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**Russia and the Persian Gulf
The Deepening of Moscow's
Middle East Policy**

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Key Points

- * Vladimir Putin's visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan in February 2007 is part of Russia's return to the Middle East.
- * The post-Soviet Russian leadership sees the Middle East as an area in which Russia already has wide-ranging political, economic and security interests.
- * The widening of contacts with Saudi Arabia and Qatar is a new feature of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy.
- * The abandonment of Marxist-Leninist ideology makes Russian foreign policy in the region more flexible.
- * Moslem discomfort with US policy in Iraq gives Moscow further opportunities to broaden its presence. Rivalry with the USA is a significant feature of Putin's Middle East policy.

Russia and the Persian Gulf: The Deepening of Moscow's Middle East Policy

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Vladimir Putin's tour of the Persian Gulf in February 2007, when he visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan was the first ever visit by a Soviet/Russian leader to this region. It followed on from his visit to Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories in April 2005, which was the first occasion that a Soviet/Russian leader had ever been to Israel, and the first visit to Egypt since Nikita Khrushchev visited there in 1964. To these visits can also be added the decision in March 2006 to invite the newly elected Hamas Palestinian leadership to Moscow. The Kremlin is demonstrating that it is now able to chart an independent course in the Middle East.

Although the Soviet Union had a strong presence in Egypt, Syria and Iraq during various periods of the Cold War, her presence in the Persian Gulf was minimal, due largely to the reluctance of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies to have dealings with a communist state. Although the USSR long desired to have a presence in the region, and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev called for a security conference on the Persian Gulf in 1981, significant relations only began to develop after the break up of the Soviet Union. Putin's visits therefore represent a new dimension for Russian foreign policy. The demise of the USSR in 1991 forced her to retreat from the Middle East, and she has long desired to return to a region where she feels she has natural right to be.¹ Russia's enfeebled state in the 1990s prevented her from making much headway in the region, and Moscow had little choice other than to follow in the wake of US policy. The increase in Russian power and self-confidence in the Putin era has enabled her to begin playing a more active role.

Why does Russia desire to enhance her presence in the Persian Gulf?

- This, along with other parts of the Middle East, is a region in which she feels she should have a presence and play a role in maintaining regional security.
- Moscow sees the region as a potentially lucrative market for Russian goods. She also desires to attract investment from the region into Russia.
- Moscow is interested in cooperation in the energy sector with several states in the region. Saudi Arabia and Russia are the two main producers of oil, and Russia is interested in the idea of forming a gas cartel with Iran and Qatar.
- The Putin leadership also wishes to counter the US presence in the region.

The March 2007 Review of Russian foreign policy by the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs,² in its section on the Middle East, noted that the lack of equilibrium in the international system after the end of the Cold War meant that there was no longer any "systemic counteraction" to the USA. The clear desire of the

Putin leadership to raise its profile in the area represents in part an attempt to provide a systemic balance to US policy in the Middle East. In other words, the Russian leadership partly sees its Middle East policy within the framework of geopolitical competition with the USA. This was obliquely expressed by Putin in an interview to Al Jazeera in February 2007:

“From the point of view of stability in this or that region or in the world in general, the balance of power is the main achievement of these past decades and indeed of the whole history of humanity. It is one of the most important conditions for maintaining global stability and security...”

“I do not understand why some of our partners...see themselves as cleverer and more civilized and think that they have the right to impose their standards on others. The thing to remember is that standards that are imposed from the outside, including in the Middle East, rather than being a product of a society's natural internal development, lead to tragic consequences, and the best example of this is Iraq.”³

Putin's tour of the Persian Gulf can therefore be seen as an attempt by Russia to demonstrate to the states in that region that there is an alternative to US hegemony. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan have traditionally been closely aligned to Washington, so Putin's visit to these three states was an attempt to declare that Russia is also worth cultivating as a friend, and to demonstrate that Russia can have cooperative relations with both Shi'ite Iran and the Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

Moscow does see her relationship with the USA in the Middle East and the Moslem as being partly one of rivalry. In June 2006, Vladimir Putin's adviser Aslambek Aslakhanov commented that:

*“Russia and the US may have different positions on international and regional issues, and different attitudes to Muslim nations. **Russia and the US are certainly rivals in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world.** The question is what it is based on and how far it may go. It is only fair that Russia does not want to play the role of a US junior partner in Middle East affairs and in questions pertaining to the destinies of the Muslim world. But Russia can and must be a partner of the US and the West when its national interests are not prejudiced.”⁴*

Saudi Arabia

Putin's visit to Saudi Arabia was very high profile. He received the Abd-al-Aziz order for services to Islam, which is the country's highest award, from King Abdullah. The Russian delegation was very large, and included Gazprom head Alexey Miller, Lukoil head Vagit Alekperov, Russian Railways head Vladimir Yakunin, and (the moslem) Tatarstan President Mintimier Shaymiev. Some ten agreements on protecting investment and improving economic cooperation were signed. Saudi Arabia had earlier invited Russian specialists to explore and develop gas deposits. Russian Railways may construct a railway line from Mecca to Medina. Putin offered to sell arms to Saudi Arabia, including T-90 tanks. Putin also offered to supply nuclear reactors to Riyadh, and called for increased Saudi investment in the Russian economy. He welcomed a proposal by some Saudi business circles to establish a joint Russo-Saudi bank. In addition, Putin offered to expand Saudi-Russian space cooperation. Seven Saudi satellites have been launched by Russia

since 2003, and six others are awaiting launch. Putin also wishes to attract Saudi investment for the GLONASS satellite navigation system.

A big impetus had been given to the economic relationship after the visit of Saudi King Abdullah to Russia in September 2003. In January 2004, Lukoil won a tender to develop the "Zone A" natural gas field in the Rub el Hali desert south of Al-Ghawar, and signed a 40-year contract with the Saudi government to explore and develop this field. When King Abdullah visited Russia in September 2003 Stroitransgaz formed the first Russo-Saudi consortium with the Saudi Oger construction company.

Putin also praised the Saudi role in broking a peace agreement between the rival Palestinian groups Fatah and Hamas.⁵ The USA was much more cautious about this agreement, and so Moscow's support demonstrated to Riyadh that it need not look only to Washington for support. The awarding of the Abd-al-Aziz order to Putin clearly demonstrates that Russian policy in Chechnya is not considered by the Saudi leadership to be an impediment to closer relations. Saudi Arabia's warmth to Russia may well be intended as a signal to Washington that it can cultivate friends elsewhere if need be. The Saudi leadership is therefore likely to encourage the development of closer ties.

Qatar

Putin's visit to Qatar is significant because of Qatar's importance as a producer of natural gas. Qatar's proven natural gas reserves stand at 910.5 trillion cubic feet as of January 2007, about 15 percent of total world reserves and the third largest in the world behind Russia and Iran. During the visit agreements were signed on the formation of a Russo-Qatari Gas Council, and on the mutual protection of investments. A memorandum on mutual understanding between Lukoil Overseas Holdings and Qatar Petroleum was also signed.

The main topic of conversation during Putin's visit was that of cooperation between gas producers. There has been much speculation about whether Russia would seek to create or join a gas cartel with other major gas producers, most notably Iran and Qatar. When in Qatar, Putin said he did not rule out the possibility of forming a cartel in the future. However this was not apparently discussed during his visit. Indeed the Emir of Qatar noted that it was easier for OPEC to raise and lower oil prices than it would be for a gas cartel, as gas supply contracts tended to be of at least 20 years duration. The formation of a gas OPEC would therefore be a complex process.⁶ However, there is clear interest in both sides in developing cooperation among gas producers. A Forum of Gas Producers took place in Qatar in April, which Russian Industry and Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko attended. Putin's visit to Algeria in March 2006 and subsequent agreements in the energy field should also be seen in this light.

Jordan

During his visit to Jordan Putin discussed cooperation in pipeline construction, transport, oil refining and building new power stations. A statement on Russo-Jordanian relations was issued, and agreement was reached on the creation of a Russo-Jordanian business council, along with an agreement on protection of investments. Jordan will purchase six Russian KA-226 helicopters for civilian

purposes, and an agreement was signed on setting up a plant to assemble Lada cars in Jordan.⁷ In addition, the already existing Russian Scientific and Cultural Centre has renewed its activities.

During this visit, Putin conferred with the King of Jordan, Abdullah II on the Arab-Israeli peace process, and he also discussed this topic with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmud Abbas.

Egypt and Syria

Alongside the development of relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan, Moscow has also continued to develop her relationship with these two former Soviet allies. A large number of economic agreements were signed when Russian prime minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Egypt in November 2004, and a Russo-Egyptian business forum took place during Putin's visit in April 2005.⁸ An agreement was signed in April 2005 on the establishment of a Russo-Egyptian university. The university opened in March 2006. Cooperation in the use of civilian nuclear energy was discussed during this visit. The Russian delegation in April 2005 included the head of Rosobronseksport Sergey Chemizov, who discussed Egypt's willingness to purchase Russian weapons systems. Little progress was made in this area, due to Egypt's preference for US weapons systems. However Putin's visit indicated that the political relationship was becoming much closer. A declaration on bilateral relations was signed, in which it was stated that both sides were "strategic partners".

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak made a return visit to Moscow in November 2006. Mubarak and Putin discussed the establishment of a Russian industrial zone in Egypt. In April 2007 Russian industry and energy minister Viktor Khristenko visited Egypt to sign a memorandum on establishing this zone. It will be set up some 30 kilometres west of Alexandria. It is planned to create projects involving auto and aviation manufacturing in the zone, and to set up facilities to produce equipment for power stations and the oil industry. Egypt has also said that she would like to see IT production, desalination facilities and medical equipment production on the site. Khristenko says that "potential projects that could be set up in the industrial zone include production supporting auto and aviation manufacturing and electricity generation, as well as other industries, including assembly and repair operations".⁹

After an initial coolness in the first few years of Putin's presidency, Russo-Syrian relations have improved from 2005.¹⁰ Syrian President Bashar Assad visited Moscow in January 2005, and several economic agreements were signed. Russia sold Syria Strelts anti-aircraft missiles in April 2005, but refused to sell Iskander or Igla missiles in light of Israeli concerns. Russia desires to maintain a security relationship with Syria, but appears unwilling to permit this relationship to jeopardise the more lucrative economic relationship with Israel. Russia also said in February 2005 that Syria must withdraw from Lebanon, but has avoided pressurising Syria too closely over the investigation into the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. In October 2005 Russia watered down an American-British-French sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution calling upon Syria to fully cooperate with the UN investigation into the Hariri assassination.

Moscow is in the fortunate position that the Assad regime is so isolated that it has no choice other than to look to Russia as a security partner, even though Syria must find Russia's unwillingness to supply certain weapons systems for fear of

antagonising Israel deeply frustrating. Moscow prefers this isolation as it means that Damascus remains dependent on Moscow. This enables Russia to keep her naval facility in Tartus, and it means that Russian businesses in Syria face no significant western competition. In March 2005, Tatneft signed an agreement to explore and develop new oil and gas deposits in Syria. In April 2005 Russian Regional Development minister Vladimir Yakovlev visited Syria for a meeting of the Russo-Syrian commission on trade and economic, scientific and technical cooperation, and signed a cooperation protocol with Syrian Minister of Economy and Trade Amir Lutfi. The protocol aims at developing cooperation in the fields of banking, industry, oil, transport, health, tourism, communications, higher education, irrigation, agriculture and investment. Lutfi said the Syrian government was ready to take every measure "to increase the flow of Russian investment in tourism, oil and gas extraction and the construction of major industrial sites". He listed among the projects of strategic importance to Syria the laying of a pipeline from the Iraqi border to the shores of the Mediterranean and the building of the Syrian section of the "Arabian gas pipeline" through which Egyptian gas will flow to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. "Damascus attaches great importance to the participation of Russian companies in setting up tourist complexes along the coast at Latakia."¹¹

In December 2005, Stroytransgaz signed contracts with Syria to build a gas processing plant (worth \$200 million) and a gas pipeline (worth \$160 million). That same month a preliminary agreement worth \$2.7 billion was reached for a Russian oil-refining and petrochemical complex to be built in Syria.¹² Russia continues to urge her Quartet partners to accept a greater Syrian role in the Middle East Peace Process, but so long as the Assad regime chooses to remain isolated, then there is likely to be little progress on the Syrian-Israeli track of this process. This is unlikely to result in the diminishing of Russo-Syrian ties. Indeed in September 2005 sales of munitions took place, and it was agreed to increase the number of Syrian officers studying at Russian military academies. The visit of Russian Chief of the General Staff Yuriy Baluyevskiy to Syria in January 2006 probably involved discussion of further Russian arms supplies to Syria.¹³

Russia's Return to the Middle East

It is clear that Putin intends to develop Russia's presence in the Middle East. His visit to Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories in April 2005 marked Russia's return to the region after almost 20 years of retreat. His tour of the Persian Gulf in February 2007 indicates a desire that Russia should play a bigger role in the region, and become one of the key players in the development of a security system in the Middle East. In the 1990s, this was merely an aspiration. At that time Russian policy makers called for the establishment of an OSCE type security system in the Middle East of which Russia would be a part, but Russia failed to achieve this objective. Putin's actions in the Middle East since 2005 have made Russia a bigger player. The expansion of her economic relations (trade levels are still low, but they are expanding), the development of military-technical cooperation, increased anti-terrorist cooperation and the development of closer political ties with states with which the USSR had little contact during the Cold War all serve to increase Russia's presence in the region, and give her a flexibility she did not have in the Soviet era.

Russia's aim is to use the Arab-Israeli peace process to become a more important factor in the region. During his visit to Jordan, Putin underlined Russia's role as a

member of the Quartet, and stated that discussion of the Palestinian issue had been a central feature of his entire tour of the Middle East. He also repeated the offer he made during his visit to the Middle East in 2005, namely to hold a broad-ranging conference on Middle East security that would embrace the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian tracks of the Arab-Israeli peace process. He stated that the number of those interested in such a conference had increased. There are as yet no firm plans to hold such a conference, and Putin has warned that such a conference needs to be thoroughly prepared. Indeed the idea overlapped with a similar initiative of the part of the UK, which was stillborn.

This is an advantageous time for Russia to take a higher profile. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent failure to stabilise Iraq after the removal of Saddam Hussein has discredited the USA in the Arab and Moslem world. This will probably handicap the USA in the region for many years to come. The USA is also caught in a dilemma in that to stabilise Iraq, she will have to deal with pro-Iranian Shia forces. At the same time, she runs the risk of antagonising Sunni forces in the Middle East.¹⁴ Russia currently faces no such problem. Moscow's new found flexibility gives her a significant advantage. As former Indian diplomat M.K. Bhadrakumar noted:

“Moscow is merrily hunting in the heartlands of the traditional US preserve in the Middle East. Russia is exposing US doublespeak, which is one of holding Israel's hand while shepherding the Arab protagonists on a case-by-case basis at random, a tactic that precluded the possibility of a common Arab position ever effectively challenging Israeli interests.”¹⁵

Russia has sought to widen the Quartet process, by arguing that leading Middle East powers should also be involved (a view that Washington is not enthusiastic about). This was raised by the Russian leadership after the visit of the Hamas leadership to Moscow in March 2006, and repeated by Sergey Lavrov when the Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa visited Moscow in February 2007. Lavrov added *“that meetings should be held with the participation of the conflicting parties”*.¹⁶

This was clearly favourably received by Amr Moussa, who, during this visit, commented that: *“Relations between Russia and the Arab world are flourishing today and we greatly value Russia's policy in the Middle East. The policies of other countries regarding our region have not proved as successful, perhaps. Russia is one of the few countries whose policy is distinguished by an understanding of the reality of our region.”¹⁷*

It is highly likely that these “other countries” would include the USA. The chaos in Iraq has probably convinced many Arab leaderships that US policy in the Middle East is seriously flawed. American rhetoric and policy since September 2001 have often given the false impression in the Arab world that the USA is engaged in a crusade against Islam, and the Arab world has long resented what it sees as excessive US support for Israel. Russia is not perceived in this way, in spite of Moscow's ruthless suppression of Chechen separatism. In addition the development of a cooperative Russo-Israeli relationship since 1991 does not appear to have caused Moscow significant problems in her relations with Arab states or with Iran.

The Russian leadership appears to have embarked on a mission to enhance significantly its relationship with the Moslem world, probably prompted by an awareness that Islam and Moslem nations are becoming a more significant force in international relations. The likely growth of Russia's own Moslem population in the next few years is doubtless another factor that is pushing Moscow towards an

increased interaction with the Islamic world. In 2005 Russia became an observer at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. This was followed in March 2006 by the formation of a Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group, which held its inaugural meeting in Moscow, where representatives from about twenty Moslem states were present. Vladimir Putin attended this meeting. At the opening meeting Primakov criticised US attempts to export democracy to the Moslem world. He stated that this had led to a crisis in relations between the Islamic world and the West.¹⁸

This notion has become a strong theme in Russian thinking, and Primakov and others appear to contrast this with the Russian approach to the Islamic world. In an article written about three weeks before the meeting of the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group foreign minister Sergey Lavrov also made a strong contrast between US and Russian approaches to the Moslem world.¹⁹

Lavrov criticised the notion of victors and vanquished in post-Cold War international relations (a code for contemporary US foreign policy), and stated that Russia would cooperate with other states on this basis (i.e. Russia will not follow the US recipe). He rejected the idea of forcing democracy and freedom on other parts of the world (another criticism of the USA). In the Middle East he argued that one should avoid becoming entangled in a conflict of civilisations (by implication this is what the USA has done), and argued that Russia could play the role of civilisational bridge, helping to overcome differences. This is a common Russian theme, put forward by many Eurasianist political thinkers in Russia, whose views now exercise considerable influence on Russian foreign policy thinking. Many have even argued that Russia's own experience as a nation in which both Moslems and Christians have co-existed peacefully enables her to play a role in encouraging dialogue between the Moslem and non-Moslem worlds.²⁰

Lavrov also commented that Russia would not allow herself to argue with the Islamic world, or become a "front-line state" in a Cold War between civilisations. The implication of his remark is that the USA is a "front-line state" which is in a dispute with the Islamic world, and that Russia is willing and able to exploit this rift. Similar thoughts were expressed by Russia's envoy to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Veniamin Popov, when he visited Iran in December 2006. Popov noted the widening gulf between Western states and the Islamic world, and went on to say that he believes Russia's cooperation with Islamic states would help settle problems in Iraq, Palestine and the Middle East region.²¹

Putin's visit to the Persian Gulf took place a few days after his speech at the Munich Security Conference, where he severely castigated US foreign policy.²² It is highly likely that Putin viewed his visit at least partly through the prism of US-Russian rivalry for influence in the Middle East. This rivalry is unlikely to be manifested in the form of a zero sum game as occurred during the Cold War. Moscow and Washington are likely to cooperate in certain areas in the Middle East, such as countering terrorism and WMD proliferation. Therefore US-Russian interaction in the Middle East may well be a complex interlinking of both partnership and rivalry.

Russia is currently in the fortunate position of being able to talk to everyone in the Middle East, unlike the USA. Moscow can talk to both conservative and radical Arab regimes, to Sunni and Shi'ite alike, to Israel and Hamas, and to Iran. This gives her a flexibility that the USA does not have. Whilst it does not mean that Moscow will be in a position to supplant the US presence in the Middle East, it does mean that Russia is re-emerging as a significant player in this part of the world, and that her role and presence are likely to increase in the years ahead. She may be

able to play a more significant role in attempting to broker any peace agreement between Israel and her Arab neighbours.

This is not to say that Russia may not face problems in her relations with the Middle East and Moslem world. It may not be possible in the longterm to maintain cordial relations with all nations and movements in the Middle East. Close support for Iran and Syria could damage Russia's relationship with Israel, where there is a significant Russian Jewish population. Any Iranian attempt to threaten the security of her Persian Gulf neighbours may also make it impossible for Russia to maintain cordial ties with both Iran and her neighbours. Russia herself may become concerned if Iran ever develops a nuclear weapons capability. Although Chechnya has not proved a major hindrance to the development of a cooperative relationship with the Moslem world, it would be unwise to argue that it could never become problematic. If the increase in the Moslem birth rate in Russia results in a significant exacerbation of Slav-Moslem tensions, and the emergence of a more nationalist leadership in Moscow, then this may also adversely affect Russo-Moslem relations. However, currently these issues do not hinder the Putin leadership's attempt to expand Russia's influence in the Middle East with all states.

Endnotes

¹ In June 2006, Russian presidential adviser Aslambek Aslakhanov, stated: 'Russia is a big world power, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It cannot abstain from major international processes, which are taking place in this vast region. There are 21 countries in the League of Arab States, including the Palestinian autonomy; the OIC has 57 members; the total population of the Arab countries exceeds 250 million; and there are more than 1,300,000,000 Muslims in the world. The Middle East and the Islamic world are important for us as partners in trade and economic cooperation, a market for military hardware, and in perspective, as a partner in the energy sphere, and in high industrial technologies. Russia wants to consolidate its role of a go-between in settling political disputes between different countries and civilizations.'

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20060630/50746969.html>

² See, Dr Mark A Smith, "A Review of Russian Foreign Policy", CSRC, Russian Series, July 2007.

³ Ariel Cohen, 'Putin's Middle East Visit: Russia is Back.' Heritage WebMemo #1382, 5 March 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/wm1382.cfm>

⁴ <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20060630/50746969.html>; emphasis added.

⁵ This is the Mecca agreement of 9 February 2007.

⁶ Ariel Cohen, 'Gas OPEC: A Stealthy Cartel Emerges,' Heritage WebMemo #1423, 12 April 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/EnergyandEnvironment/wm1423.cfm>

⁷ <http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=2485>

⁸ See Mark A. Smith, 'Putin's Middle East Diplomacy,' Conflict Studies Research Centre, UK Defence Academy, Russian Series 05/27 June 2005.

⁹ BBC Monitoring RIA Novosti, Moscow, in Russian 1319 gmt 10 April 2007 BBC Mon FS1 FsuPol ME1 MEPol se.

¹⁰ See the discussion of Russo-Syrian relations in Mark N. Katz [Putin's Foreign Policy toward Syria](#) *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, no.1, March 2006, and Ilya Bourtman [Putin and Russia's Middle Eastern Policy](#), *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, no.2, June 2006.

¹¹ BBC Monitoring ITAR-TASS news agency, Moscow, in Russian 1427 gmt 4 April 2005 BBC Mon FS1 FsuPol kp/sgm.

¹² See Mark N. Katz [op cit](#).

¹³ Igor' Plugatarev, 'The General Staff does not forget about military cooperation with Syria,' *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozrenye*, 5, February 10, 2006.

¹⁴ M.K. Bhadrakumar, 'Russia straddles Sunni-Shi'ite divide,' *Asia Times*, 17 February 2007 http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/IB17Ag01.html

¹⁵ [ibid](#).

¹⁶ BBC Monitoring. Interfax news agency, Moscow, in Russian 1136 gmt 6 Feb 2007;RTR Planeta TV, Moscow, in Russian 1100 gmt 6 Feb 2007. BBC Mon FS1 FsuPol ME1 MEPol ydy/aej

¹⁷ M.K. Bhadrakumar, Asia Times, 17 February 2007

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/IB17Ag01.html

¹⁸ <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2006/06-03-27.rferl.html> See also his article in Moskovskie Novosti, 'A New Threat,' 7 April 2006.

¹⁹ Sergey Lavrov, 'The first pole. Russia in global politics,' Moskovskie Novosti, 3 March 2006.

²⁰ See for example Yevgeniy Primakov, Moskovskie Novosti, 'A New Threat,' 7 April 2006.

²¹ <http://www.irna.com/en/news/view/line-22/0612042993123340.htm>

²² <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179&>

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See:

M.K. Bhadrakumar, 'Russia straddles Sunni-Shi'ite divide,' Asia Times, 17 February 2007

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