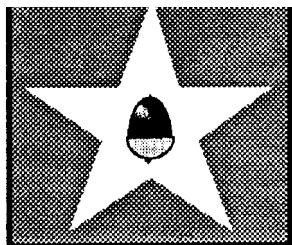


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**Putin's Russia:
Whither Multi-Polarity?**

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During the last decade Russia has successfully overcome Cold War-era confrontation and antagonism and has moved from a strategy of integration with the West to the concept of multi-polarity, attempting to regain Russia's proper place in the world. The 11 September 2001 events appear to have entirely revalidated Russia's pursuit of a multi-polar world.

The Way to Multi-Polarism

Questions of Russia's identity and its place in the world have always been crucial for the Russian elite. For centuries Russia was dominated by the influences coming from Asia; with its Christianisation Russia was culturally and spiritually attracted towards Europe. But even if Russia established itself as a European power, its elite was split between the "Westernizers" and "Slavophiles",¹ between the advocates of a European direction for the development of the country and those attempting to prevent outside influences. There were others - "Modernisers" - who believed that Russia should remain "on its own". Paradoxically, the attempts by the Russians to transform the country using Western models (the attempts of Peter the Great around 1790 are the best example) evolved, according to Vladimir Baranovskiy, "*into such grotesque forms that even wider rifts opened between Russia and Europe*".² Russia's defeat by the European powers during the Crimean War of the mid 1850s coincided with the emergence of the school of "Eurasians" who understood Russia's identity as based on the notion that Russia is "in between" Europe and Asia, that Russia is different from Europe.³

The most far reaching attempt to reshape Russia's standing in the world was made by the last Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's "new political thinking", which supported cooperation with the West, the creation of a "common European home". But neither he nor Russia's first independent President Boris Yeltsin were able to foresee that the bi-polar system would soon be "converted" in to a uni-polar one. The period of Andrey Kozyrev, Yeltsin's Foreign Minister, was further characterised by Russia's attempts to integrate with the West. Russian leaders framed their foreign policy by reference to a set of Western norms rather than by reference to the concept of power, or even to the concept of "polarity". But ordinary Russians considered that as their country was retreating from Central Europe and accepting the unification of Germany, the West was gaining, and continuing to pursue its own interests.

The amount of help offered by the West was much less than Russians hoped and, as Jeffrey Surovell noted, "*hope for Russia's economic stabilisation and the effective utilisation of Western aid had faded*".⁴ In parallel, voices that the country needed to have leverage started to grow. In the CIS area Russia, according to Dov Lynch, "*shifted from disengagement and withdrawal after the Soviet collapse, to assertive,*

sometimes coercive, re-engagement".⁵ In 1994 Kozyrev refused to sign Russia's partnership programme with NATO and at the OSCE Summit meeting in Budapest Yeltsin warned about Europe plunging into "a cold peace". The arrival of Yevgeniy Primakov, Kozyrev's successor as Foreign Minister, whom American scholar Sherman Garnett has identified as a representative of the nineteenth century "Modernizers",⁶ represented another shift in Russia's foreign policy.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, immediately after Russia's humiliating defeat in the Crimean War, Tsarist Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov had two alternatives - either to accept the rules imposed by the victorious powers or, while emphasising internal reforms, to assume an active foreign policy. Gorchakov chose the second one. Primakov, a great admirer of Gorchakov, formulated the key principles of his foreign policy in a similar fashion.⁷ Russia inevitably needed to reform its economy, its armed forces, to strengthen its political system, but only with an efficient foreign policy could Russia accomplish internal reforms and protect its sovereignty. In Primakov's view, Russia needed to pursue its interests; but interests did not mean confrontation. "Balance" was required to engage a diffused international order, which would not be concentrated in the hands of one country.⁸ Only a multi-polar system could be regarded as an alternative both to the previous bi-polarity or emerging uni-polarity. Later, Vladimir Putin reiterated similar ideas.

But for the implementation of this ambitious policy Russia lacked adequate resources. Its dependence on Western support for economic reform was still undisputable. In the view of leading Russian political analyst Alexei Pushkov, the West three times seriously "tested" Primakov's policy of multi-polarity.⁹ In the "bargaining" with the Alliance on the decision on NATO enlargement in 1997, and during the crisis in Kosovo in the first half of 1999 Primakov failed, receiving only symbolic compensations, and this led to Russia's isolation. Only in the case of the Iraq crisis in 1997-1998 did Primakov's toughness achieve some "success" and the US and UK were forced to postpone air raids.

Learning from Primakov's mistakes, President Vladimir Putin started to develop the concept of multi-polarity further. He came with a clear view: Russia must restore its statehood, re-establish Russia's pride. That was a huge task, which was not only dependent on Russian political elite, Putin's determination. It also depends on the development of the entire international system, how Russia's partners perform, and on how many choices they give to Russia. Thus, while Russia was moving forward with the concept of multi-polarity, many questions remained open: how has this concept been implemented, if at all? What does this concept present to the rest of the world? How realistic is this concept? 11 September 2001 brought a new dimension: can we say that Putin has achieved his aims in implementing the concept of multi-polarity? How are global efforts to combat international terrorism influencing Russia's policy?

Putin's Concept of the Multi-Polar World

The Internal Context

The Russia which was established after the dissolution of the Soviet Union differed from the USSR. It possessed a smaller territory and a smaller, declining number of inhabitants. Russia had limited access to the Baltic and Black seas, no direct land routes to Europe. Thus, Putin faced a much weaker Russian geostrategic situation. With his former KGB background he was able to understand this reality very well.

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As Baranovskiy has described, “*even in the most liberal-orientated circles the loss of superpower status continues ... to be a source of considerable unease and confusion*”.¹⁰ Putin’s coming to power coincided with the start of Russia’s second war in Chechnya in the summer of 1999.

The war in the south was not Russia’s only problem. The overall political system has not settled down. There was a lack of clear legislation, poor corporate governance, corruption, the unlimited power of the “oligarchs” and criminality. President Yeltsin let the regions exercise autonomy. Russia’s military was almost wholly unreformed and thus ineffective. The wars in Chechnya had devastating and demoralising effects. Initial military reforms damaged military-civilian relations and drew the military into politics. Despite GDP growth in 2000, Russia’s economic conditions were still fading. The economy became far more dependent upon oil revenues. Russia was facing the problem of high debts to the West. According to Garnett, during the Yeltsin period the privatisation of major state assets occurred on such a scale that it would be difficult to mobilise huge resources to conduct foreign policy.¹¹

Indeed, Putin has realised that Russia can encourage the establishment of the multi-polar world only when Russia is a politically stable and economically vibrant country. Putin made efforts to consolidate his position, weakening other major sources of independent political or economic power such as the oligarchs, extending control over the media, restoring the country’s authority over the regions. Actually, some of Putin’s actions led foreign experts to the conclusion that the problem was not a strong Russian state that can threaten its neighbours, but a possible lack of democracy. As Stephen Sestanovich said, “*neo-authoritarianism may be a larger problem for Russia’s integration into the West than neo-imperialism*”.¹² In foreign and security policy, Putin established a clear hierarchy, strengthening the role of institutions involved - the National Security Council, the Foreign and Defence Ministries. In a sense, he made Russia speak on foreign and security policy “in one voice”, after a decade of chaos.

The promotion of the concept of multi-polarity pressed Russia’s elite to further develop this model, and Putin listened attentively to the voices of Russian experts. Several years previously, the concept of multi-polarity had been thoroughly discussed by the influential non-governmental Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, headed by Sergey Karaganov.¹³ Vladimir Chernenko described the concept of multi-polarity as a way to prevent the international isolation of Russia, to strengthen its role in the international arena, and to endorse its national interests,¹⁴ with a striking similarity to Gorchakov’s ideas noted above.

As Pushkov has argued, the rest of the world will only respect Russia when Russia challenges the US, only when Russia pursues a policy based on its interests in Asia and in Europe.¹⁵ Natalia Narochitskaya, another supporter of the concept, echoed this idea: only a strong and self-determining Russia will be important to the West.¹⁶ For Professor Sergey Kortunov the question was not multi-polarity itself but how to live within it, how to find partners, and what sort of relationships to establish with them.¹⁷

But there were those who disputed with the concept of multi-polarity. The influential Alexey Arbatov underlined that Russia, while supporting the concept of multi-polarity, supports nuclear proliferation - and that is already happening in India and Pakistan.¹⁸ According to Irina Kuklina, the concept of multi-polarity is only an instrument within the system of globalisation.¹⁹ Former minister Kozyrev

also strongly attacked the concept, calling it meaningless.²⁰ Political analyst Georgy Mirskiy raised a fundamental question: is the concept of multi-polarity an attempt to achieve this model within the international system, or is it an attempt to adapt Russia to a system of multi-polarity already existing in the world?²¹ Even Karaganov was of the opinion that it would be advisable for Russia to follow a more moderate policy - to strengthen the economy, to rebuild the state, to establish favourable economic relations with the leading countries in the West, and only then to try to challenge the West.²²

Multi-Polarity: Main Developments before 11 September

Although in many respects continuing Primakov's doctrine, Russia's new President tenaciously underlined the differences between the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept, which was formally approved by him on 28 June 2000, and previous ones.²³ Key priorities were identified: to promote Russia's status as a permanent UN Security Council member, to seek membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), to participate in regional economic cooperation, the development of a diplomatic dialogue with EU countries, and the attraction of Western investments and technologies. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov has emphasised many times that Russia's "*main priority is the creation of favourable external conditions for the democratic development of Russia, and the creation of economic and social welfare ... [and] active support for Russian businesses*".²⁴

At the same time, Russia's dissatisfaction with American attempts to lead the world unilaterally, and the trend towards a uni-polar world, have played a major role in Russia's enduring emphasis on multi-polarity, even if Putin clearly realised the need to launch a permanent dialogue with the West, and to pursue a policy of active engagement. NATO's decision to use air power in Kosovo in 1999 was interpreted, according to Baranovskiy, "*as an additional manifestation of insulting disregard towards Russia and one more attempt to disassociate it from crucial European issues*".²⁵ Russia was extremely critical of the use of methods bypassing existing international legal mechanisms, seeing real danger in the concept of "humanitarian intervention".

Although continuing the foreign policy traditions of Primakov, Putin's attempts before 11 September 2001 to redesign the relationship with the former Soviet republics; his policies towards the US and NATO; his attempts to intensify relations with the EU and its member states; to establish relations with China, India and Iran; to promote multilateral fora, have been different from his predecessors.

Redesigning the Relationship with the Former Soviet Republics

Even before Putin, Russia was able to influence the former Soviet republics by providing economic support, regulating the energy supply and exports. Various security/military assistance measures were employed: "offering" peacekeeping and mediation, patrolling the former Soviet Union's borders. For many years Russia supported secessionist regimes. At the same time, Russia failed to achieve significant results in its neighbourhood. During the Yeltsin period a host of documents were signed between the CIS countries, but few were implemented. All the CIS countries established relationships with EU and NATO countries. The general opinion in Moscow was that the West was going too far in meddling in the affairs of the former Soviet republics.²⁶

Yet, as Mark Smith had noted, "*the CIS has been unable to restore even the levels of trade that existed between the members when they were union-republics in the*

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USSR".²⁷ Putin placed different priorities upon cooperation with the former republics. Putin realised the need to better use economic levers to promote Russia's interests in the CIS. There were signs that Russia's political, economic and security interests in the CIS area were being much better synchronized within Russia itself.

Although Putin still was eager to exploit CIS structures, to revitalise the Treaty on Collective Security²⁸ by emphasising joint actions to counter international terrorism and other kinds of extremism, his major initiatives were orientated towards bilateral relationships: the union with Belarus, re-establishing positions in Ukraine, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Even if Putin realised that the Russian-Belarusian Union would strengthen Russia's strategic position in the "Western direction", Russia simply did not have enough resources to "sponsor" the ruined economy of its ally. The Russian President has clearly chosen a tactic of delaying the integration process even if cooperation in the military field, unlike in the Yeltsin period, has been advancing swiftly.

Many Western states viewed Ukraine as the crucial element in counter-balancing Russia, albeit Ukraine was continuously facing a dichotomy: policy being orientated towards the West, its economy towards Russia. The country's severe economic problems have constrained the scope and pace of its reforms. Despite encouraging rhetoric coming from Western capitals, the West was disappointed by political instability and corruption in Ukraine. With Western support decreasing, Ukrainian leaders started to turn to Russia for support. Ukraine's dependence on Russia's energy increased Russian influence. For many years Russia had not been able to solve the problem of Ukraine's debts for Russian gas. At the same time, Ukraine had been able to implement pro-Western policy. Pressure was brought to bear on Ukraine in a variety of ways to redress the balance.

Under Putin, Russia has made significant efforts to regain influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, where for security reasons and because of both regions' vast energy resources, the US and other Western countries continued to maintain strong interests. Here Russia's geostrategic interest was "*to remain strong in the area and wield power within and control over the ... CIS, thereby ensuring the security of its southern flank*".²⁹ Indeed, as the 11 September events showed, Russia has rightly considered its southern borders as an area of great threats: a source of drugs, with porous frontiers, especially taking into account the proximity of Taliban forces. Therefore, Russia has set up agreements with the southern states - Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan - to defend them from Islamic fundamentalism. But security interests here were closely tied to economic: the Caspian energy resources were a significant element in Russian calculations for exports to Europe. During the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, some major Western countries had an interest in Central Asia but their investors became dissatisfied with unpredictable laws and property rights, the high level of corruption, and the technical and political difficulties of transporting the energy resources from the region. Putin understands that Russia has remained the key player here: the countries in the region themselves want Russian involvement. Even if Americans have been granted the right to establish some limited bases in the region, it was done only with Moscow's consent.

Being much closer to Europe, the South Caucasus countries attract more consistent attention from the West. Despite the current problems in the Northern Caucasus, Russia has also paid enormous attention to the region. Armenia lacked

allies and access to the rest of the world, and was entirely dependent on Russia's energy and product supply. For many years Russia's relationship with Azerbaijan progressed little, since the Azeris regarded Russians as the major supporters of Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and a major cause of problems in negotiating oil exports from the Caspian Sea. Although major investments from the US and UK continue, Western investors have started to take a more restrained view of the potential size of Caspian Sea oil and gas deposits. This more sober view has led Azerbaijan to reconsider the benefits of a closer relationship with Russia.³⁰

Just a few years ago Russia supported the destabilization attempts of the separatist movements in Georgia. Moreover, despite Putin's revalidation of the 1999 Istanbul agreements on the withdrawal of Russian bases from Georgia, he has shown no indication of implementing it in reality. Beyond that, Moscow has leverage on Georgia via the gas and electricity supply, and the introduction of visas. After 11 September, with international attention concentrated on Afghanistan, Putin has been relatively free to do in Georgia whatever he wishes.

Although many states of the former Soviet Union have managed to run independent foreign policies, Russia under Putin has strongly established itself as the key player in the CIS. Economic dependency, insufficient Western support, and inability to cope with their own problems have made Russian involvement not only important but also desirable. This policy has gone beyond the traditional policy of Russia surrounding itself by a "buffer zone". Putin realised that Russia, projecting its influence towards the CIS countries, would be more solidly regarded as one of the distinct "poles" in a multi-polar world. Without becoming a leader among CIS countries, Russia simply cannot continue the promotion of multi-polarity.

Policy Towards the US

Putin has fully comprehended that Russia's relations with the US, the only remaining super-power, were the key to the amelioration of the international situation and the achievement of global strategic stability. As "Washington Post" columnist Jim Hoagland noted, "*Moscow today can achieve its most significant ambitions only with the assistance or acquiescence of other nations - mainly the United States*".³¹

For many years Russians have been showing dissatisfaction with the growing tendencies towards the establishment of a "uni-polar" world structure dominated by the US. Dissatisfaction was further increased by the new Republican Administration's efforts to "marginalise" Russia. The first months of the Bush Administration clearly favoured a unilateralist approach. Economically and military weakened, Russia was probably less and less regarded as the partner to deal with. As Chernega predicted earlier, the US needed a Russia that is stable, but weak.³²

But, despite the growing disparities in the relationship, Russian leaders are eager to collaborate with the US. Russia needs American investments, support for joining the WTO. Moreover, the Russians were engaged with the Americans on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and participation in NATO's missions in Balkans.

Of course, sceptics usually underline that Russia's and America's interests will never coincide, because of the second round of NATO enlargement or different approaches towards the former Soviet Union republics. US plans to deploy a National Missile Defence (NMD) system were among the issues where Russia had

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and continue to have their biggest disagreements with the Americans. Even if Russia has expressed its desire in favour of the preservation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, it can do little about it in practical terms as the US is pushing ahead with NMD. Some analysts thought that Russia could seek to establish a connection between the process of NATO enlargement and NMD, perhaps in the shape of a "trade-off".³³ But probably even the Russians understood that this option looked less than realistic.

Paradoxically, for Russia, NMD has presented an opportunity in favour of the policy of multi-polarity. At least, it has succeeded in postponing NMD plans pending consultations, and in creating a strong block of worldwide opposition. But it is important to note that Russia, together with the EU and China, are those with whom the US discusses these matters. And Russia, although repeating discontent with NMD, has shown constant preparedness to consult on the issue.

As a counterweight to American plans, Russia has proposed an international missile-defence system. Russia's proposal, which the West saw as being very short on substance, was actually aimed at exploiting the differences between the US and its European allies who, particularly France and Germany, were also sceptical about NMD. "*A Russian anti-missile defence proposal ... could split the NATO alliance, even though it will almost certainly never be built.*"³⁴

Russia's handling of the NMD debate has shown how Russia makes the most of its reduced status. By concentrating its efforts on the opposition to NMD, Russia has exploited this issue in front of the international community in a masterly fashion. Russia has shown that, unlike the US, it seeks a diplomatic solution to any security problem. During Putin's 2001 visit to North Korea, a "rogue" state to the Americans, he managed to convince the leadership of this country to halt programmes to create missiles, albeit temporarily, in return for foreign assistance.

Even before 11 September it was obvious that Putin and Bush, both being followers of pragmatic and realistic policies, would inevitably find common ground on which to engage. Although "*US power is the biggest single obstacle to Russia's aim of bringing about a multi-polar international system*",³⁵ the US is the *raison d'être* for the concept of multi-polarity as well. Only by substantially engaging with America can Russia restore its vanished status. The strategic US-Russia partnership emerging as the result of the 11 September events confirmed that both states need each other.

Relations with NATO

During the Cold War period the Alliance was regarded by the Soviets as their biggest enemy. This "enemy psychology" has remained despite Putin's attempt to play a different game. Russia has continued to oppose NATO's eastward expansion, and felt uneasy because NATO's new strategic concept does not rule out the use of force outside the zone of the Washington Treaty without a UN Security Council mandate. But Putin's concept of multi-polarity also brought new tendencies to this relationship. Russia's assessment of NATO had become more pragmatic as compared with the policy of Primakov. In pursuing the concept of multi-polarity, Russia needs the Alliance. As the Soviet Union was NATO's *raison d'être* during the Cold War, so the Alliance, a "pole of power" in the Euro-Atlantic area, was the rationale for Russia to be a separate pole.

Despite the perceptions in Russia of the failure of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) during the Kosovo crisis, Russia has continued to see the Founding Act, signed in 1997, as a basis for cooperation. From Russia's perspective, within the PJC their country was treated as an equal, as a strategic partner, and not as one of the myriad of the PfP partner countries. What Russia wanted from its special relations with NATO was partnership in the format, as Karsten Moller said, "*one big alliance and one big country*".³⁶

Despite the continuing differences, NATO-Russia cooperation after nearly one year of its renewal has reached the pre-Kosovo level and even expanded. Moreover, the crisis which Russians were predicting when NATO opened its doors to new members in 1997 did not occur. Even if Russia's membership of NATO is unrealistic (Pushkov provides excellent arguments why it would even be dangerous for Russia to become a member of the Alliance),³⁷ Russia was eager to support British Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent idea to establish a Russia-NATO Council. This body would inevitably give Russia a feeling of equality in discussing certain security issues.

Relations with Europe

Although the US has remained Russia's focal partner, the establishment of a relationship with the European "heavyweights" is an important part of its attempts to promote the concept of multi-polarity. According to Smith, "*failure to develop a close equal partnership with Europe ... would leave Russia in her current state, frustrated at US-led western uni-polarity ... and seeking strategic partnerships ... in Asia that have so far proved to be of limited value*".³⁸

Germany has already become the leading power of the EU; it controlled European fiscal policy and was the main sponsor of the EU's expansion eastwards. Putin himself has said, "*as Germany is one of the leaders in Europe, we hope that cooperation with it will help to broaden Russia's cooperation with the European community in general*".³⁹ German leaders frequently underline the importance of involving Russia in European affairs, and avoiding of any sort of isolation. Even if France was one of the strongest critics of the Chechen War, development of a partnership with Paris and collaboration on strategic and military-technical issues have fitted with Putin's strategy to intensify relations with Europe while undermining NATO's role there. Both countries have had a similar understanding of multi-polarity, similar opposing views on NMD and US policy on Iraq.

Yeltsin once promoted the idea of a triangular relationship comprising Russia-Germany-France, but Putin saw more value in a bilateral approach, probably on the grounds that it would be easier to find a common language with major European capitals rather than with the EU. But Putin has also convinced Russia's elite that in Europe Russia borders not just a number of European states, but also the political-economic union - the EU. The EU is interpreted in Russia as an organisation that does not endanger Russia's interests.⁴⁰ Moreover, the growing political aspect of the EU has been largely neglected in Russia. Its creation by 2003 of crisis management capabilities has been noted but so far it has not changed Russia's attitude towards the EU. Russia, according to David Gowan, "*has not finally decided whether to view this aspect of European integration as an instrument for driving a wedge in the transatlantic alliance, or as an opportunity to engage with the EU in crisis management*".⁴¹

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As the EU countries encompass two fifths of Russia's trade, economic cooperation is the backbone of their relationship: developing trade links, dropping punitive import duties on certain Russian goods, etc. Russia is increasingly interested in cooperation with the EU in the energy sector, regarding this as the "breakthrough" in achieving a Russian-EU strategic interrelationship. But, despite the rapidly growing nature of the relationship between Russia and the EU, the question of Russia's membership has been ruled out for the foreseeable future. President Putin has noted that the Russians "*do not set ourselves a goal of joining the EU*".⁴² Russia would probably never agree to subordinate its policy to any external entity.

Putin's circle understand that with the expansion of the Union, the enlargement of its role, the introduction of the Euro, and the strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU has expanded significantly from the economic organisation it was in the past. Putin has placed the EU firmly in the rank of Russia's strategic partners.⁴³ He values the EU-Russian Summit meeting format. The EU itself was searching hard to acquire a more prominent role in the world, and to diminish US dominance. But Russia can never achieve a dramatic split between Europe and the US. Relations between them have been of a strategic nature for both parties. As Russian scholar Oleg Barabanov has underlined, a stable and substantial Russian presence in Europe can only be balanced by the American presence there.⁴⁴

Attempts to Diversify Foreign Policy

Although Russians identified the Asian direction as a counter-balance of the Western direction, other motives have played a significant role as well. In the Far East Russia borders China, which is a nuclear power with a population of 1.4 billion. Japan and Korea are huge economic powers. India is a country with a growing population and economy. Russia has even seen itself as "*a transport corridor, able to link Europe with Asia and North America*".⁴⁵ Unlike Primakov, initiator of relations with "non-Western" countries, Putin's policies *vis-à-vis* them are much more balanced. Russia today cannot afford to allow these relationships to take the lead. Moreover, the bulk of investments into the Russian economy come from the West.

Russia and China have increased their trade in arms, continued beneficial cooperation on power engineering, rocket technologies, engineering and industry. Both countries have made progress on demarcation of borders; they developed a joint stance against NATO's air campaign and NMD. China even supported Russia's position against NATO's enlargement. Russia and China play a leading role in certain multinational fora in the region, particularly the Shanghai Cooperation Council, which together with Russia and China includes Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and recently Uzbekistan. Of course, still, there are problems between Russia and China, eg on the demarcation of the Russian-Chinese border in several stretches. Russia fears Chinese immigrants who far outnumber the inhabitants of its Far East. China's economic strength is far ahead of that of Russia. Potentially, according to Dmitriy Simes and Paul Saunders, China might be a greater danger to Russia than to the US.⁴⁶

Despite promising declarations and potential, Russia's relations with Japan are at a stalemate because of the unsettled question of the Kuril Islands. Several years ago Yeltsin agreed with the then Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto that a peace treaty between the two countries would be signed by 2000, based on a compromise agreement. In Putin's understanding, any revision of the territorial *status quo* that

evolved after WWII would set a dangerous precedent that might eventually result in a dramatic redrawing of the world map. Of course, Putin has tried to break this stalemate, proposing to Japan to separate the signing of a political agreement from a solution on the Kuril Islands. He has also continuously tried to convince the Japanese to invest in Russia's Far East.

India was the only large state in Asia with which Russia had no conflicts or tensions. This country remains one of the biggest markets for Russian arms, despite the fact that ties between Washington and New Delhi have warmed considerably over the past two years. But India cannot be regarded as an alternative to China, since India's potential is still lagging behind. Although India had been clearly identified by Russia as an important element in achieving a multi-polar world, this country cannot seriously be considered as an alternative to any relationship with the West.

In a way, Iran has also helped Russia to realise its concept of multi-polarity. Agreements on Russian arms sales to Iran and a joint nuclear energy project have illustrated that Russia, in pursuing its policy *vis-à-vis* Iran, sought concrete trade advantages even at the expense of worsening its relationship with the US. But Putin has cleverly tried to avoid going too far in the relationship with Iran. Commenting on the resumption of the arms sales to Iran, Foreign Minister Ivanov has underlined the profit-seeking aspect in the relationship.⁴⁷

In seeking relationships with the "non-Western" powers, Russia has tried to balance relationships between the West and the East, to diversify foreign policy. One could however agree with Roland Dannreuther that Russia's policies towards the East "*are more opportunistic than strategic, and do little to obscure the fact that the most significant external threats to Russian national security emanate from the south and east*".⁴⁸

Russia's attempts to diversify its relations also included the UN as well as the OCSE, G8, IMF and *ad hoc* arrangements such as the "Contact Group". With Russia's economic and military strength shrinking, projection of Russia's interests via multilateral fora became paramount, the best argument in favour of the concept of multi-polarity. But there are limitations to this policy. Leading world powers, especially the US, would not undermine their interests by subjecting them to any international organisation. So, although pushing forward a desire to strengthen global and regional international institutions, Putin saw them rather as a tactical goal, a bargaining chip rather than a realistic single strategy.

In the G8 Russia is still part of just an economic agenda. Permanent membership of the UN Security Council, and its status as a nuclear power, have remained the two most important elements still preserving Russia's role as one "pole" of the international system. But although Russia has expressed hopes of influencing world affairs through its permanent member status in the UN Security Council, these attempts will come to nothing if the Council is in deadlock caused by a US-Russian confrontation. Russia cannot prevent the UN status becoming weakened. In some degree, by threatening to veto Security Council decisions, as in the humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo in 1999, Russia itself has contributed to that end.

The True Nature of Multi-Polarity

Despite Russia's weakness and its unfavourable international situation before 11 September, Putin's attempts to promote the concept of multi-polarity have contributed to the strengthening of Russia's position in the world. With the new President, the Western states regained confidence in Russia's ability to govern itself. Gorbachev and Yeltsin had created doubts in the West: can Russia still participate in international policy as an equal partner? With Putin, the major Western powers immediately noted Russia's changing stance. A strongly articulated and balanced strategy towards multi-polarity has helped to achieve this. Moreover, by offering a consolidated policy that concentrates around a sound vision, Putin has contributed to the establishment of a more coordinated foreign policy within Russia.

Currently, neither politically nor economically, and certainly not militarily can Russia be equal to the US. Russia's share of world gross product is only 1.6%, compared with 20% contributed by the Americans. But, as Joseph Nye has noted, power in today's world cannot be considered in a linear model. In the military field, the situation is certain - the US prevails and will prevail in the foreseeable future. In the economic field the tendencies of multi-polarity are much more visible and the US shares "power" with the EU and Japan. The third dimension, according to Nye, "*representing transnational relations that cross borders and lie outside the control of governments - has a more dispersed structure of power*".⁴⁹

Indeed, the world today is much more complex. No single power can claim full responsibility for world affairs, which are increasingly interrelated. The devastating terror attack on the US and American attempts to build an *ad hoc* coalition to fight international terrorism showed that more and more problems are beyond the capacity of one state to solve. Not only international terrorism, but such issues as global warming, scarcity of water resources and AIDS force countries to combine their efforts. That some countries have already acquired nuclear weapons and others are close to doing so, illustrates that the process of non-proliferation has been difficult to manage. These circumstances dictate the need for joint efforts.

Moreover, globalisation has already transformed the very idea of "poles" by significantly blurring them. In natural sciences, the "pole" can be either positive or negative. Applying this logic to international relations, the poles were considered as something rival, incompatible. Given the rivalry between such antagonistic poles as Moscow and Washington this was perfectly true during the Cold War. Even if today, say, the EU is seeking a more independent foreign policy, its relations with the US cannot in any way be characterised as relations between two poles. Today, despite the fact of US political, economic and military predominance, one can probably talk not about poles but about the emergence of some kind of long-term global coalition. International actions to fight terrorism, led by the US, already include many countries of the American continent, Europe and the Far East and may well expand. Even taking into account that the majority of wars were products of multi-polarity,⁵⁰ any tendency towards the blurring of poles must be positive. The current war in Afghanistan is, indeed, untypical. It is not a war of rivalries, as was the case during WWI, WWI or even the Cold War. It is a war of the international community against a common "evil".

Thus, even if Russia, in promoting multi-polarity, cannot be a pole in the traditional understanding of balance of power, the post-11 September period has shown that Russia has established itself as a viable actor within the international system. Unlike the system based on poles, this alternative system that could be seen as one

of multi-actors - where in parallel to Washington other strong actors such as Brussels, Beijing, Moscow, or Islamabad make their voices known, and this does not lead to confrontation or conflict. Of course, it cannot fully eliminate tensions, but it is not a system leading inevitably to large-scale clashes. By contributing to the system of multi-actors, Russia has contributed to the understanding of the diversity of the current international system. This by itself has contributed to the creation of a more predictable and stable international environment.

Moreover, while promoting his ideas, Putin has clearly chosen a pro-active foreign policy: instead of anticipating how the international environment will affect Russia, Putin wants to contribute to the construction of it. Of course, after 11 September Putin learned a major lesson. Putin's predecessors were pursuing a tactical game of bargaining: the US can achieve breakthrough in NMD if a second round of NATO enlargement is postponed,⁵¹ if Russia receives rearrangement of its foreign debt; or the EU can enlarge eastwards if it is ready to increase support to Russia. According to Clinton's National Security adviser Samuel Berger, "*Yeltsin drew lines in the sand with the West that he could not sustain: 'nyet' to NATO enlargement, 'nyet' to the Balkans. He created for himself zero-sum confrontations, and when the United States and the West held their ground, 'nyet' became 'da' and Russians became bitter*".⁵² Putin, instead, "*does not draw unsustainable lines in the sand. He does not let himself get cornered*".⁵³

11 September offers the Russian President a unique opportunity to establish long-term partnership with the West and with the US, instead of bargaining. Moreover, these events were a catalyst for such decisions as to cut the American nuclear arsenal to around 2,000, which is the number Russians were seeking for many years. Thus, in a way, current events assist Putin's strategy for becoming a separate pole or actor within a system of global relations. As Russian analyst Andrey Piontkovskiy wrote, Russians should ask themselves a strategic question: "*To what extent can we get the United States to work with us on resolving our strategic-security issues?*"⁵⁴

The system of multi-poles or multi-actors gives not only Russia, but also the EU and China the possibility to sustain significant international weight and protect their international security and economic interests. Moreover, this system balances US dominance in the world. Promotion of diversity contributes to the understanding that only by carefully balancing between various actors in the international system can one achieve long term stability and prosperity. It could contribute to the implementation of obligations in arms control, disarmament, protection of the environment, etc. It could add to the pluralism in the international system.

Paradoxically, the US itself is pushing towards the establishment of a more diverse world. Washington openly declares that it does not want to be involved everywhere. Bush's touchstones towards China, eg the arms sales to Taiwan, have forced China to strengthen its international positions, including through its contacts with Russia. American plans on NMD, refusal to ratify the Kyoto convention, ambivalence towards European plans to establish autonomous crisis management capabilities, were all pushing Europeans to seek a more diversified foreign and security policy, to strengthen relations with other parties, again including Russia.

But even if the world is becoming more diverse that does not mean that various actors are rivals or antagonistic. The West and Russia can disagree or, in some cases, have different strategies concerning the enlargement of NATO or arms sales

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to Iran, but without precluding their engagement. Despite different positions, it is in the West's interests that Russia's policy remains in conformity with that of the West as much as possible, and that Russia "*not be dismembered by the warriors of Islam or by a China*".⁵⁵ Alienating Russia can endanger European security as well.

What does that offer to Russia? Although geographically Russia partially belongs to Europe, it is not a European country, but neither is Russia an Asian country. Russia cannot be forced to become part of the West or distant from it. As Garnett has rightly noted, "*Russia is unlikely to become either a consistent adversary or a reliable partner of the United States and its allies*".⁵⁶ According to Pushkov, the only probable policy for Russia within the international system is to be alongside the West, but as a discrete, separate power.⁵⁷ Russia's strategy towards multi-polarity or a system of multi-actors helps Russia to avoid being forced to choose between the West and the East.

Thus, the 11 September events did not herald a revolution in Russia's relationship with the rest of the world. Putin simply had an exceptional opportunity to implement his strategy of multi-polarity in reality. By strongly condemning terror acts in New York and Washington, by agreeing to let Americans use Russia's air space, by acquiescing on the use of the territories of Central Asian states for the operation against Afghanistan, Putin made a clear decision to stay, using the famous phrase of President Bush, "with us", ie with the US, with the West. But Putin did not want simply to melt into the West as a junior partner, rather to stay as a distinct player with its own interests, who has "*strategic fish to fry, sometimes at US expense, sometimes not*".⁵⁸ "*Putin does not believe that September 11 has changed Russian interest*":⁵⁹ American interests were changed instead. As Karaganov sarcastically noted, "*this is a unique situation, in which Americans are fighting for Russia's interests as well as their own*".⁶⁰ A US attack on Iraq, for example, could change the coincidence of interests between the US and Russia. Vyacheslav Nikonov went even further by describing that "*for the first time since 1945 Russia and US found a common adversary ... nothing unites so strongly as the existence of a common enemy*".⁶¹ Putin's uneasiness on the ABM treaty changes has already shown Americans that Russia will not simply follow their demands. It is highly likely that, with the war in Afghanistan over, Putin will continue his pre-11 September agenda with China, Iran and strengthening his stance in the CIS.

For its part, the West has also understood that Russia cannot be simply integrated into its institutions. The British proposal on the new Russia-NATO Council signalled, despite its far reaching goals, that the West does not see Russia as a member of the Alliance, although recognising "*Russia's responsible and considerate behaviour in world affairs, its support of broad international coalitions ... and understanding of the strategic interests of the West (and first and foremost of the United States) in critical situations*".⁶²

From the very beginning Putin's idea on multi-polarity received different interpretations in the West. Putin's critic Zbigniew Brzezinski has defined the new President's aim as gaining a breathing space in order to achieve the main goal - restoration of Russia's statehood.⁶³ Paralleling with Gorbachev's *perestroika*, some Western analysts had even named Putin's policy as a *peredyshka*, ie gaining a breathing space.⁶⁴ This is only partially true. It is correct that President Putin seeks to revive Russia's statehood. It is his key policy aim. A strong state is imaginable only within a system of equals. Thus, US attempts to unilaterally lead the world, tendencies towards the uni-polar world, have forced Putin to articulate an alternative - the concept of multi-polarity. But the strategy towards the multi-

polar world is far beyond the tactical goal of gaining a “breathing space”. It has the potential to become Russia's policy for many years ahead. Even the 11 September events did not change Russia's goals. Russia is now on its way to finding a long-term strategy. Even after regaining economic strength - and this will not happen soon - Russia still will be able to base its foreign policy on the concept of multipolarity.

For many years Russia was treated as a special case, as a country requiring particular treatment. As the Czech President Vaclav Havel has recently said, “*Russia does not deserve that we behave toward it as we would toward a leper, an invalid or a child who requires special treatment and whose whims, no matter how dangerous, must be understood and tolerated*”.⁶⁵ From the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia demanded “special rights” in the territory of the former USSR; afterwards, Russia demanded a stop to the process of NATO enlargement. Indeed, the Baltic membership of NATO issue will be a test case for Putin's foreign policy, since “*a modern Russia must also accept that the times of red lines are gone forever*”.⁶⁶ A country which has claimed to be a pole within the international system should not fear its tiny neighbours' membership of a democratic Alliance with which it cooperates. If Russia wants to establish itself as the separate pole or actor in world affairs, this requires a constructive attitude as well. As former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said, indirectly pointing to Putin, “*those international leaders who insist that the world is or should be multipolar have an obligation to see that their particular pole stands up to its responsibilities*”.⁶⁷

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