

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

Russian foreign policy

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'Russia—Forward!' Thus Dmitri Medvedev outlined his strategic view to the Civil Forum in January 2008. In international affairs, he declared, Russia is a state which must choose its own position. It is one thing to conduct collective decision-making in international affairs, he argued; another to conduct an independent foreign policy as Russia does. If Russia needs to continue 'open and precise explanation' of its economic and political plans and find more allies in the world, equally Russia should defend its 'national interests'. 'No one should doubt', he declared, that Russia 'will further develop as a country, open for dialogue and cooperation with the international community', or that Russia will conduct active, influential participation in international affairs.¹ Other indications of his foreign policy preferences given by Medvedev before and after his election as president of the Russian Federation on 3 March 2008 have only emphasized these views. Russia will pursue a 'well-balanced foreign policy' to 'defend its interests in a non-confrontational way', he stated, declaring that ensuring Russia 'sustains its position in the world' is one of his priorities.²

Medvedev's election as president, the publication of a foreign policy review by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), also in March, and the announcement that Russia is working on a new Foreign Policy Concept (to replace that published in 2000) give cause for a reconsideration of Russian foreign policy and its main drivers. What are the dominant trends in international affairs, as seen from Moscow? What are the key influences on Russia's policy? How does Moscow perceive Russia's position and role in international affairs? Which sense prevails in Moscow—one of vulnerability or one of opportunity? What are the vulnerabilities? What are the opportunities?

In seeking to answer such questions, this article will not examine the detail of individual components and dimensions of Russian foreign policy, such as relations with specific states or international organizations, even ones as important to Russian

* The views expressed in this article are the author's own and should not be attributed to the NATO Defence College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

¹ Speech by Dmitri Medvedev to the Civil Forum, 22 Jan. 2008, www.medvedev2008.ru/performance_2008_01_22.htm, accessed 16 June 2008.

² Speech by Dmitri Medvedev following his election, 3 March 2008, www.medvedev2008.ru/performance_2008_03_02.htm, accessed 16 June 2008; transcript of interview with Dmitri Medvedev, *Financial Times*, 24 March 2008.

foreign policy as China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.³ Nor will it recap the numerous points of tension between Russia and the West,⁴ though the primary focus of the article is Russian views of the West. Even energy issues, so central to Russia's role in international affairs, are addressed only in passing.⁵ Instead, the article seeks to provide an overview of the broader themes and trends in Russian foreign policy. First, an outline will be sketched of the recent evolution of Russian foreign policy, using President Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 as a focal point.⁶ Then the article will examine Moscow's views of the international situation and Russia's international status. Finally, it will weigh the balance of vulnerability and opportunity in Russian foreign policy, and consider the constraints on Russia's ability to seize opportunities.

The article charts the transition of Russian foreign policy from a defensive approach founded on Russian weakness at the beginning of Putin's presidency through to a more confident but still insecure stance. Russian arguments are the particular focus of the article, which seeks to illustrate and underscore what appears to be a broad consensus in official circles in Moscow. While some of the arguments being proposed by Moscow may be familiar—the need to respect Russia's 'national interests', Moscow's concerns about a unipolar world—others are less so: among the latter are Moscow's desire to establish Russia as an international role model. Moscow's argument that it represents a valid 'value centre' reflects an important evolution in Russian thinking which many in the West may find surprising and controversial—not least since the policies Moscow has pursued seem to have driven away many of the states Russia might feasibly seek to attract. The threads, weaknesses and paradoxes of the Russian arguments and their importance for the West will be drawn together and assessed at the end of the article.

The key points to emerge are that Medvedev's election seems unlikely to lead to any significant change in Russian foreign policy: he will be working along the central lines of an established consensus that evolved during Putin's second term. Russian diplomacy, though backed by economic strength and also increasingly active (particularly in exerting pressure on its neighbours), was initially defensive at the beginning of Putin's second term, seeking to enhance domestic unity and prevent external interference in Russian domestic affairs rather than to confront the West. There is still a realization in Moscow that Russia cannot afford a confrontation with the West. Yet an effort to reconsider and, as far as possible, renegotiate the results of the post-Cold War period has become increasingly visible.

³ For more on these, see e.g. Peter Ferdinand, 'Russia and China: converging responses to globalization', *International Affairs* 83: 4, July 2007, pp. 655–80, and 'Sunset, sunrise: China and Russia construct a new relationship', *International Affairs* 83: 5, September 2007, pp. 841–68; Bobo Lo, *Axis of convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the new geopolitics* (London: Blackwell, 2008); Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Who's afraid of the SCO?*, CSRC paper 07/09 (Swindon: Defence Academy of the UK, 2007).

⁴ For examination of many of these issues, and for economic detail of Russia's emergence, the reader should consult the range of materials drawn together for the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee Report on Russia, available at www.publications.parliament.uk, accessed 16 June 2008. See also Roy Allison, Margo Light and Stephen White, *Putin's Russia and the enlarged Europe* (London: Blackwell/RIIA, 2006).

⁵ For detailed discussion, see Andrew Monaghan, *Stakhanov to the rescue? Russian coal and the troubled emergence of a Russian energy strategy*, ARAG paper 07/34 (Swindon: Defence Academy of the UK, 2007).

⁶ For the text of Putin's speech, see 'Realpolitik from Munich', *International Affairs* (Moscow), 53: 3, 2007.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

Russian diplomacy reflects renewed confidence, but continuing insecurity; alongside renewed strength there remains considerable weakness. A sense of global instability heightens this dual feeling of strength and weakness, vulnerability and opportunity: the knowledge of weakness tempers Moscow's ability to take advantage of perceived opportunities. These contradictions inform the title of this article, giving rise as they do to the tension of an international political posture that has swayed between the fear of an 'enemy at the gates' directly threatening Russia's interests and, alternatively, the impression given by official documents and statements of a Russia winning a string of diplomatic successes across the world, a Russia that marches 'from victory to victory' in protecting and asserting its 'national interests'.⁷

Munich and beyond—evolution, not revolution

Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 is often hailed as a turning point in Russia's relations with the outside world, not least because it is considered to reflect a turning point in Russian foreign policy. Certainly, it served to raise awareness of Russia in international affairs, particularly in the West.

In fact, the speech was largely a reiteration of concerns already voiced by senior Russian officials over many months: as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted, it merely served to open people's eyes.⁸ Senior Russian officials have explicitly embedded the speech within this longer-term context, one based on the Foreign Policy Concept published in 2000.⁹ Written at a time of internal instability in Russia following the financial crash of 1998–9, and reflecting unease in Moscow about NATO's Kosovo campaign, the concept noted Russia's concerns about the nature of a unipolar world dominated by the United States—a world marked by double standards, the use of force and instability, and one in which Russia would need to protect its sovereign independence.¹⁰

Underlying Russian foreign policy have been concerns about (western) threats to Russian interests and a consciousness that Russia has a different understanding of international affairs from the West. Events in 2004, in particular the terrorist outrage at Beslan (and Russia's response) and the 'coloured revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine, provided clear illustration of this: Moscow interpreted them to signify that it was under direct threat from western influence which sought to undermine Russia's return to international affairs and to intervene in its domestic affairs. Thus, in September 2004, Vladislav Surkov, then deputy director of the presidential administration, stated that the enemy was 'at the gate'. Though

⁷ Interview with Vladislav Surkov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 29 Sept. 2004; Aleksandr Artyemyev, 'Rossiya obozrela vragov', *Gazeta.ru*, 18 March 2008, www.gazeta.ru/politics/2008/03/18_a_2671176.shtml, accessed 16 June 2008; Yulia Latynina, 'Building high fences around bad neighbours', *Moscow Times*, 12 March 2008.

⁸ Sergei Lavrov, 'The present and future of global politics', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 2, April–June 2007, pp. 000–00. All *Russia in Global Affairs* articles are available online at <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru>, accessed 16 June 2008.

⁹ Medvedev, speech, 3 March 2008.

¹⁰ *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 2000, www.mid.ru, accessed 16 June 2008.

focusing on terrorism, he established the context in which such terrorism worked by depicting international groups who continued to live with 'Cold War phobia', who considered Russia an adversary and who had both the aim and the means of bringing about Russia's destruction.¹¹

Referring to Surkov's comments, one western commentator expressed the view in early 2005 that the terrorist attacks had illustrated Russian weakness, pushed the country on to the defensive in an international context considered by Moscow to be 'deeply threatening', and resulted in an effort to strengthen political and social unity. He argued that a central theme of Putin's policy since 2000 was recognizing Russian weakness and diminishing the impact of this weakness on domestic and foreign policy. Furthermore, he noted, Russia's relations with the EU and the United States had reached an 'unprecedented low'.¹² This, then, was the context in which, as one Russian analyst noted, Russia's leaders began to create their own Moscow-centred system.¹³

Yet Putin's Munich speech did underscore a shift in Moscow, reflecting increasing confidence and a related shift in foreign policy tactics. Not only was it an eye-opener, therefore; according to commentator Sergei Oznobishchev, director of the Strategic Assessments Centre in Moscow, it was a 'prelude to current events'.¹⁴ According to another Russian commentator, Munich signified a change from complaining about US actions to public opposition to them: from critical comment about the lack of respect for Moscow's interests to unilateral action to seek to protect and even project them, and from anger about criticism of Russian internal politics to denunciation of the critics themselves. Thus Russian foreign policy has since become more 'coercive', emphasizing the country's independence and ability to play an active role to achieve its aims.¹⁵

Konstantin Kosachov, chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the State Duma, suggests that this change in Russian foreign policy is evident in the 'proposal of creative ideas aimed at achieving end results', for example by Putin's proposal to the United States to operate jointly the radar station in Gabala, followed by initiatives made public at the Russia-US summit in Kennebunkport. 'It is thus in our power', Kosachov argues, 'to make such proposals to our partners and opponents that will throw them into a dilemma': either cooperate to achieve a desirable solution to problems or admit that the problem is 'rooted in their biased attitude towards Russia'.¹⁶

Alongside such proposals, Russia's foreign policy has included unilateral actions as a means of asserting its role and interests, such as Moscow's suspension of its observation of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in late 2007 and resumption of strategic bomber flights and increased naval activity. Furthermore, Moscow has rejected western policies, for instance disagreeing with the EU and

¹¹ Surkov interview, 29 Sept. 2004.

¹² Dov Lynch, "'The enemy is at the gate': Russia after Beslan", *International Affairs* 81: 1, Jan. 2005. pp. 141-4.

¹³ Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia leaves the West', *Foreign Affairs* 85: 4, July-Aug. 2006, p. 87.

¹⁴ Sergei Oznobishchev, 'Moscow's moratorium on CFE Treaty', *RIA Novosti*, 3 Jan. 2008.

¹⁵ Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia's coercive diplomacy', *Carnegie Moscow Briefing Paper* 10: 1, Jan. 2008. p. 3.

¹⁶ Konstantin Kosachov, 'Russia and the West: where the differences lie', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2007.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

United States over Kosovo's independence, vociferously opposing NATO enlargement and continuing to reject firmly western criticism of Russian domestic affairs, particularly democratic and legal processes. Moscow has also pursued a more active role in dealing with its neighbours, not least in its energy relationships, with Russian energy companies significantly raising the prices of their deliveries.

Accompanied by strong anti-western rhetoric from the Russian foreign policy establishment, the combination is widely interpreted in the West as representing a newly assertive—even aggressive—Russian diplomacy. This change has given rise to an increasingly difficult political atmosphere between Russia and the West, illustrated by the request of NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer that Putin restrain his remarks at the NATO summit and NATO–Russia Council meeting in Bucharest in April 2008. For many, the atmosphere is redolent of a 'new Cold War'.

But Russian officials strive to emphasize that the Munich spirit is not confrontational, emphasizing that Russia seeks cooperation with anyone who is willing to do likewise on equal terms.¹⁷ Dmitri Peskov, first deputy press attaché to the Russian president, noted that Putin's Munich speech was not confrontational, but added that Moscow believes it is reacting to provocation. It was, he argued, delivered as an 'invitation to discuss openly challenges in international affairs that we all have and sometimes treat using double standards'. It is a problem of action and counter-action, he stated: the actions (i.e. by the West, particularly the United States) come first, and Russia's moves are counter-actions; what is good for one (the United States and the West more broadly) is good for the other (Russia); just as western states and organizations may have valid interests, so may Russia, even though these may differ.¹⁸

Despite what many in the West might consider to be a string of diplomatic failures (a list that includes widespread discussion in the West and Russia alike of a new Cold War), the slowing down of Russia's cooperation with western institutions and the souring of its political relations with a number of European states, Moscow claims that its diplomacy has achieved significant success, particularly in improving recognition of its status in international affairs. Medvedev has stated that 'if we had not taken a strong line on some questions, Russia would still be treated like a third rank state'.¹⁹ The image of success is reflected in the official review of foreign policy, which celebrates the strengthening of Russia's role in international economics and finance and its establishment of an independent foreign policy position. Russia is actively establishing relationships across the world, notably with the rising powers China, India and Brazil, and playing a major role in key international organizations.²⁰

Signs appeared of a further slight evolution after Medvedev's nomination as

¹⁷ Medvedev interview, *Financial Times*; Sergei Lavrov, New Year speech to representatives of international mass media, Moscow, 15 Jan. 2008, www.mid.ru.

¹⁸ Transcript of discussion with Dmitri Peskov, 20 Feb. 2008, Nixon Center, www.nixoncenter.org, accessed 25 Feb. 2008.

¹⁹ Andrei Vandenko, interview with Dmitri Medvedev, 'Prostye istiny', *Itogi*, 18 Feb. 2008.

²⁰ *Foreign policy and diplomatic activities of the Russian Federation in 2007: review by the MFA*, March 2008, www.mid.ru.

Putin's preferred presidential candidate, and some commentators suggest that Moscow is 'giving up its bellicose foreign policy rhetoric'.²¹ The tenor of statements made by senior Russian figures, for instance the then First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, has also changed. His speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2008 was considered by some in the West to reflect a 'warm tone'.²² Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin and Anatoli Chubais, then CEO of Russia's electricity monopoly RAO Unified Energy Systems, have called for the clarification of Russian foreign policy to maintain economic growth and questioned how much Russia's diplomacy and rhetoric is costing. Chubais asked, for instance, if Russia was ready to pay the high price of its argument about the closure of the British Council. Another senior commentator, former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, stated that Russia's foreign policy stance was similar to that of a 'badly behaved adolescent', but that policy could change soon.²³ Medvedev's subsequent election has further encouraged western observers to hope for a softening of Russian diplomacy, given what is considered to be his more 'liberal' background.²⁴

But this returns us to Medvedev's comments noted at the outset, which suggest that he views protecting Russia's 'national interests' as something an 'effective leader' of the country has to do, a task for which the terms liberal, conservative and democrat have little meaning.²⁵ Sergei Ivanov, too, essentially reiterated that Russia would continue to defend its interests. He referred to Russia's status in international affairs and its economic growth, and noted that 'we should decisively abandon all approaches that have long divided our world on ideological grounds'. Acknowledging the protracted process of 'overcoming past tendencies to apply double standards to Russia and which even includes attempts to return to a containment policy', he declared: 'we can hardly accept that there exists some universal experience or idea to serve as a "master standard" for all times and nations', in direct echo of Putin's Munich speech.²⁶ Such views are again formulated and elaborated in the foreign policy review, which noted that 'only firm standing for one's own rightful interests ... is the basis for further transition to pragmatic relations with the outside world'. The review identified 2007 as a year of transition, the experience of which shows that Russia now has the political will and accompanying resources to succeed in making the change happen.²⁷ The tone may be slightly different, the views do not seem to be.

²¹ Viktor Yadukha, "Obrezenie" otmenyaetsya', RBC Daily, 30 Jan. 2008, www.rbcdaily.ru/2008/01/30/focus/317201, accessed 16 June 2008.

²² 'West need not fear resurgent Russia', Reuters, 10 Feb. 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKL1030398720080210?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>, accessed 16 June 2008.

²³ Quoted in Mikhail Sergeev, 'Liberalno-pravitel'stvennyi opportunizm', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 31 Jan. 2008.

²⁴ See e.g. Fred Kempke, 'Russia's Medvedev deserves handshake, nosehold', Bloomberg, 29 Feb. 2008.

²⁵ Medvedev interview, *Financial Times*.

²⁶ Sergei Ivanov, 'Where is Russia heading? New vision of pan-European security', Munich Security Conference, 10 Feb. 2008, www.securityconference.de, accessed 16 June 2008.

²⁷ *Review by the MFA*.

International relations: instability and transition

A central tenet of Russian views of international affairs is that the United States is playing a highly destabilizing role, especially in its unilateralist approach in imposing its own value-system on the world and in its use of force rather than international law to achieve its aims. Putin stated at Munich that the almost uncontained use of military force is plunging the world into an 'abyss of permanent conflict', creating new centres of tension and stimulating a new arms race. Lavrov echoed such views, noting that it increases the 'likelihood of conflict in world politics while fuelling old problems'. There is thus a 'deficit of security' in international affairs.²⁸ Similarly, Russian commentators argue that US intervention not only fails to resolve crises, it exacerbates them and encourages the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by regional powers—states are arming themselves 'just in case'.²⁹

Moreover, the concept of unipolarity marginalizes those who do not agree with specific modes of politics, especially democracy, resulting in a redivision of international affairs. According to Lavrov, efforts are being made to impose the structure of international relations framed in the 'Western alliance': nothing has changed since the Cold War, he argues, and a policy of containment of Russia is being pursued.³⁰ He stated his alarm that organizations and instruments 'inherited from the past—NATO, the OSCE, the CFE Treaty and others—are evolving into a means of reproducing a bloc policy'. There is a 'real danger that this may, without an overall reform of the European security architecture, acquire a life of its own', thereby 'predetermining a real split of Europe for decades to come'.³¹ Such views were reiterated almost a year later in the review of Russia's diplomacy, which notes that the 'inertia of bloc approaches delays the qualitative reform of the entire European architecture, carrying the imprint of the ideology of "victory in the Cold War" into the contemporary open system of collective security'.³²

These points illustrate the widespread belief among officials and analysts alike in Moscow that the international situation is unstable and dangerous. Putin remarked in February 2008 that 'today's world is not getting any simpler—on the contrary, it is ever more complicated and tough'.³³ Lavrov believes that unilateral moves by some countries may provoke global political breakdowns in 2008.³⁴

Russian commentators see a deteriorating international situation, one of increasing disorder and instability, becoming only more complicated in the foreseeable future.³⁵ This is a central theme running through one document assessing international perspectives over the next ten years: as the publication's editor,

²⁸ Lavrov, 'Present and future'.

²⁹ Sergei Kortunov, in Sergei Karaganov, ed., *The world around Russia: 2017. An outlook for the mid-term future* (Moscow: SVOP, 2007). pp. 24–30.

³⁰ Sergei Lavrov, 'Containing Russia: back to the future?', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, Oct.–Dec. 2007.

³¹ Lavrov, 'Present and future'.

³² *Review by the MFA*.

³³ Speech by Vladimir Putin to expanded meeting of the State Council on Russia's development strategy through to 2020, 8 Feb. 2008, www.kremlin.ru, accessed 16 June 2008.

³⁴ Sergei Lavrov, *Interfax*, 29 Dec. 2007.

³⁵ Vitaliy Ivanov, 'Myagshe i shirshe? Nu nyet!', *Izvestiya*, 24 March 2008.

Sergei Karaganov, noted, it reflects a sensation that threats are accumulating and will emerge some time within the period under review. The upcoming decade, he argued, is expected to be 'turbulent and unpredictable', with 'growing chaos' and a 'vacuum of governance'.³⁶ Others concur, arguing that Russia faces the hardest geopolitical situation of the post-Soviet period,³⁷ one in which Russia's foreign policy context is deteriorating.³⁸

More directly, Russian interests are still perceived to be under threat: concern in Moscow about external interference in Russian domestic politics continues.³⁹ NATO enlargement is considered by the foreign policy establishment to be a 'serious provoking factor, fraught with the appearance of new separating lines and a lower level of mutual trust', and the main irritant in Russia's relations with the West. Furthermore, Lavrov declared that Russia would find it difficult to continue dialogue with NATO if the planned US missile defence system in Europe meets only the interests of the United States. MFA spokesman Mikhail Kamynin has stated that the missile defence plans could seriously destabilize the strategic balance of forces in Europe, further undermining confidence.⁴⁰ The military establishment concurs: General Baluyevsky voiced the views of many in arguing that missile defence elements in Europe target Russia. Further, he stated that the CFE Treaty is a 'yoke' for Russia and that events in Georgia were provoked by NATO states that would gain from tension on Russia's southern borders.⁴¹ These issues were again examined widely in Russia in the build-up to NATO's Bucharest summit.

Such views are important for three reasons. First, Russia is redrafting its Military Doctrine and seems likely to formulate them as a founding basis for policy. One western expert notes the 'major shift in what Russia considers to be a threat to its national interests or sovereignty' and that it 'appears that all those contributing to the drafting of the new [military] doctrine who have made their views public are agreed that NATO and the USA present the main threat to Russia'.⁴²

Second, they clearly have the backing of the Russian leadership: Putin endorsed Baluyevsky's comments in February,⁴³ Medvedev in March. With a passing reference to the increasing number of nuclear states and growth of terrorism, Medvedev noted his unhappiness with the US missile defence plans, which break the 'fragile balance of forces and facilities' in Europe and beyond. No state, he announced, could be 'pleased about having the representatives of a military bloc [NATO] to which it doesn't belong coming close to its borders'.⁴⁴

Third, they reflect a conceptual mismatch in outlook between Russia and the West. There is clearly a very different understanding of the post-Cold War trans-

³⁶ Karaganov, *World around Russia*, pp. 5–6.

³⁷ Boris Piadyshev, 'Realpolitik from Munich', *International Affairs* (Moscow) 53: 3, p. 64.

³⁸ Viktor Kuvadin, 'The quest for Russia's foreign policy', *International Affairs* (Moscow) 53: 4, 2007, p. 64.

³⁹ *Review by the MFA*.

⁴⁰ Mikhail Kamynin, Interfax, 6 Dec. 2007; Lavrov, Interfax, 9 Dec. 2007.

⁴¹ See e.g. reports in Interfax, 12, 13 Nov. 2007.

⁴² Keir Giles, *New focus for Russian military doctrine*, ARAG paper (Swindon: Defence Academy of the UK, forthcoming, 2008).

⁴³ Transcript of big annual press conference, 14 Feb. 2008. www.kremlin.ru, accessed 16 June 2008

⁴⁴ Medvedev interview, *Financial Times*.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

formation in Europe held in Russia from that held in western capitals and the transatlantic community, according to which this transformation, whatever its flaws, represents a positive qualitative change and reform on a considerable scale. However, according to Kosachov the West believes itself by definition to be the 'good guy'. Indeed, westerners argue, why should Moscow be concerned about democracy approaching its borders? Having convinced themselves of the validity of their arguments, western planners apparently believe that Moscow should follow suit and accept the explanations for initiatives such as the missile defence projects—that a failure to do so must simply be politically motivated obstruction. Yet Moscow sees things differently: as Kosachov put it, democracy does not worry Russians, but the 'cardinally changing balance of security' does.⁴⁵

The Russian leadership also sees threats to Russian political influence on regional and global levels. Lavrov illustrated the long-held concerns about western, particularly US, penetration into what Moscow considers to be its area of influence, the former Soviet space. Attempts to incorporate Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, he noted, are leading towards a 'substantial negative geopolitical shift'; 'we see how work is being done [by the US and NATO] on Central Asia and Azerbaijan,' he added.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Putin's concern about NATO enlargement and transformation reflects anxiety that the alliance seeks to position itself as an alternative to the UN, an organization which Moscow prioritizes in international affairs (not least because of its permanent seat on the Security Council). According to one Russian commentator, this concern is rooted in a perception that the entire framework of international relations is changing and that Russia, as neither a NATO member state nor one which adheres to the alliance's democratic agenda, will find itself marginalized as a result.⁴⁷

Simultaneously, nevertheless, Russian officials argue that international relations have reached a time of nascent transition, largely as a result of the failure of US policies and the difficulties the United States and its allies face in Iraq and Afghanistan. US influence is declining and the West is 'losing its monopoly on the globalization process', according to Lavrov. He therefore envisages a 'correction'—i.e. reduction—in the US role (a loss of influence and allies) and a 'clarification' of the Russia factor in global politics.⁴⁸ This transition reflects the fact that the world is becoming increasingly multipolar, as new centres of power emerge.

Russia's status: from regional state to global purview

Two interlinked points emerge from Moscow's belief that the international system is entering a phase of transition. First, Russia's strategic horizons have changed significantly and rapidly. Russia's recovery from the weakness and national political focus of the 1990s has been swift. As Putin's presidency progressed, and

⁴⁵ Konstantin Kosachov, 'Brek! Rossiya-zapad: ishchem vykhod', *Izvestiya*, 29 Oct. 2007.

⁴⁶ Sergei Lavrov, 'My staraemsya deideologizirovat nashi deistviya', *Izvestiya*, 31 March 2008.

⁴⁷ Yevgeniy Kiselyov, 'The price Russia must pay for being hysterical', *Moscow Times*, 2 April 2008.

⁴⁸ Lavrov, 'Present and future'.

particularly during his second term, Russia emerged as a state with a regional horizon, increasingly seeking to assert its influence in the former Soviet space. As Medvedev's presidency begins, Russia's position is that of a regional power with global horizons and ambitions. Thus Putin recently declared that Russia 'has returned to the world stage as a strong state, a country that others heed and that can stand up for itself'. Indeed, he did not think anyone was 'tempted to make ultimatums to Russia today'.⁴⁹ Medvedev echoes these views, declaring that Russia has changed, becoming stronger and more successful: a transformation accompanied by a return to a fitting place in world affairs and a change in the way others treated the country.⁵⁰ Lavrov has declared that Russia now has the political and financial resources to return to the world stage: it is no use, he asserted, 'trying to keep Russia in a regional shell'.⁵¹

Despite the concerns noted above about the potential risks and dangers in international affairs, Moscow feels confident that it can survive in its own system, given Russia's actual and potential economic growth which, according to Putin, allows it to be firmer in standing up for its national interests, both politically and economically.⁵² Indeed, with few exceptions, Russian officials and analysts alike consider Russia to be an indispensable global actor and partner for leading states, based on its roles as a key producer and transit state in global energy security and as an ally in the war against terrorism. Senior Russian analysts argue that Moscow, whatever other difficulties may exist, considers itself to be on the 'same side of the barricades' as the western world in the struggle against radical Islam, a struggle in which Russia has suffered the heaviest losses.⁵³

This status defines two further features of Russian foreign policy thinking. First, Russia has no permanent friends, since no other great power would want to see a strong Russia with which it had to compete. Second, its rise, along with that of other leading regional states, means that a multipolar world is materializing, within which there is an emerging competitive market for (equally valid) ideas on the future world order. In this context, all states should be free to choose their own paths of development; a world is emerging characterized not by confrontation but by competition between value-systems and models.

This is a key point in current Russian thinking, explored below. Suffice it here to note two points. First, multipolarity, usually taken to mean the grouping of regional powers to balance the United States, has long been a feature of Russian foreign policy discussions. The new concept of multipolarity appears to reflect an evolution of this thought, whereby all the regional powers compete among themselves. Second, Russia sees an opportunity to present itself as a valid 'value centre' in its own right, asserting the legitimacy of its particular values: to counter western influence, Russia must respond by becoming attractive politically, economically and culturally.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Transcript of annual big press conference.

⁵⁰ Transcript of speech by Dmitri Medvedev, 11 Dec. 2007. www.medvedev2008.ru, accessed 16 June 2008.

⁵¹ Lavrov, 'Present and future'.

⁵² Transcript of annual big press conference.

⁵³ Alexei Arbatov, 'Is a new Cold War imminent?', *Russia in Global Affairs* 2, Jul.–Sept. 2007.

⁵⁴ Interview with Sergei Lavrov, *Izvestiya*, 31 March 2008.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

This article now turns to pick up the threads of issues alluded to above and look at two other important drivers of Russian foreign policy: internal politics and external opportunity.

Russian foreign policy: vulnerability with opportunity

Russian diplomacy has been in large part driven by concerns about Russian domestic affairs, particularly about a 'coloured revolution' of the type conducted in Georgia and Ukraine, which Moscow considered to be supported by outside interference. Even as Moscow became more confident in other ways, the 'enemy at the gates' motif remained prominent throughout Putin's second term, alluded to in his annual addresses to the Federal Assembly in 2006 and 2007 and then as the elections approached. External influences, Putin argued, sought to undermine Russia's parliamentary and presidential elections and the government's legitimacy: there are those, he suggested in a series of speeches prior to the election season, that seek to poke 'their snotty noses' into Russian affairs, even to divide Russia.⁵⁵

In response to this perceived threat, the Russian authorities have sought to enhance Russian political and social unity. This has proved problematic: the Russian Federation is a very diverse society, and following the collapse of the USSR Russia has lacked a unifying ideology. In place of such an idea, the concept of 'sovereign democracy' is proposed, predominantly by Vladislav Surkov and among the supporters of the *Edinaya Rossiya* party, as a means of mobilizing and consolidating the population by projecting the picture of a Russia besieged by powerful enemies.⁵⁶

Russian diplomacy has served two purposes in enhancing domestic stability. First, it has sought to prevent major splits within the Russian political elite: as one commentator noted in December 2007, Putin needed to stake a forward claim in the global game to enhance political unity among the different factions of the Russian elite, including those noted above who see a significant threat emerging from the West.⁵⁷

Second, it sought to generate popularity for Putin's successor: the enemy at the gates motif is being combined with an impression of Putin's diplomatic successes to generate popularity for Medvedev. In this context, Putin believes enhanced national unity to be one of the main successes of his presidency.⁵⁸ Moreover, it can be deduced that Moscow considers the 'prevention of foreign interference' in the process of the election a foreign policy 'victory': no foreign noses were stuck in, and the baton was safely passed to the chosen successor. Finally, Medvedev appears

⁵⁵ See e.g. Oleg Shchederov, 'Putin slams "foreign interference" in Russia vote', Reuters, 26 Nov. 2007, reported in *Johnson's Russia List*, no. 243, 2007; 'Putin slams those who want to "split Russia"', RFE/RL, *Newsline* 11/205, part 1, 5 Nov. 2007.

⁵⁶ Andrei Okara, 'Sovereign democracy: a new Russian idea or a PR project?', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 2, Jul.–Sept. 2007. Though the concept does not enjoy complete support in Moscow (indeed, it is the subject of some debate, even among official circles, as being oxymoronic), it features increasingly prominently in political discussions.

⁵⁷ 'Global player', *Expert*, no. 48 (589), 24–30 Dec. 2007.

⁵⁸ Transcript of big annual press conference.

to have great popular support. While many risks and potential threats remain, the point of possible maximum vulnerability has been successfully negotiated.

Medvedev has therefore inherited a political context in which there is a broad consensus among both elite and public, a consensus to which he apparently subscribes. Two final comments are apposite. First, while in some ways this is advantageous for him (providing a solid basis of support), it creates contextual limitations to what he can do, particularly in the initial period of his presidency. Altering course, even if he sought to do so (which he does not appear to), would run counter to the interests of this consensus.⁵⁹

Second, a good deal of Moscow's assertive diplomatic rhetoric has been directed more towards the domestic audience rather than towards the West. While Moscow is more prepared to defend what it sees as its interests internationally, the assertive rhetoric does not necessarily reflect a desire in Moscow for confrontation with the West: on the contrary, the Russian elite believes it would lose more than it stood to gain in seeking such confrontation.⁶⁰ In fact, there seems to be a realization that Moscow's point about its interests is made and to that to press it further would be counterproductive, possibly reuniting the West directly against Russia. That senior figures such as Kudrin and Chubais have proposed that Russia's diplomatic stance is proving expensive suggests that there is an awareness of the limits of the current stance adopted by Moscow. It may have been successful at home, but it has also generated international costs. Interestingly, asked about these statements by 'high ranking representatives of the Russian leadership', Putin replied: 'I have not heard these statements ... I haven't seen anyone from the political leadership among the people you cited.'⁶¹ Kudrin, who subsequently clarified his views, saying that he did not think that foreign policy mistakes had been made, has been reappointed deputy prime minister and finance minister in the new Russian government.

Yet Russian foreign policy is not simply inward-looking, nor is it purely defensive against a range of perceived political and military threats. Moscow believes Russia to have an important, influential role to play in international affairs. Moreover, though Moscow believes that the West, particularly the United States, poses a threat to Russia, it sees that the power and influence of the West are broadly in decline. This may lead to added instability, but equally it affords Russia an opportunity both to become more active and to gain further influence and strength.

Indeed, though in some respects Moscow remains on the defensive in international affairs, it also seeks to reconsider the fundamental bases of the international system. This project can be traced back through Putin's Munich speech, in which he noted that he was 'convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security'.⁶² Thus a main

⁵⁹ For more discussion of this, see Nazrin Mehdiyeva, 'New man in the Kremlin: what hope for Russian foreign policy?', *International Spectator* 43: 2, June 2008, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Latynina, 'Building high fences'.

⁶¹ Transcript of big annual press conference.

⁶² Putin, 'Realpolitik from Munich', p. 57.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

goal of Russian foreign policy, as Trenin argues, is the revision of the results of the Cold War.⁶³

This goal has two main elements, both of which remain in their early stages and as yet sketched only in outline. First, according to Russian officials and analysts, the inertia of bloc approaches is leading towards crisis. It is widely believed in Moscow that international institutions, as they exist today, are incapable of addressing the current range of international problems, particularly regarding conflict regulation. They are losing their influence, according to one analyst, because they were designed for the bipolar era—but new nations have now emerged as international leaders and are asserting their right to participate in formulating the rules of the game.⁶⁴ At best, priority should be given to the modernization of these institutions. At worst, they are already in deep crisis and in need of replacement.⁶⁵

Lavrov has suggested that the qualitative reform of the entire European security architecture (ridding it of the ideology of victory in the Cold War) is one of Russia's key foreign policy tasks for 2008.⁶⁶ He also believes in the need to 'democratize' international affairs by allowing states to make sovereign decisions.⁶⁷ NATO enlargement and the US missile defence system are considered 'undemocratic' by Moscow, which sees considerable public opposition to these plans in Ukraine and eastern Europe respectively. Given such opposition, Moscow argues, surely their fulfilment would be undemocratic?

Such views are important because Russia is reformulating its Foreign Policy Concept. Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Federation Council, has stated that the new concept should reflect the need to pose the question of radical reform of all the founding international organizations of the Cold War era. Kosachov agrees, noting that a new concept should allow for the altered role of Russia in a changing world; noting that Russia has become markedly stronger, he considers that it should correct its strategy accordingly and take a more active role.⁶⁸

Second, as noted above, Moscow seeks to set Russia up as a 'value centre' in its own right, along the lines of Lavrov's comment that Russia must become attractive in every sense. In so doing, it proposes that Moscow is a legitimate democratic centre, one that offers 'sovereign democracy', a different model of economic and social development that is particularly relevant to states in the former USSR and Asia.

⁶³ Dmitri Trenin, 'Vneshnaya politika', *Kommersant' Vlast*, 28 Jan. 2008, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=845861>, accessed 16 June 2008.

⁶⁴ Fyodor Lukyanov, 'Refitting global organisations', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 20 Feb. 2008.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Sergei Kortunov and Dmitri Suslov in *World around Russia*, pp. 35–6 and 44 respectively; Alexander Khranchikin, 'Collective security: dusting off old clichés', *RIA Novosti*, 17 Dec. 2007.

⁶⁶ Transcript of speech by Sergei Lavrov, MFA press conference, 23 Jan. 2008, www.mid.ru. His speech was reported by one newspaper as reflecting 'decidedly sharp comments', by other media that 'in most cases' he spoke as a 'dove'. See respectively 'Lavrov says Russia won't back down', *Moscow Times*, 24 Jan. 2008, and 'The West no longer understands Lavrov', *RIA Novosti*, 24 Jan. 2008.

⁶⁷ Lavrov, speech to international mass media, 15 Jan. 2008.

⁶⁸ Roman Dobrokhoto, 'Kontseptsiya izmenilas', *Noviye Izvestiya*, 4 March 2008.

Karaganov considers that Russia, by showing the post-Soviet and developing societies that they can fruitfully organize their economies in ways other than those proposed by the EU (which entails significant and expensive reform), is 'restoring albeit very slowly, its ability to attract medium-developed states'. According to him, 'many neighbouring states ... are eager to emulate the sovereign system of Russia which is showing growth and is better governed'.⁶⁹

Furthermore, Moscow proposes a moral basis for its approach to foreign policy: as Putin remarked, 'we should not forget that the fall of the Berlin Wall was possible thanks to a historic choice—one that was also made by our people, the people of Russia—a choice in favour of democracy, freedom, openness'.⁷⁰ Indeed, senior Russian political figures such as Kosachov and Surkov have argued that Russia in fact won the Cold War, in the process doing much for the spread of democracy in Eastern Europe and Central Asia by delivering Russians and others from totalitarianism.⁷¹ This desire to assert Russia as a valid value centre appears to be articulated in conscious parallel to the claims of western democratic organizations. On the one hand, as noted above, Russia proposes the 'sovereign democratization' of a state's independent, individual democratic development in response to the West's 'democratic messianism' or 'export model of democracy'.⁷² On the other, Moscow is establishing centres (under the umbrella title of the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation) in the United States and Europe to monitor democracy and human rights there, and judge whether and how the West abides by (its own) democratic standards. Andranik Migranyan and Natalya Narochnitskaya have been appointed to head the centres in New York and Paris respectively, though offices have yet to be opened in either city, and Narochnitskaya has recently begun publishing work.⁷³ Migranyan has argued that some states are trying to monopolize the right to interpret democracy. 'They regard other countries from the standpoint of their own interpretations and wishes,' he stated. 'We want to participate in this discussion.'⁷⁴

With these aims in mind, it is worth commenting briefly on Moscow's capacity to achieve such goals, since there are important shortcomings which will hinder its ability to take broader advantage of the opportunity it sees. Russia's assertion of its leading power status masks the relative and rather one-dimensional nature of its power, its continuing domestic weakness and a complex variety of problems, many of which are openly acknowledged by the Russian leadership.

These can be defined in terms of three interlinking issues. First, Russia's capabilities to project its foreign and security interests are limited. Though its military expenditure has grown, this increase follows a prolonged history of serious underinvestment and neglect. Russia still faces many obstacles to rearma-

⁶⁹ Sergei Karaganov, 'A new epoch of confrontation', *Russia in Global Affairs* 5: 4, October–December 2007..

⁷⁰ Putin, 'Realpolitik from Munich', p. 60.

⁷¹ Kosachov, 'Russia and the West'.

⁷² Kosachov, 'Russia and the West'.

⁷³ See, for example, Natalya Narochnitskaya, ed., *Oranzheviie seti: ot Belgrada do Bishkekka (Orange networks: from Belgrade to Bishkek)* (St Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2008).

⁷⁴ Cited in Natalia Lebedeva, 'Russian freedom house', *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 29 Jan. 2008; *Johnson's Russia List*, no. 20, 29 Jan. 2008.

'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'?

ment, including inefficiency and waste, the loss of key skills and knowledge through retirement or death, and the disruptive effects of a major reorganization of the defence industry. Defence procurement costs are spiralling, dramatically curtailing Russia's ability to acquire new equipment despite the growing expenditure. Russia also faces serious manpower shortages.⁷⁵ Moreover, the country's administrative capabilities remain weak and inefficient.

True, Russian foreign policy has tended to reflect a geo-economic rather than a geopolitical approach, which has meant that economic tools, particularly energy resources, have featured more prominently. But this leads to the second point, which is that Russia's own economic strength rests on a fragile basis. First, the Russian energy sector, on which much of Russia's economic strength continues to depend, faces gas, oil and electricity shortages. Inefficient management and limited development of new projects have undermined the growth of this key element of the Russian economy. Second, Russia continues to face a demographic crisis, with a declining population beset by a low birth rate and average life expectancy, and rising rates of HIV/AIDS and TB. Indeed, the health situation is so grave that this is considered to be a national security issue—with serious ramifications for the future of Russia's workforce and therefore its economy. Third, Russia faces immediate economic difficulties including rising inflation: rising oil, gas and electricity prices, and rising food prices. The new government faces difficult challenges in controlling and reorganizing the Russian economy.⁷⁶

Finally, Russia's aims beyond the current broad consensus remain ill-defined. While Russia has sought to propose sovereign democracy and has announced its intention to protect its national interests, there has been little beyond this, particularly in defining these national interests more specifically or practically. As the Russian commentator Fyodor Lukyanov has noted, concepts suggesting the means of changing the world, or even interpreting it, have not been produced in Moscow; he doubts that Moscow is intellectually ready for that, even today.⁷⁷ Similarly, others note that the MFA's objectives as outlined in the review published in March hardly appear to go beyond preventing external influence in Russian affairs.⁷⁸

The sum of these constraints is that, while Russia has pursued a more assertive policy with its neighbours, it still cannot afford confrontation with the West and has limited capacity to instigate a full revision of the international system; while there are those who propose a 'strategy of global penetration',⁷⁹ neither the means nor focus to achieve this currently exists.

⁷⁵ Keir Giles, *Cold start for Russian re-armament*, ARAG paper (Swindon: Defence Academy of the UK, forthcoming 2008).

⁷⁶ Mikhail Delyagin, 'The change in external factors of Russia's development', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, Jan.–March 2008, pp. 000–00.

⁷⁷ Fyodor Lukyanov, 'O vrede i pol'ze shumovikh effektov', *Gazeta.ru*, 20 March 2008, www.gazeta.ru.

⁷⁸ Aleksandr Artemyev, 'Rossiya obozrela vragov'.

⁷⁹ Andrei Fyodorov, 'Strategiya global'nogo proniknoveniya', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 31 Oct. 2007.

Conclusions: on the cusp of change

Russian foreign policy is undergoing a complex evolution as Moscow's horizons change from a regional to a global purview. Perhaps most obviously, a broad consensus has formed on the fundamental tenets of the country's foreign policy, particularly about its status and the need to create favourable external conditions for growth, which at least involves a rethink of the balance of international affairs. What this means, though, is that significant change in Russian foreign policy is unlikely, at least in the near future. The nature of consensus across the Russian foreign policy elite would limit Medvedev's room for manoeuvre; in any case, he subscribes to its broad tenets.

Nevertheless, within this broad consensus there remain a number of tensions, most particularly between vulnerability and opportunity. These tensions are apparent in the formulation of official documents: the drafting of the new Military Doctrine seems to reflect vulnerability, particularly to the threat emanating from the West; the drafting of the new Foreign Policy Concept also reflects vulnerability—the dangers posed by the 'inertia' of the current (European) architecture—but seems to lean towards the opportunities offered by Russia's new strength and status to reform this architecture.

Equally, Russian foreign policy remains contradictory, reflecting the lack of clear definition of what the country's more concrete interests might be beyond this broad consensus. Moscow seeks to position itself as an international pole, an economic, social and political model, seeking to attract like-minded partners. Yet it also seeks to assert itself and its interests: Medvedev has stated that no one is being forced to love Russia, but that all should respect it.⁸⁰ It seems that Russian officials recognize that assertive policies are unlikely to make many friends. The lack of allies—indeed, the driving away of many former partners in the former Soviet space—is an important result of Russian diplomacy and foreign policy activity to date. If and how Moscow will resolve this paradox between assertion and attraction is a key question in the near term.

This is particularly relevant to Russia's relations with the West. There is no new Cold War: the realities of global, European and Russian politics have all changed significantly, and indeed there is significant cooperation, much more than would have been envisaged even 15 years ago. Yet clearly a number of real differences of understanding and interest remain, and some new ones are emerging.

Regarding its relations with the West, the desire to revise the results of the post-Cold War period and the newer assertion that Moscow is a value centre in its own right represent a significant evolution. First, there is an important discrepancy between Russia's views of the post-Cold War period and those of the West, including replaying discussions about whether Russia was deliberately isolated by the West in the 1990s. Thus, when Russia was weak, some Russian analysts argue, it was not invited to 'join the club' of developed democracies as an equal yet junior

⁸⁰ Speech by Dmitri Medvedev to Davos Forum, 27 Jan. 2007, www.medvedev2008.ru/performance_2007_01_27.htm, accessed 16 June 2008

partner. Equally, Moscow has asserted both its sovereign independence and its global power status as reasons why it could not subordinate itself to regional structures. Nonetheless, Russia was welcomed by the West, and numerous structures of cooperation, however flawed, have been established.⁸¹ How the West handles this mismatch of perceptions will be important.

Second, there is an emerging conflict of values visible in Moscow's attempt to establish itself as a 'value centre'. Many in the West would challenge Moscow's argument that Russia is a model form of government. In the early 1990s, there were hopes that Russia would adopt western values. As the decade progressed, and though Russia had signed up to these values in principle, it became apparent that few common values were actually shared and that common interests had to form the basis of the relationship. Now Moscow argues that its values are as valid as those of the EU and the West more broadly—indeed, given that Moscow considers the 'western monopoly on globalization' to be fading, it could be inferred that Moscow perceives its values, insofar as they have yet been defined, to be more representative of the future.

⁸¹ For discussion of this, see Karaganov, 'New epoch', and the reply by Roderic Lyne, 'Russia and the West: is confrontation inevitable?', *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, Jan.–March 2008. This to a significant extent replays the debate in the late 1990s over whether Russia had a 'seat at the table'. See the articles by Jonathan Haslam, 'Russia's seat at the table: a place denied or a place delayed?' and William Odom, 'Russia's several seats at the table', in *International Affairs* 74:1 and 74: 4, 1998, respectively.

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