, FIIA, 2002 pp. 15-21

⁴⁰ Bordachev 2001

with EU but also as a defining principle for cooperation. Cooperation would not be allowed to damage the “self-governing” image of Russian foreign policy.⁴¹

The problem of Russia’s image abroad (in the West, in particular) had turned into a crucial foreign policy issue already by the end of Yeltsin’s second presidency, and it became a vital priority for the new Russia’s President. As the aforementioned example of the EU political discourse shows, there was a growing certainty that Russia will for decades remain a country with an unclear and ambiguous mission in the world. Also, the new Republican administration coming to power in the USA seemed to hold an exceptionally harsh image of Russia as “deindustrializing, depopulating, and barely managing the degradation of federal authority and effectiveness.”⁴²

Russian claims for ‘proper’ status in the international system at the end of the 1990s started looking ridiculous; despite its self-image, Russia was facing the challenge of “slipping into developing-state status.”⁴³

⁴¹ Umbach F. Russia as a “Virtual Great Power”: Implications for Its Declining Role in European and Eurasian Security. In *European Security*, Vol. 9, No 3, Autumn, 2000. An excerpt of the speech given by Commissioner Patten is worth citing at some length, as it eloquently points out Russian-EU dilemma of misperceptions and misgivings:

“Should we expect Russia to play a role in ensuring peace and stability beyond its borders? Incontestably. But how will Russia play that role? Is Russia genuinely willing to work with its partners in the international community on the basis of common standards and values agreed, for example in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe? Perhaps you will say that we are wrong to have any concerns, that we have misunderstood your position and your policies. But from your knowledge of us, you will recognize that the way Russia approached this questions at the recent OSCE ministerial meeting and the way in which it appears to be using the visa regime and its monopoly on gas supplies in its relations with Georgia are bound to provoke controversy in the European Union and to raise some anxieties. Have these incidents helped to improve Russia’s international image? Have they enhanced or damaged its efforts to play the role of an honest broker?”

Patten Ch. The EU and Russia – The Way Ahead, Speech given in Diplomatic Academy in Moscow, 18 January 2001. Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/speech_01_11.htm

⁴² Shiraev E. and Zubok V. p.139; see also Kortunov S. A Chance to Open a New Page? in *International Affairs*, 2001

⁴³ Herd G. and Akerman E. Russian Strategic Realignment and the Post-Post-Cold War Era?

Furthermore, it was not just a change in self-image that Russian foreign policy had to undergo, but rather there was a strategic choice to be made: whether Russia would continue to insist on revision of the international system in favor of Primakov's multipolarity and face estrangement from the Western-led global economic and security institutions and maybe even an open clash with them, or whether it would revise the view of its own place in the world and question the great power status, assuming that in the present international system the 'great power' diplomacy rests elsewhere than in plain geopolitical balancing.

The Crossroads of 2000: Multipolarity for the 21 century?

A change in the political leadership caused a new wave in Russian foreign policy discourse. The central topic remained the same – Russia's place in the new world order.⁴⁴ For some analysts, the war in Yugoslavia was seen as a litmus test showing how little the West respected Russia and its interests. The UN and OSCE mechanisms were deemed defunct, the US was striving to achieve the global dominance and only nuclear capabilities could prevent Russia from following the path of the ancient Carthage.⁴⁵

Interestingly, multipolarity seemed to be ruled out in this light because, the analysts argued, the world was unipolar and Russia should not have any ambitions to revise it. As Alexei Pushkov sarcastically points out, "turning his (Primakov's) plane back over the Atlantic was, of course, a spectacular and, under those circumstances, the only correct political move. But that turnabout did not cancel the other flights – to seek US consent for funds for Russia to be provided under the

Security Dialogue, Vol. 33 (3) p.357

⁴⁴ Matveev A. Washington's Claims to World Leadership in International Affairs, No 5, 1999, p.53

⁴⁵ Fedorov A. New Pragmatism of Russia's foreign policy, International Affairs, No 4, 2000, p.13

IMF auspices and especially funds for restructuring our debts.”⁴⁶ Pushkov recognizes Russia’s huge economic dependence on the West but he stresses, it should not be the motive for Russia to integrate with the West politically, either with NATO, or with the EU. In his words, partnership is possible only “in a number of areas” and only if a “serious common threat both to the Western alliance and to Russia” emerges.⁴⁷

In a more academic manner, a similar view was presented by another analyst, Sergei Blagovolin. Blagovolin questions not the multipolarity as such but the ability of Russia to play “structure-forming” role in the international system. Russia in his view should limit its structure-forming role as a regional power to the post-Soviet space. However, he also underscores the necessity to build strong bilateral relations with the US and EU, as the isolation would be costly for Russia.⁴⁸ Although this group of analysts seems to reveal dissatisfaction in “multipolarity” as a general view of the outside world, they nevertheless tend to stress that Russia, due to geostrategic reasons, should conduct a multipolar policy, e.g. oppose NATO enlargement and create strategic alliances with China and India, as well as with other “poles”, like France, Germany and Great Britain.⁴⁹ Multipolarity is thus suggested as one of the few most relevant instrumental approaches to pursue Russia’s national security interests.

Those analysts that have always been arguing for revision of Russia’s foreign

⁴⁶Pushkov A. Russia and the New World Order in International Affairs, No 6, 2000, p.5

⁴⁷ Ibid p.7

⁴⁸ Blagovolin S. Russia’s Place in a Changing World in International Affairs, No 6, 2000, p. 37

⁴⁹ Utkin A. Geostructura XXI veka (The geostructure in the 21 century) in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 09.01.2000

The basic reference is made to the US policies as threatening Russia’s security, e.g. plans to withdraw from the ABM treaty and build a national anti-missile defense system. See Pushkov A. Russia and the New World Order in International Affairs, 2000, Ot mechty o garmonii – k zhestokomu realizmu (From the dreams of harmony to cruel realism) in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 18.07.2000

policy in favor of cooperation and integration with the West, drew from the lesson of Kosovo that multipolarity was an “unreliable strategy”.⁵⁰ The unreliability of the multipolarity is twofold: it was both an ill-defined vision of the international system and an erroneous accommodative strategy for post-Soviet Russia. In spite of inadequate attempts to challenge the leading position of the US and the institutions of the West, Russia had to re-integrate itself into Greater Europe in terms of economic development and further democratization; the anti-NATO stand was to be abolished and closer cooperation with the EU, US and Japan was to be promoted. Russia’s place in the world was to be determined by its belonging to Europe: Russia as the last European great power was coming back home.

Finally, one of the most influential and prestigious think tanks, the Council of Foreign and Defence Policy (SVOP), joined the grand debate on Russia’s future with its *Strategy for Russia – An Agenda for the President 2000*. The position of the Council was a consensus-based approach that suggested Russia should continue its maneuvering between the world centers of power while at the same time mobilizing and reforming its economy according to the Western standards.⁵¹

A commonly held opinion, namely that the academic and the expert-community plays a rather modest role in Russian foreign policy-making looks proven if one reads the official statements of Russian diplomacy. They show that official understanding of multipolarity did not undergo the changes that the experts had anticipated. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation approved by

⁵⁰ See Trenin D. *Nenadezhnaya strategiya* (A fallacious strategy) in *Pro et Contra* Vol 6, No1-2, 2001; see also Trenin D. *Rossija i novij miroporjadok: vsgljad is Moskvi* (Russia and the New World Order: the view from Moscow), *Die Internationale Politik*, No 10, 2002

⁵¹ See *Strategija dlja Rossii- Povestka dnja dlja Presidenta 2000* (A strategy for Russia – An Agenda for President 2000) SVOP, *Vagrius* 2000; see also Tropkina O. *SVOP sanjalsja globalisazijej* (Globalization and SVOP) in *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, 6.03.2001

It has to be pointed out that SVOP has several hundred members with drastically different backgrounds and views. However, one of the most acclaimed leaders, Sergei Karaganov is known for his somewhat hawkish, realpolitik views.

president Putin in 2000 states that one of the challenges and threats to the national interests of Russia is: “the growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United states”⁵²

More specifically, NATO enlargement is assessed as “not coinciding and partly contradicting” Russian interests. In the same “balance of power” manner, interaction with China, India, Iran and “the states of Western Europe”, such as Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and France is presented as an “important source for Russia’s protection of its national interests in European and world affairs. Critically viewed, the Concept cannot be regarded as a strategic breakthrough, although it does, in a very diplomatic way, recognize the unfeasibility of Russia’s striving for multipolarity in the world.”⁵³

⁵² Foreign Policy concept of the Russian Federation, 2000, p.2

⁵³ It does so while stating that Russia’s relations with the EU are desirable but “yet to achieve its full effectiveness”. As for NATO, the Concept bluntly states: “substantive and constructive cooperation between Russia and NATO is only possible on the foundation of a due respect for the interests of the sides and an unconditional fulfillment of mutual obligations assumed.”

2. Putin's Foreign Policy and Multipolarity

Multipolarity with a human face: the case of image-making

The first steps of Putin the diplomat are difficult to analyze since it is not clear whether he had his own view on multipolarity or whether he just adhered to traditional parlance.⁵⁴ The state of affairs in Russian foreign policy in the aftermath of Yeltsin's resignation was dire and needed concrete emergency measures. Due to the Kosovo crisis, Russia terminated the work of Russia-NATO Council; the EU announced ceasing the Tacis assistance to Russia in response to the escalation of the conflict in Chechnya and multiple civilian casualties. Besides, the foreign policy agenda was overloaded with such sensitive issues as the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty; accession of the Baltic States into the EU and NATO, and the future of Kaliningrad after the double enlargement. Quite often, in tough political settings, doctrinal views give way to diplomatic improvisation. In compliance with this logic, Putin took extreme efforts to alter the image of Russian foreign policy abroad. The intensity of his trips around the world in 2000–2001, as well as an unprecedented volume of interviews and press-briefings, shows his personal motivation to conduct a successful public diplomacy campaign aimed at re-branding Russia for the outside world. Yet, a close reading of Putin's statements shows that, in fact, multipolarity remains present, although in a much more implicit form.

The general trend of Putin's early rhetoric was his willingness to present

⁵⁴ The best example is, perhaps, his visit to Cuba in December 2000. In Cuba Putin joined Fidel Castro in his anti-American rhetoric saying, "unipolarity against which we stand is an attempt to monopolize and dominate the world affairs. Monopoly must not exist in the modern world." Putin's visit to Russian surveillance base in Lourdes made the audience assume he would stick to traditional multipolarity. . See Gornostaev D. Putin i Kastro sovместno pokritikovali SShA in Nesavisimaya Gazeta (Putin and Kastro expressed common criticism toward the US), 16.12.2000

multipolarity as a positive vision for the world system, based on cooperation and mutual respect. The overall theme was that Russia didn't treat any country as a source of threat or as an adversary. Russia is striving to resolve global issues by political means and from a "democratic base".⁵⁵ Although, when visiting such 'geostrategically' important countries as France, Germany and India, Putin was elaborating on strategic importance of Russia's cooperation with these states; the element of multipolarity in his rhetoric never reached the alarmingly pathetic tone of his predecessors. One of the most striking features of Putin's rhetoric is that he tried to divorce multipolarity from confrontationist and anti-American tones.

This friendly diplomacy perhaps reached its peak at the Russian-US Summit in Slovenia in June 2001. Russian President solemnly stated he regarded the US as a friend as did President Bush in regard to Russia. "The spirit of Ljubljana" remained in the air during the following summer months while Putin took part in the Summit of the G8 in Genoa in July and participated in the informal meeting of the CIS in Sochi in August 2001. In Genoa, it became apparent that Russia foresaw the inevitable withdrawal of the USA from the ABM Treaty and Putin personally tried to prepare the ground for this maneuver.⁵⁶ Speaking to the CIS leaders in Sochi,

However, as it appeared later, he decided to close the base in Lourdes, which in turn was very warmly perceived by the critics of multipolarity

⁵⁵ See Putin's interview with the French TV and radio outlets TF1, FRANCE 3, RFI and the Russian channel ORT, 23 October 2000; The interview to the French newspaper Le Figaro, 26.10.2000; Speech at the Meeting with the French business elite, 31.10.2000; Speech at the Parliament of India, 04.10.2000

⁵⁶ See the press conference of the Presidents Putin and Bush, 22 July 2001. Putin said: "This (the future of the ABM treaty) is an issue for negotiating. We agreed that in any case we would be acting together to reduce the amount of strategic offensive arms. Let the experts calculate the exact amount". Bobo Lo points out that Putin's attempts to soften Russia's harsh response to the ABM and NATO enlargement were to call these issues simply a "mistake" Lo B. Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign policy, Blackwell, 2003, p.74. Interestingly, in the case of the USA intervention in Iraq in 2003, Putin took the same line, although it was negatively perceived both at home and abroad. For the US, his assessment was too non-cooperative, in Russia it was criticized as too soft. See Ofitova S. V Sovete Federazii vosobladali "jastrebi" (The hawks took upper hand in the Federation Council) in Nezavisimaja Gazeta, 27.03.2003

there was no reference to multipolarity; instead Putin pledged to inform his colleagues on his recent talks with Bush and Chirac.⁵⁷

As Lo notes, “the real key to Putin’s Teflon-like qualities is that he has known ‘how to lose’ or, more accurately, to convert necessity into a virtue; he has yet to fight a battle he cannot win.”⁵⁸ Given the array of his speeches made at the start of his presidency, it remains to be seen whether the multipolarity was a battle he realized he could not win, and therefore quit altogether. Starting by re-branding Russia as a partner to everyone, he drifted towards an unambiguous partnership with the USA. Would multipolarity “with the human face” that was devoid of “Russia as a great power” and “No to American and NATO-centrism” dictum survive? It could be argued that what Putin had done was simply a public relations-like exchange of the brand: the archaic image of Russia as great power was replaced with a somewhat more plausible image of a reasonable, trustworthy and cooperative partner (presumably for the West but also for the rest of the world). This is, perhaps, the best strategy if one is losing the game, however it might be of little use when starting a new one. The cases that follow, trace the evolution of multipolarity and its strategic use in Russia’s most recent foreign policy-making.

Systemic shock of September 11 and Russia’s response: Unipolarity ad hoc?

For students of Russian foreign policy, September 11 2001 perhaps is best remembered for Russia’s unprecedented support for the United States that followed the terrorist attacks. One of the most striking features of Russian behavior after September 11 was its resoluteness and readiness for the far-reaching implications

⁵⁷ He furthermore underscored their involvement in the process of conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabach. See Statement of President Putin at the informal CIS Summit in Sochi, 02 August 2001 and The press-briefing, 02 August 2001

⁵⁸Lo B. 2003, p.29

that its new policy would have.⁵⁹

For some, it seemed like Russia had finally made the strategic choice in favor of not just a partnership with the US but also an alliance.⁶⁰ For this paper, such close cooperation with the US demonstrates the accomplishment of Russian accommodation to the unipolar international system and its assuming the status of the “junior partner” of the USA. Some scholars have already expressed this opinion, pointing out that Russia acknowledged the reality of the US’s overwhelming might and unipolar position in the world when it accepted the inevitability of the termination of the ABM Treaty, and of NATO enlargement.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, all these concessions were a source of concern for many including Primakov, one of the main ideologists and practitioners of multipolarity. His commentary was constantly revolving around Russia’s status in the world.⁶² The worst-case scenario for Primakov was the return to the “led/leader model” in which Russia would be the ‘led-country’ with a foreign policy depended on the benevolence of the West, as had happened under Kozyrev in early 1990s. However, one might argue that, contrary to Kozyrev or Gorbachev, Putin’s decision to realign with the US was caused by a pragmatic acceptance of the fact that Russia’s way out of present economic and political marginalization required a long-term partnership with the

⁵⁹ Alexei Arbatov, for instance, argues that Russia could have “simply taken a passive line, providing moral support, expressing sympathy, and leaving the Americans to sort it out themselves – that is to say, roughly the position adopted by China. Russia could have taken the line of possible neutrality, facilitating US agreement with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan but again remaining on the side-lines – a position close to India’s.” Arbatov A. Russia’s place in the World after September 11, Roundtable discussion in *International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No 2, 2002, p.80

⁶⁰ Khodorenok M. *Rossija delaet strategicheskij vybor* (Russia makes a strategic choice) in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 21.09.2001

⁶¹ Nurick R. and Trenin D. *Noviy format integracii i partnerstva*, (A new pattern for integration and partnership) available at http://www.russiamonitor.org/ru/main.asp?menu_id=11_a_1411

⁶² Primakov E. Is the Russia-US Rapprochement Here to Stay? in *International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No6, 2002

US.⁶³ Also, in the short-term perspective, he had to take into account the US determination to crush the Al-Qaeda terrorist bases in Afghanistan and eventual American presence in the *near abroad*, i.e. Central Asia and the Caucasus. It became clear that Russia had, in fact, no ways to prevent the deployment of the US troops in the areas close to Russia's southern borders. To raise a protest against the US activities would be futile, for Russia's own influence in the respective part of the CIS was not sufficient to prevent Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan from granting the USA access to their military bases.⁶⁴ The overall picture of how the world reacted to the challenge of September 11 might have seemed a striking evidence of unipolarity in action for the Russian President and the bandwagoning was deemed to be the best possible solution.⁶⁵

Given the assumption that after September 11 Russia's foreign policy became more permissive towards unipolarity, it is therefore worth asking whether this trapped Russia, bending its foreign policy to the 'yoke' of America's hegemony? Did Primakov's nightmare come true, and having stepped into unipolarity, Russia became the led-country for the world sole superpower? It may be argued that Russia's permissive, concession-oriented behavior provided for establishment of the NATO-Russia Council of 20, and thus resulted in most impressive political payoffs and actual increase in Russia's status since the demise of the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ True, the Russian-US partnership after the September 11 was

⁶³ Herd G. and Akerman E. Russian Strategic Realignment and the Post-Post-Cold War Era? In *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 33 (3), 2002 p.363

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.367

⁶⁵ Kortunov defines it in rather harsh terms stating that "while enjoying the support of Russia and all other major countries in the anti-terrorist operation the United States turned the national tragedy into a military and political triumph, gained considerable political weight in the world and straightened its position as the only world leader that disregards its own allies, the UN and international laws". Kortunov S. A Chance to Open a New Page? in *International Affairs*, 2001

⁶⁶ Kuchins A. *Explaining Mr. Putin: Russia's New nuclear Diplomacy 2000*, available at http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_10/kuncisoc02.asp?print

asymmetrical and did not resemble the US-Soviet alliance of the World War II. However, it became apparent that although Russia was not likely to gain the status of the great power, in the unipolar world the United States was ready and in need of engagement with Russia in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. In the course of the anti-terrorist struggle the US called for partnership with Russia. It became the role of Russian diplomacy to make the unipolar situation serve Russian national interest. As Kuchins notes: “Putin’s post-September 11 orientation has been reasonably well rewarded, and he can make a plausible argument that Russia is now getting from the West as good as it is giving. First, there is the nuclear arms treaty rather than just a handshake. There is a new and potentially tighter institutional relationship between Russia and NATO. Russia has been recognized as a market economy by both the European Union and the United States – important steps in the WTO accession process. And in July, Russia was accepted as a full member of the G-8 beginning in 2006.”⁶⁷

To make the picture complete, it is worth remembering the question mark ending the title of this section. Was Russia’s acceptance of unipolarity, and decision to become America’s ally made on the ad hoc basis? Is it possible to see traces of multipolarity even after such as an unambiguous policy-turn as Russia’s following the fall of the Twin Towers? To probe this requires looking into the juncture of rhetoric and strategic thinking. It is thus not impossible to argue that multipolarity, although largely marginalized, remained a foreign policy options.

The Multipolar Option: Russia as great power in counter-terrorism

Russia’s response to the shock of September 11 should not be described only as siding with the United States. In fact, from the multipolar perspective, the threat of international terrorism, or terrorists using weapons of mass destruction, is taken

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.5

in terms of realpolitik as one of the most powerful determinants of the shift in the balance of power and interests in the international system. In one of the most radical interpretations, the terrorist attacks have brought an end to the hegemony of the United States and catalyzed the exit to the anarchic multipolarity. This view has been expressed by ideologists of geopolitics and nationalism, such as Aleksandr Dugin. In Dugin's view, Russia's foreign policy after September 11 would depend on whether the United States would give up its unipolar aspirations and provide for multipolar world order.⁶⁸ September 11 was seen by Dugin as a chance to conduct genuine multipolar foreign policy in form of "eurasianism", i.e. the "formation of a broad, anti-globalist, anti-American club, composed of until-now antagonist forces, including the economic giants of Asia and the countries of the Islamic world."⁶⁹ Although the ideas of Dugin were quite popular in the Yeltsin era, they became marginalized and obsolete to Putin's foreign policy. Although hardly a real option for Kremlin's short-term strategic planning, "eurasianist" multipolarity remains a dream plan for some in the military and political elites that impose indirect influence on the foreign policy.⁷⁰

More apparent and far more technically complicated evidence of the multipolarity can be encountered in groupthink of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Minister Ivanov stated: "a new world order for the new century is emerging... Russia has both power and potential which make her role necessary

⁶⁸ Rossiya dolzshna uchest oshibki Ameriki (Russia has to learn from America's mistakes) in *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, 11. 09.2001

⁶⁹ Vremena, Moscow, ORT 1, 16.09.2001, 18.30 GMT quoted in Kipp J. Aleksandr Dugin and the Ideology of National Revival: Geopolitics, Eurasiansim and the Conservative Revolution in *European Security*, Vol. 11, No3, 2002

⁷⁰ These include the General Staff generals and academicians, e.g. General Leonid Ivashov; political parties and individuals in the State Duma, e.g. among the Communists; see, for instance, a recent book by Leonid Ivashov *Rossija ili Moscovija: geopoliticheskoje izmerenie nazionalnoj besopasnosti Rossiji*. (Russia or Moscovia: geopolitical dimension of the national security of Russia) Eksmo, 2002

whatever issues are at stake. It resembles the ‘adjustment’ of the concert of the great powers.”⁷¹ Russian initiatives on an “adjustment” of the international system included the establishment of international arrangements to counter terrorism. Somewhat in parallel to the US’s-led antiterrorist coalition, Russia attempted to institutionalize the counter-terrorism struggle under the auspices of the United Nations, using the norms of international law. In doing so, Russia actively participated in the work of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee as vice chairman and ratified almost every convention on counter-terrorism.⁷² For Russia, bringing the problem of international terrorism onto the UN agenda was a way to assure itself of its status as a great power. Emphasis on its status of the permanent member of the UN Security Council has always been a mantra for Russia’s position in the world, therefore the logic behind strengthening the role of the UN in the context of the counter-terrorism revealed Russia’s strategy to remain at the core of the decision-making process.

The threat of international terrorism also became a new reference for Russia’s strategic partnerships outside the Atlantic community, mainly with India and China. Apart from the aforementioned calls for the greater engagement of the UN, Russia’s “strategic partnership” with India also involved bilateral activities on the post-war development in Afghanistan. Needless to say, in the official diplomatic parlance, multipolarity went hand in hand with the theme of international terrorism.⁷³ Recent developments in Russian-Chinese relations and Russia’s participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are evidence that Russian

⁷¹ Ivanov I. Kakoj mir nam nuzhen? (What world do we need?) In *Kommersant*, 20.11.2002

⁷² Rossiija vosglavit antiterroristicheskuju koaliziju (Russia will lead the antiterrorist coalition) in *Kommersant* 22.01.03

⁷³ Ivanov I. Rossiija i Indija: vmeste v borbe s mezhdunarodnim terrorizmom. Strategicheskoe partnerstvo v dejstvii (Russia and India: on a joint fight against international terrorism. Strategic partnership at work)., in *Rossiiskaja gazeta*, 02.12.2002

foreign policy aims at continuing to seek alliances elsewhere.⁷⁴ In sum, developing strategic bilateral relationships outside Europe and stressing the counter-terrorism rhetoric, Russia has demonstrated that multipolarity, at least in tactical terms, is no longer synonymous with anti-Americanism.⁷⁵

This same trend is also visible in Russia-NATO relations. Although the rapprochement between the two was quite amazing, Russia's more agreeable stand with regard to NATO enlargement should not be overestimated. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the threat of terrorism provided Russia with a fresh and seemingly more justifiable argument against the enlargement and for rebuilding the alliance as a whole.⁷⁶ Here again, the "multipolarity with the human face" is supplemented with an essential argument: not only is NATO's enlargement unnecessary due to Russia's willingness to cooperate with Western security institutions, but it is also counter-productive in terms of its goals because the enlargement as such has little to do with coping with such a topical threat to the *whole* international community as international terrorism.⁷⁷

To summarize; the argument of counter-terrorism has become an important element of Russia's foreign policy after September 11, while multipolarity, although present in the doctrinal texts, evolved in terms of practical implementation. The extent, to which multipolarity became free from the illusory aspirations to multipolar world, persistent resistance to "American globalism", and Russian great power status, can be partially explained with factors of institutional

⁷⁴ Ivanov I. Interview to Zhenmin Zhibao Newspaper, 27.02.2003

⁷⁵ see, for instance, Vladimirov A. & Plenkin D. Bolshaja Azija in *Itogi*, No49, December 2002

⁷⁶ Ivanov I. Speech delivered at the North-Atlantic Partnership Council in Prague 22.11.2002

⁷⁷ Ivanov I. Press conference statement in Reykjavik, 14 May, 2002 in Ivanov I. *Vneshnya politika Rossiji v epohu globalisazii: statji i vystuplenija*, OLMA-Press, 2002

change.⁷⁸ As a reformer and realist, Putin realized the superiority of American power and the USA readiness to use all its might if national security was under threat. But what Putin also seemingly took into account was the window of opportunity offered by the challenge of international terrorism. This was a chance for Russia to close the gap between it and the West (and the US in particular) caused by misperceptions whilst also assuming an independent and *noticeable* role as a responsible contributor to fight against international terrorism. Assuming this role, Russia's foreign policy, though modernized and "westernized"⁷⁹, remained multipolar. The presence of revisited multipolarity becomes apparent in Russia's continuous attempts to institutionalize combating international terrorism in the framework of the UN and revitalizing its bilateral ties with India and China.

From September 11 to War in Iraq: Back to Multipolarity and Out Again?

Russia's behavior during the 2003 Iraq crisis can be examined as a litmus test for revisited multipolarity as the state's foreign policy. The place and role of multipolarity both in the form of strategic thinking and political rhetoric covering it, amazingly coincides with the unfolding of the situation prior to the actual war, in the course of war and at its aftermath.⁸⁰ The impact of September 11 and the chosen strategy to uphold close relationship with the USA, and even the Russia-US alliance in the form of antiterrorist coalition and NATO Council of 20, became seriously challenged as the US President announced plans for removing the regime of

⁷⁸ see Brown A. Russia as a "Normal" Object of Study in international Politics in Sundelius B. (ed.) *The Consequences of September 11: A Symposium on the Implications for the Study of International Relations*, The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm 2002, p.165

⁷⁹ Morozov V. Putin's westernization and the future of Russia's relations with Europe in *The New North of Europe: Policy Memos*, Helsinki, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs- Institut für Europäische Politik, 2002, pp. 68-72

⁸⁰ This proves that Russia's foreign policy still holds mainly a adaptive/reactive standing and the multipolar option is still crucial in the way that it often represents the actual reaction of Russia to the external changes.

Saddam Hussein by means of military force.⁸¹ From the American perspective, inevitable war in Iraq was one of the implications of the new security policy, which defined threats to national security as stemming from the terrorist organizations and the state potentially sponsoring them, as well as the proliferation of weapons or mass destruction. Moreover, since America's present military capability allows it to project power globally, the sources of threat are to be eradicated by the means of preventive strikes.⁸²

As a result, the US diplomats spent months between the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003 trying to convince the international community that the regime of Hussein posed this threefold threat as a state that honored none of its pledges to the UN to disarm itself, a state that also praised terrorism, and a state that provided asylum to Al-Qaeda members. As the US was creating the coalition of the willing to dismantle the Iraqi regime Russia remained reluctant. For the most part of the pre-war period, i.e. from fall 2002 till March 2003 Russia continuously stuck to UN line of sanctions and the disarmament of Iraq on the basis of the UNSC resolution 1441. Already committed to counter-terrorism but having institutionalized the fight as primarily the UN's competence, Russia was playing the safe card of softly opposing the US in the Security Council. Only some weeks before the war started on March 19, 2003, did Russia's position reach where it said it would veto a pro-war resolution if one was initiated by USA or Great Britain. One of the reasons for Russia's hardening position against the war may be found in the context of the diplomatic game of multipolarity that took place not only in the UNSC, but also between Paris, Berlin and Moscow. When French President Chirac openly stated

⁸¹ See US President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly on September 12, 2002, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>

⁸² More on US security strategy and the so called Bush doctrine, see The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>; Dr.

that he “favored a multipolar world”⁸³, and France, Germany and Belgium vetoed the proposal in NATO on the defense of Turkey in February 2003, it all seemed to be signs of the growing displeasure of the Europeans with the American unilateralist policy. It is not clear, however, what would have happened, if Russia and the proponents of multipolarity had vetoed the resolution. As Arbatov notes, perhaps Russia would have been the country that would have had to pay the dearest price for jeopardizing its partnership with the US; whereas France and China would have been more secure as they both enjoy far better connections to the US either in form of NATO membership or multiple economic contacts.⁸⁴ It appears that multipolar option was more a sign of weakness than of strength both for Russia and France.⁸⁵ But whereas France had a room for maneuver, which was via the EU, Russia had nothing to rely on.

In fact, Russia’s improved status in the world after September 11 was solely depended on whether Russia could find a niche by projecting the image of a member of the Western partnership, and keeping the US interested in perceiving Russia that way. When Vladimir Putin publicly called the start of the military campaign in Iraq a “great mistake” and insisted on the “soonest possible ending of the military actions”⁸⁶, the US launched a massive diplomatic attack on Russia

Condoleezza Rice Discusses President's National Security Strategy, September 2002, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021001-6.html>

⁸³ Time February 24, 2002

⁸⁴ Arbatov A. Irakskij krizis: moment istini (Iraqi’s crisis – the moment of truth) in *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 28.02.03

⁸⁵ Jacquelyn Davis argues that the French outcry against the US was caused by identity crisis which France has been experiencing ever since it lost its Empire. Contrary to another former empire, Great Britain, France “has been unable to accept the new global realities and has asserted its positions even when they have been at odds with those of friends and allies.” See Davis J. *Reluctant Allies or Competitive Partners: US-French relations at the Breaking Point?* IFPA, 2003

⁸⁶ See Putin V. Statement at the meeting in the Kremlin, Moscow, 20 March, 2003 <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2003/03/40898.shtml>

revealing the cases of Russian arms contracts with Iraq.⁸⁷ In doing so, Washington demonstrated it might well regard Russia as a sponsor of the ‘terrorist state’, which would exclude Russia from the western community. Just as Russia’s estrangement from the West in Yeltsin’s time was a result of perceiving Russia as a non-democratic, imperial-inclined, hegemonic state in decline, the war in Iraq revealed the new pattern of perception: Russia as either a member of US-led antiterrorist and counter-proliferation struggle with relative degree of reluctance or an untrustworthy state. The rhetorical swing between the US and Russia was inevitably leading to stalemate, as the sides turned towards mutual accusations. Russia blamed the States for destroying the existing world order; the Americans accused Russia of being non-cooperative and inconsistent. When the US-Russian relations were about to reach freezing point, Putin made pacifying steps stating that it was not in Russia’s interests to wish a US defeat in the war with Iraq. Putin’s reaction to the US proposal on relief of Iraqi’s debt to USSR was more intricate. In spite of the fact that Iraqi’s \$8 billion debt was one of the main stakes for Russia with regard to Hussein regime, Putin agreed to consider the prospect of relief. However, he insisted that this would be done via Paris club of creditor states where Russia enjoys membership.⁸⁸ This wise intention of Russia to contribute to post-Iraqi development through its influence in international institution may not end the latest misgivings between the US and Russia, but they indicate the return of Putin’s famous ‘pragmatism’ that helped Russia to overcome the deadlock of 1999.

Another indicative trend is what is currently going on in the Russian-European affairs. On Russia’s initiative the French and German leaders convened in St. Petersburg on April 11, 2003, just a few days after the American troops got

⁸⁷ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/special_report/bbcussian/2002_07/newsid_2881000/2881665.stm

⁸⁸ Grigorjev E., Ivanov I. SShA Potrebovali spisanija dolgova Husseina in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, (US demands relief for Hussein’s debt) 14.04.2003

control of the Iraqi capital. Vladimir Putin underlined that the St. Petersburg summit was one of the regular meetings between French, German and Russian leaders (although previous ones occurred in 1997 and 1998, when Russia was preoccupied with an idea of the strategic troika, a security alliance between the three great continental powers counterbalancing the enlargement of the North-Atlantic Alliance). Contrary to the summits of the past, the St. Petersburg meeting was sought not to decouple but rather to bridge the divide between the 'Coalition of the Winning' and those who might be left out of the post-war development in Iraq, the Persian Gulf and international system as a whole.

3. The Lessons of Multipolarity

Multipolarity as an instrumental factor in Russian foreign policy

The cases examined in this study cover almost a decade of Russian foreign policy from 1994 until 2003. Although hardly being regarded as comprehensive and complete, this empirical insight demonstrates a continuously apparent pattern of multipolarity in Russian foreign policy. From the conflict in Sarajevo 1994, through the war in Kosovo in 1999, and to Iraq in 2003, multipolarity has been used as a rhetorical tool of Russian diplomacy with which, in the absence of more persuasive instruments, Russia has tried to overcome a striking and painful decline of its role and status in the international system since the end of the Cold War. The main empirical findings on the pattern of multipolarity are summarized in the Fig. 1. They are cross-connected with the international context and political outcomes that followed the employment of multipolarity.

Fig. 1 *Russian foreign policy and the instrumental meaning of multipolarity.*

	International Context	Evidence of Multipolarity	Political Outcome
1994	War in Yugoslavia	Multipolarity as an ad hoc protest measure against unilateral decisions that bypassed the UN and OSCE, and hence disregard Russia's global power status and responsibility	Marginalisation during the conflict; strained relations with NATO
1997	Russia-NATO Paris Summit NATO Madrid Summit	Multipolarity as an argument to oppose NATO enlargement. Multipolarity becomes official Russian doctrine	Enlargement continues to proceed; Russia is invited to join the PFP; Russia and NATO sign the <u>Founding Act</u> .
1999	War in Kosovo; EU Summit in Cologne	The same as in the case of 1994. Complemented with more intensive alliance-making efforts. Anti-Americanism and stalemate with the EU (partly because of Chechnya)	NATO's mission in Yugoslavia was accomplished. Enlargement continues to proceed. Russia pauses and then resumes membership in Russia-NATO Council
2000 2001	Russia-EU Summits Russia-US Summits	Putin's bridge-building diplomacy and "multipolarity with the human face"	First round of rapprochement with the West
2001	Terrorist strikes against the USA; Emergence of antiterrorist coalition; War in Afghanistan	A Break in Multipolarity? Multipolarity of counter-terrorism; Russia's activity in the UN	Russia joins the antiterrorist coalition. Closer rapprochement with the West. NATO-Russia Council of 20 established.
2003	Crisis in UN Security Council over Iraq; Split into "Old" and "New" Europe War in Iraq	Russia promises to veto pro-war resolution. It sees the war as illegitimate and calls for greater use of UN. Multipolarity as a conceptual link between Russia and Germany and France.	Russia-US relations under strain. Diplomatic scandals. Marginalization of Russia's role in the conflict and its post-war settlement.

Apparently, the operational and instrumental employment of multipolarity reached its utmost intensity at times of international crises as with the cases of the former Yugoslavia and Iraq. Moreover, crises were not simply the source for Russia's reactive diplomacy of multipolarity, but rather the fact that Russia was not taken into account as a meaningful and relevant actor that was naturally supposed to take part in their settlement. Another source of concern was that Russia had no institutional channels but bilateral diplomacy to affect the decision-making of those actors that were in charge of international crisis-management, e.g. NATO. Finally on a more global scale, such situations may be explained by the systemic shift of early 1990s and emergence of the unipolar international system. The structural change provided for a causal link between the rise of USA and NATO, and decline of UN and the OSCE – membership of which enabled the USSR to form the global security agenda on par with the USA. Russia, although succeeding the Soviet Union in the UNSC and OSCE failed to accommodate to the new structural determinants of the system and remained on the sidelines.

The employment of the harsh and somewhat hysterical policy of multipolarity in times of international crises was sought to demonstrate that Russia still considered itself a great power with global responsibilities, able to oppose NATO and the USA. The fact that, as was the case of wars in Yugoslavia in 1994 and 1999, Russia was simply not a real participant was not considered a defeat, as this was compensated for by Russia's "virtual" role of a great power capable of criticizing present hegemonic order. In periods between crises Russia's behavior was more cooperative and assertive, although the multipolarity never ceased to be the diplomatic bottom line. The general trend was that multipolarity, once it had emerged as a doctrinal solution to Russia's strategic dilemma, evolved into a persistent foreign policy practice used to handle Russia's relations with the West. Paradoxically but strategically, multipolarity meant little for Russia's relations with

its “multipolar” partners such as India, China and Iran, as they were eager to cooperate with Russia in terms of trade, arms sales, and technical assistance. In this light, multipolarity was serving a purpose of wrapping trade agreements into more solemn ideological framework. For the West, Russia’s multipolarity was a signal that Moscow was not satisfied with how its relations vis-à-vis the West were unfolding. In the absence of more integrationist and constructive strategy towards NATO and the EU, the doctrine of multipolarity was a relatively effective instrument, although an instrument that provided Russian diplomacy with only two options in regard to the West: “approve” and “disapprove.” The general trend for most of the late 1990s was that the episodes of “disapproval” were many, but in each case the West accepted this pattern and, after periods of stalemate, granted Russia the institutional arrangements that were fitting for Russia’s great power stance. In these general terms, multipolarity is likely to remain in use for the midterm future.

This is not to say, however, that the operational content of multipolarity will remain untouched. Initially, it was grounded in the Soviet superpower strengths such as the permanent seat in the UN Security Council, nuclear capabilities and the geopolitical dominance in the CIS region. In today’s world the three are not as significant as they used to be in the bipolar international structure. The case of 11 September and the war in Afghanistan saw the US advancing into the CIS and establishing its military bases in some of the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia. In the case of Iraq in 2003, Russia had to swallow the bitter pill of US arrogance toward the UN Security Council. Last but not least, the US exit from the ABM Treaty in 2002 buried the illusion of the survival of the Russian-US nuclear bond, which used to determine the world politics at times of détente. Apparently, one of the most vital elements of the policy of multipolarity will continue to be Russia’s activities in the UN and the practice of balancing and realigning. These two policies

might also be combined, as was the case during the Iraqi crisis 2003, when Russia sided with Germany and France and institutionally under the auspices of the UNSC.

The latest cases, e.g. 11 September, Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrate that the political practice of multipolarity has been significantly updated. For instance, the counter-terrorism rhetoric became integrated with the vast multipolarity doctrine and thus invigorated Russia's activities in the UN and upheld its international status.⁸⁹ It also provided Russia with a new tool to sustain its policy toward the CIS, as the anti-terrorism struggle was laid down as the cornerstone of the new Collective Security Treaty Organization that turned the Collective Security Treaty into a Russian dominated military bloc.

In essence, Russia's ability to conduct a multipolar policy has been determined by its residual great power capacities and the central desire to stay in the core of world politics. In turn, the practice of multipolarity was facilitated by the willingness of the West not to alienate Russia. This allowed Russia to maneuver in the relatively rigid unipolar international structure and uphold its international status in the face of greater structural changes.

For the Russian leadership, a decision to leave multipolarity for good would require not only a great deal of patience and persistence, but also a new vision of Russia's role in the world. In the post-11 September situation Vladimir Putin led a mostly unequivocally pro-Western course. Then came the war in Iraq, and he returned to rhetoric of multipolarity backing up his European partners, Germany and France, in their warnings against US unilateral actions toward Saddam Hussein's regime. A few months later, at the jubilee summit in St. Petersburg Russian diplomacy demonstrated yet another return to cooperation and partnership with the US and the West. It is obvious that multipolarity has lost its central place in

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Russia calls on UN to complete work on anti-terrorist conventions, ITAR TASS, May 17, 2003 available at <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/7171-3.cfm>

Russia's foreign politics but it may well survive if the political will to develop a new strategy for Russia's interaction with the West remains weak. Lacking a strong conceptual grounding, Russia's foreign policy is prone to shift between different options and multipolarity still remains one of them.

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