

Analysis on Russian foreign policy

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Abstract: This analysis consists of brief review of the major aspects of Russian foreign policy. Starting with brief history of Russia in the world politics is followed by an analysis of Russian participation in different international political, economic and social institutes and organisations. Then focus is given to the Chinese-Russian relations and then different territories are also analysed regarding how Russia has been facing its disputes with the neighbouring countries. Special emphasis is given to Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin to analyse in particular the challenges and opportunities under his role in Russia.

Keywords: foreign policy, neighbourhood policy, border dispute, Near Abroad

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Brief overview of the Russian foreign policy

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the replacing Russian Federation had a very important task: to find its place in the world's stage. The USA became the most powerful country all over the world and there was no rival nation. The Russian Federation is conceded in international law as successor state of the former Soviet Union. Russia continues to fulfil the international commitments of the USSR, and has assumed the USSR's permanent seat in the UN Security Council as well as membership in other international organisations, the rights and obligations under international treaties, besides properties and debts. Russia has a multifaceted foreign policy. Nowadays the country keeps diplomatic relations with 191 countries and has 144 embassies. The foreign policy is determined by the President (Vladimir

Putin) and implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia (Sergey Lavrov). The geopolitical importance of Russia is not a question in the region, however commentators, politicians and world leaders are characterising it as a currently reinstating or potential superpower.

In addition to that, Russia is often criticised when it comes to human rights issues, democratic processes and its values. For instance, such organisations as the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch consider Russia to have not enough democratic attributes and to allow few political rights and civil liberties to its citizens. John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Director at Amnesty International stated on the killing of the one of the journalist in Russia that that “Reporting on injustice, human rights violations by members of security forces and corruption in the North Caucasus is a life threatening job.”¹

Furthermore, Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia Division director at Human Rights Watch mentioned that “This outrageous move against the Movement for Human Rights is a part of the unprecedented crackdown by the Kremlin on its critics.”² The incident coincides with the peak of the “foreign agents” campaign, during which hundreds of nongovernmental organizations all over Russia have been subjected to intrusive inspections. At least 62 face sanctions or warnings for failure to register as “foreign agents” and other alleged compliance failures. Freedom House, an international organisation funded by the United States, ranks Russia as “not free”, citing “carefully engineered elections” and “absence” of debate. In addition to that Freedom House in a statement strongly condemned the conviction of Russian corruption fighter and opposition figure, Alexey Navalny, in a trial and prosecution clearly staged to derail his political career. Navalny, who became famous for investigations of government corruption on his blog, vocal criticism of the Russian government, and unconventional grassroots organizing activities, was sentenced today to five years in prison on charges of theft.³

¹ Amnesty International Country News. 2013. *Russia: Journalist killed after appearing in “assassination list”*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/russia-journalist-killed-after-appearing-assassination-list-2013-07-09>> [Accessed on 29 July 2013]

² Human Rights Watch Country News. 2013. *Russia: Investigate Violent Raid on Rights Groups*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/01/russia-investigate-violent-raid-rights-group>> [Accessed on 29 July 2013]

³ Freedom House Issue. 2013. *Conviction of Navalny: The Latest Human Rights Outrage Under Putin Regime*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/conviction-navalny-latest-human-rights-outrage-under-putin-regime>> [Accessed on 29 July 2013]

Russian participation in international organisations

Russia has been a key player of international relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia plays a major role in maintaining international peace and security as it is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The country participates in the Quartet on the Middle East and the six-party talks with North Korea. Russia is a member of the G8 industrialized nations, the Council of Europe, OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). Russia usually takes a leading role in regional organisations such as the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Community), CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation), and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation)⁴.

President Vladimir Putin advocated a strategic partnership with close integration in various dimensions including establishment of EU-Russia Common Spaces. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has developed a friendlier and better relationship with NATO. The 28 allies and Russia work together as equal partners in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which was established in 2002. The NRC provides a framework for the consultation on current security issue and practical cooperation in a wide range of areas of common interest. Its agenda builds on the basis for bilateral cooperation that was set out in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which provided the formal basis for relations⁵. In the recent years, the country has sought to strengthen ties especially with the People's Republic of China by signing the Treaty of Friendship as well as building the Trans-Siberian oil pipeline geared toward growing Chinese energy needs. Russia participates strongly and actively at different international platforms and still considered one of the strongest lobbying partner when it comes to its interests.

Russia-China relations

Diplomatic relations between People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation radically improved after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991. The two countries share a long land-border which was demarcated in

⁴ CIA Fact book. (n.d.) *Russia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>> [Accessed on 29 July 2013]

⁵ NATO website (n.d.) *NATO's Relations with Russia*. [online] Available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-DF942A66-CF6E376D/natolive/topics_50090.htm> [Accessed on 31 July 2013]

1991, and they signed a Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation in 2001 which are very important contributing to the life of this region. Nowadays, relations between Russia and China have reached unprecedented high levels, with the visitation by President Putin. Since Russia and China signed the Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation in 2001, the two countries have witnessed many breakthroughs in the development of their relations. Since the leaders of the two countries decided to upgrade their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination based on equality, mutual trust and support, common prosperity and lasting friendship, the countries have made concerted efforts to further their relations.

At the recent Russo-Chinese summit in Beijing, both governments again hailed their close ties, signed seventeen agreements on economic and other issues, and vowed to expand their joint military engagements. China pledged to invest more in the Russian Far East and buy more Russian nuclear energy technology. The two countries also declared their identity of views regarding Asia-Pacific security, Iran's nuclear program, Syria, and other global hot spots. It is hard to contest the regular assertions of Russian and Chinese leaders that relations between Beijing and Moscow are the best they have ever been⁶. Both countries have common core interests. They hold similar stances on the on-going profound changes in the world and similar approaches to new challenges. Russia and China support building a multi-polar world, establishing a more just and democratic global political and economic system, and enhancing the UN's central role in coordinating and resolving hot international issues, like the situation in Syria or the conflict between the South and North Korea. Cooperation is needed in order to keep stability and peace in the region.

Russian territorial disputes with neighbour countries

It is a very thought-provoking part of the Russian foreign policy, when analysing territorial disputes, due to Russia was taking part in many conflicts including territorial questions. Undeniably, Russia is the greatest country in the world in terms of territory, however there is always a good cause to fight for more. First, we could mention the Kuril Islands dispute, concerning the islands of Iturup, Kunashir, and Shikotan and the Khabomai group occupied by the Soviet Union in 1945, now administered by Russia, claimed by Japan. Interestingly the

⁶ Weitz, R., 2012. Superpower Symbiosis: The Russia-China Axis. *World Affairs Journal*. Nov/Dec Issue 2012.

recent development shows that Japan and Russia have agreed to hold talks to end the territorial dispute which has prevented them from signing a formal treaty to end World War II. The agreement came as Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Russia for the two nations' first top-level talks in a decade. In a joint statement, he and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin said the lack of a treaty was "abnormal". Japan refers to the disputed islands as Northern Territories while Russia calls them the Southern Kurils and has controlled the islands since Soviet troops seized them from Japan at the end of World War II.⁷

There had been also territorial conflicts between Russia and China, nevertheless the disputes were finally resolved on 21 July 2008. On that day the Foreign Ministers of the two countries signed an agreement in Beijing. Under the agreement, Russia ceded approximately 174 km² of territory to China. The territory transferred comprised Tarabarov Island and approximately half of Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island. According to the intergovernmental agreement, Tarabarov Island became China's Yinlong, whereas Bolshoi Ussuriysky is split into two. Its western part now belongs to China and renamed to Heizi. The eastern part of the island will remain under Russia's jurisdiction. The total size of these territories reaches approximately 340 square kilometres.⁸ The settlement of their border dispute followed over 40 years of negotiations. The final settlement was the result of the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation⁹ which was concluded on 2 June 2005 and signed by Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. This followed by talks in Vladivostok. Currently there is no border dispute between Russia and China along their 4300 km border.

Border dispute settlement was reached also along the western borders of the country. Estonia's government recently approved a bill for a new border treaty with Russia, more than 20 years after the small Baltic nation gained independence from the Soviet Union. Estonia is the only country in the European Union that does not have a border treaty with Russia. The two countries signed one in 2005, but the Russian Parliament then failed to ratify it. Officials from Estonia and Russia have met three times since last fall to discuss a

⁷ BBC News Asia. 2013. *Japan and Russia agree to resolve island dispute*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22334253>> [Accessed on 13 July 2013]

⁸ Pravda.ru report. 2008. *Russia gives away some of its islands to China, leaving Japan jealous*. [online] Available at: <http://english.pravda.ru/russia/politics/14-10-2008/106559-russia_china-0> [Accessed on 31 July 2013]

⁹ Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. [online] Available at: <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm>> [Accessed on 31 July 2013]

new one, leading to the approval by Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's Cabinet. The next step is for foreign ministers of both countries to sign the treaty and then for both parliaments to ratify it¹⁰. There has been different other issue when it comes to territories with Russia some settled and some became subject to war such as in the case of Georgia.

Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin

Someone would ask the question, how can a policy be attributed to a man? The answer is President Putin is one of the most influential politicians all over the world for so many years. It is generally believed that he is the person who cannot be bypassed, when we talk about foreign policies. After his election as president in 2000, Putin added to this agenda an overarching goal: the recovery of economic, political, and geostrategic assets lost by the Soviet state in 1991. Although he has never spelled it out formally, Putin has pursued this objective with such determination, coherence, and consistency that it merits being called the Putin Doctrine.¹¹

Vladimir Putin has often been publicly critical of the foreign policies of the United States and other Western countries. More precisely, he has recently stated his suspicion of the motives behind NATO expansion, objected to the planned US Missile Defence system, and engaged in both positive and bad dialogue with members of the European Union. Some commentators have linked this increase in hostility towards the West with the global rise in oil prices. Although President Putin has important "friends" such as, former US President George W. Bush, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, former French President Jacques Chirac, and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi are reported to be personally friendly with him. Putin's relationship with Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, is reported to be "cooler" and "more business-like" than his partnership with Gerhard Schröder.

Putin's policies towards the United States – since Russia represents a resurgence of Russian nationalism, prestige, and active influence in world affairs – frequently stoked fears of a second Cold War. However, relations between the two powers during Putin's presidency were marked by prickly-but-cordial relations, punctuated by both cooperation and disagreements. In addition to that, it has been underlined during one of the workshop on US-Russia relations

¹⁰ Kangsepp, L., 2013. Estonia Advances Border Treaty With Russia. *Wall Street Journal*. USA.

¹¹ Aron, L., 2013. The Putin Doctrine: Russia's Quest to Rebuild the Soviet State. *Foreign Affairs Magazine*. Council on Foreign Relations.

at Carnegie Endowment for Peace and it is reported that “Despite the ‘reset’ of US-Russian relations during the first Obama administration, tensions seem to be increasing between Moscow and Washington. International observers point to the US Magnitsky Act, new Russian regulations on child adoption by US citizens, or the Syria question as evidence of these tensions.”¹² Also experts stressed when it comes to security policy between the two countries, that lack of trust is a core problem, especially while discussing security issues. The United States and Russia should find a new platform to discuss these challenges.

During the Iraq crisis of 2003, Putin opposed Washington’s move to invade Iraq without the United Nations Security Council is authorizing the use of military force. After the official end of the war was announced, American president George W. Bush asked the United Nations to lift sanctions on Iraq. Putin supported lifting of the sanctions in due course, arguing that the UN commission first be given a chance to complete its work on the search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq. Russia had always been critical towards the Iraq invasion and also stood strong on its position since the beginning at United Nations. It has also been reported that “Putin and the Russian leadership reacted to the preparations for war, and to the war itself, rather calmly – essentially saying, we are categorically opposed, your actions are unbelievably foolish, but in principle it is your business.”¹³

Russia has always got smooth relations with European Union. There have been series of treaties among different European Union member states and Russia and also they both share common values on the NATO platform. At a press conference following the 20th Russia-EU Summit in Portugal in 2007, Putin proposed creating a Russian-European Institute for Freedom and Democracy headquartered either in Brussels or in one of the European capitals, and added that “we are ready to supply funds for financing it, just as Europe covers the costs of projects in Russia.”¹⁴ Above all these things Russia and also President Putin knows that the European Union needs Russia’s help at almost any price because of its oil and gas reserves.

¹² Analysis of US-Russian Relations: Putin’s Foreign Policy Outlines the New Framework [online] available at: <<http://imrussia.org/en/politics/404-putins-foreign-policy-framework-outlines-a-new-course>> [Accessed on 1 August 2013]

¹³ Lukyanov, F., 2012. What Russia Learned from Iraq War. *Al Monitor* [online] Available at: <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/russia-iraq-10-year-anniversary-putin-bush-syria.html>> [Accessed on 1 August 2013]

¹⁴ Press Statement and Answers to Questions following the 20th Russia-European Union Summit. *Speech Archives of President Vladimir Putin* [online] Available at: <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/10/26/1918_type82914type82915_149706.shtml> [Accessed on 1 August 2013]

Once Europe suffered from lack of gas, and if Russia could not provide sufficient, it can be economically catastrophic for the whole continent.

Russia has also closer relations with former Soviet and Eastern Bloc republics, such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Russia frequently has debates over gas with Ukraine; consequently the relationship between the two countries is occasionally not balanced. President Putin said that Russia is in favour of a democratic multipolar world and of strengthening the system of international law. The Russian President also has good understanding with Caspian countries which includes Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. According to the President that it is their right to develop peaceful nuclear programmes without any restrictions with the countries like Iran and North Korea. Finally, we determine that Russia has not out of the world power stage. On the contrary, Russia's position is stable in the world politics as its role is rising due to its wide spectrum of foreign policies. It is also important for the United States and the European Union to cooperate with Russia and therefore contributing to stability. Nevertheless, it is still not clear if a multipolar system will keep up the formula of today's international relations or a hegemonic power will rise on the long run. However Russia – as it is a permanent member of United Nations Security Council – most probably will be able to determine and protect its interests globally in the future.

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