

# **Russian Diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

## **Multilateralism Put to Work**

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In a summer 2002 interview, Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov outlined some of the recent achievements of Russian diplomacy and suggested that well-thought out foreign policy would yield the goals Russia has set. According to Ivanov, "If you look at the activeness of the last few months, you see, after all, not some sort of spontaneous measures, but the implementation of the principles that were ratified by the president two years ago in the foreign policy concept blueprint. The essence of this is that the limited resources at the country's disposal should promote as much as possible the domestic reforms that are being carried out."

Seen in this light, the overall performance of Russian foreign policy in the first years of the twenty-first century does show a pattern of following a wide-ranging and yet focused design. The breadth of the design suggests that, inevitably, there will be incongruities of coordination. The implementation of Russia's foreign policy concept will pose other problems related to a multitude of factors on all levels, from systemic to personal. Yet current Russian diplomatic activity, in the context of Russia's historical circumstances, reveals a strong degree of consistency and purposefulness.

### **Shrinking Resources Linked to Global Designs: the Role of the United Nations**

Official assessments of global political trends and developments reveal a sense of vulnerability underlying the philosophies that form Russia's current foreign policy program. As a state with justifiable concerns about the integrity of its territory and legal sovereign space, Russia is sensitive to the international environment, including, as expressed in the 2001 statement of the heads of state of Russia and China, "attempts at subversion of the fundamental norms of international law by means of such concepts as humanitarian intervention and limited sovereignty." Struggling economically to sustain domestic growth and to be a participant rather than an observer of transnational integration processes, Russia is conscious of the increasing competitiveness and challenges of interdependence that globalization entails. Foreign policy officials have acknowledged the limited resources available to pursue foreign policy goals and the continuing erosion of Russia's international position.

This disturbing appraisal stimulates, perhaps surprisingly, an assertive international stance by Russia and a foreign policy vision of a global scope that is, surprisingly, not driven by imperial motives. The resulting foreign policy program aims at the creation of a

“democratic multipolar world order guaranteeing progressive development and equal security to all states,” which is a condition for the fundamental objective of internal economic revival. Russia’s perceived inadequacy compelled it to embrace multilateralism as its favored operating principle. In the course of Russia’s realization of its foreign policy program, the United Nations has begun to play an extremely important role. In the Russian view, the UN represents the central collective mechanism for shaping the multipolar world order and regulating world politics. It is the backbone of the emergent international system based on international law, the UN Charter, and multilateral approaches to global and regional problems.

Russia’s status as a permanent member of the Security Council is a determining factor in its view of the UN’s central role in lending legitimacy to international issues. The 2000 Russian Foreign Policy Concept lists Russia’s status in the Security Council as the primary source for the country’s influence in the world and sets a high priority to the objective of preserving the current veto principle and prerogatives of the Security Council, as well as centrality of the UN role in world affairs. This position sets the general framework for Russia’s international action. It also determines a focus for the routine, more technical diplomatic work. It was in the UN, for example, in 2001–2002, that Russia sought to establish legal consequences of the use of force by states without prior authorization by the Security Council, except in the exercise of self-defense, and to uphold the Security Council’s exclusive authority in defining the crime of aggression. In the legal field, it is the fundamental character of the UN Charter that enshrines the principle of sovereignty. In the political arena, the UN is the sole legitimizing authority in matters of conflict prevention and crisis management. Russia persistently strives to strengthen these two principles in its diplomatic agenda.

## **The UN School of Multilateralism**

More recently, Russian diplomats have been learning to capitalize on the UN’s potential for multilateralism. The General Assembly, expressing prevailing international sentiment, supported Russia’s position on the ABM treaty, which resulted in the adoption of the final resolution “Preservation and Compliance with the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems”, despite the fact that Russia, in bilateral talks with the United States, could not convince the United States to continue to comply with the ABM treaty. Following the General Assembly discussions in 2000, Russian foreign policy statements reflected the overwhelming international consensus rejecting the doctrines of limited sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, which have been strongly opposed by Russia since NATO’s Kosovo operation in 1999. And despite having permanent member status in the UN, Russia felt more confident voicing its opposition to the current U.S. stance against Iraq only after more than 70 states requested an open debate on the issue in October 2002.

Furthermore, Russia seems to seek greater legitimacy by engaging more fully in the regime- and partnership-building capacity of the UN. Lately, Russian official pronouncements have begun to stress the key role of the UN in the effective management of the globalization processes. Seeing the UN-based complex institutional networks as the core structure of the international financial and trade systems, Russian foreign policy officials tend to regard the UN as a unique instrument capable of alleviating the

disrupting effects of globalization and promoting the standards of fairness and stability in the changing world economic order. Working within the system holds both the symbolic value of participation in a legitimate process and the practical importance of advancing the interests of the national economy. Thus, in its efforts to join the World Trade Organization, Russia is using the UN Conference on Trade and Development as an additional channel to press for more equitable conditions in international decisionmaking, while campaigning for recognition of the special concerns of transition economies. From a different angle, the recent UN shift to encourage collaboration with the private sector has been construed as a direct opportunity for Russian firms to enter the world-level markets of services and goods. For instance, Russia is paying close attention to the work of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), a specialized entity delivering procurement, management, and support services to thousands of projects funded by the organizations of the UN and international financial institutions. Admittedly taking a new direction, the Russian Foreign Ministry co-organized, in conjunction with national business organizations, a series of events to introduce Russian firms to the prospects of the UN-sponsored partnerships and to the related ideas of corporate social responsibility.

It is predominantly through multilateral channels that Russia is currently reinforcing previously secondary policy goals such as sustainable development and environment protection, or the long-neglected ones like development aid and cooperation. International attention to these issues can be explained only in part by Russia's membership in such international organizations as the Group of Eight or the OECD. It also reflects the implementation of a new process for creating international policy that is characterized by interdependence and multilateralism.

### **Invigorated Diplomacy: Some Issue Areas**

The fight against terrorism is a policy direction that gives a supplementary perspective on the new, invigorated mode of Russian diplomacy. Conceptually, terrorism is defined in the Foreign Policy Concept not only as a national security issue but also in the context of "new challenges and threats associated with globalization processes." This presupposes a long-term approach on a global scale, and thus requires a coordinated and multilateral response. Strategically, the anti-terrorist agenda has been addressed at the level of international organizations, and predominantly through initiatives to develop a comprehensive international legal framework, with subsequent attention to political and military instruments. Russia, typically having taken a less active and follower-type role, has chosen to take a more decisive leadership stance on such issues as human rights in organizations such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Russia's increasing turn to multilateralism is further supported by Russia's position on the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Convention on Climate Change. Russia used the Johannesburg Summit to declare its intention to ratify the protocol and announce its plans to host a World Conference on Climate Change in 2003 in Moscow. This was a calculated choice that factored in political and economic considerations. Finding itself in a position where its decision could actually decide the future of the Protocol, the Russian government had reasoned that international political advantages and prospective economic benefits outweighed the costs associated with implementing the protocols. This is significant because it demonstrates that Russia is prepared to take the initiative in an

area outside the more traditional or immediate scope of its concerns, realizing that the implications affect not only ecological, but also political, economic, and institutional outcomes.

Clearly, multilateralism as a cornerstone of Russian foreign policy is not a universal magic wand. In Russia's case it has proven problematic in some regional contexts, notably in the Commonwealth of Independent States. It has, however, been productive, almost paradoxically, in the parallel tasks of accumulating sparse resources and stimulating the diversification of policy directions. It is a pay off now being applied by Russia in a consistent goal-oriented manner within an identifiable foreign policy project.

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