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Foreign policy is generally defined as "The actions of a state toward the external involvement and the condition as under which the actions are formulated. Generally speaking the factors which determine the foreign policy of a country are: geographical location and its geopolitics, neighbourhood, a sense of collective security, territory and climate, resources, population, historical tradition and its experiences etc. The foreign policy of Russia has been affected by these elements too.

The Russian Federation, or Russia, consisted the major part of the USSR, providing some 76% of its area spread across Europe and Asia. In the course of the last century, one of the central issues in decisions on Russia's foreign policy was how to balance its European and Asian interests. Frequently, those discussions acquired an ideological content: the matter was essentially whether to support or to reject the values of western civilization.

The new Russian diplomacy is pragmatic. It believes that artificially opposing the West with the East as incompatible directions within Russia's foreign policy contradicts state interests. Today this principle harmoniously combines Russia's 'traditional European orientation' with its 'natural wish to secure its interests in Asia.' "Being an integral part of the Asian space, Russia actively engages in the dynamic processes of economic development and integration in the Asia-Pacific reason. It strives to deepen its relations with major Asian powers, such as China, India and Japan. Russia also believes it must urgently contribute to strengthening security and stability in Asia, in particular on the Korean peninsula."

Russians realize that they still have potent influence within their immediate neighbourhood and that if that neighbourhood is important to the larger world, Russia must be important as well.
The foreign policy of Russia has been affected by its vast territorial zone and extreme cold climate condition. The harsh climate, inhospitable territory, and lack of natural barriers make the Russian Federation unable to protect its boundaries and vulnerable to foreign invasions. To overcome its vulnerability the Russian rulers - whether in its Tsarist, Soviet, or democratic form - followed an expansionist foreign policy. By increasing its political, ideological or territorial influence, Russia always wanted to keep away the aggressors from its own territory.

Although, Russia is rich in resources but its inhospitable and inaccessible conditions make them almost unavailable or costly affairs. So, all these conditions make the Russian Federation to depend heavily on imports of these materials from the neighbouring countries. And for the friendly relationships with the neighbouring countries, the Russian Federation has to adopt a foreign policy according to their convenience.

The shrinking tendency of Russia’s population results into shortage of manpower for the defence. Russia had already lost its huge manpower in World War-I and II as well as in conflicts with neighbouring states. Inside the territory, Russia has already lost a large number of defence personnel while fighting with separatist groups as well as terrorists. In other words, we can say that the Russian Federation has already taken this issue into its consideration while forming the foreign policy.

In the post-Soviet period Russian foreign policy has been influenced by the debate between the Atlanticists and the Eurasianists. Initially Andrei Kozyrev deemed emphasised on Russian solidarity with the West. This in fact was an extension of the policy pursued in the last two years of Mikhail Gorbachev’s rule. Originally labeled the new political thinking, this proclaimed that the USSR would not challenge but would work in cooperation with the US.

Critics of the Atlanticist foreign policy argued that far too much attention had been paid to the "far abroad" and not enough to the "near
abroad”, i.e., to the countries which had emerged from the former Soviet Union. Sergei Stankevich, a senior foreign policy advisor to President Yeltsin declared in March 1992 that Russian policy makers should be focusing on the developing of the crisis in their own backyard. Russia should avoid being drawn into a North-South anti Islamic confrontation in which it would suffer disproportionately because if its location and because of its own substantial Muslim minority population. The Eurasianists believe that Russia cannot be included in a European civilization. From a social and cultural point of view, ‘Continent Eurasia’ is a unique phenomenon, with interests in both Europe and Asia.

Kozyrev was succeeded by Yevgeny Primakov. Primakov’s foreign policy can be called the ‘policy of alternatives’. Instead of animosity towards the West, alternative steps to those of the West were offered.

Contention with the West reached its peak in the spring of 1999, with the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. The main causes of stronger anti-Western feeling in the second half of the 1990s were twofold: First the continuation of a severe economic crisis, ‘shock therapy’, combined now with frustration at the lack of economic assistance from the West. Second, several steps by the West, such as plans for NATO expansion and the NATO bombing of former Yugoslavia, increased support for the militant nationalists inside the Russian political establishment. To them these steps proved that the West was selfish and militant, and a ‘natural enemy’ of Russia. Hence, relations between Russia and the West became much more antagonistic than they were immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The conflict under way in Chechnya and Dagestan – which may have reverberated, in the form of lethal bombings, deep inside Russia and in Moscow itself, created a sense of fear and uncertainty in the country.

It was during this period of transition and uncertainty of the Russian foreign policy that the then president, Boris Yeltsin suddenly announced his retirement on 31 December, 1999 and appointed Putin as
acting president of Russia on the same day. Thus the Yeltsin era in Russia including its foreign policy came to an abrupt end.

Vladimir Putin started readjusting Russian foreign policy as Acting President. According to the newest version of the “Concept of National Security” and the “New Foreign Doctrine”, it is obvious that Russia will carry on pragmatic foreign policy, which is, protecting the Russian national interests, and reviving the economy. Judging from the diplomatic measures taken recently, a new framework of Russian foreign policy is looming clear that will take the West as a top priority, focus on national economic interests, and seek all-round diplomacy balancing between the East and West.

The main objectives of Putin’s foreign policy are: improve relations with the West; Pragmatic and cooperative relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Improving and strengthening Russia’s relations with major Asian countries; Seeking equal political status and widening space for “big power diplomacy”; Serving Russia’s strategy of its economic revival, Strengthening Russia’s position and influence as a Eurasian powers; To face the challenges created by eastward expansion of NATO; To tackle the problems rising out of CIS eccentricity; To overcome economic hardship in Russia.

The Putin leadership accepts the reality of the current international system, namely that it is dominated by the USA. Putin himself sees no point in opposing the status quo, given the USA’s strength and Russia’s weakness. However this acceptance of the inevitable contains many paradoxes. Perhaps most interesting is the point made by Sergey Medvedev, when comparing Putin’s current foreign policy with that of the Kozyrev period in the early 1990s. Both Putin and Kozyrev favour close western partnership, but whereas Kozyrev saw this partnership as a means whereby Russia could become an integral part of the West, fully sharing its values, as West Germany did after 1945, Putin sees partnership as simply a means of not being marginalised by US-led globalisation. Marginalisation would destroy any hopes of regaining
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great power status. This is a paradox, as Putin is pursuing a western oriented foreign policy, but has no interest in westernising (ie democratising) Russia. The lack of interest in becoming part of a western Wertegemeinschaft places limits on the extent of possible partnership between Russia and the USA. It carries the possibility that a stronger Russia might at some point turn its back on partnership. Hence partnership with the USA is not an end itself under Putin, but rather a means to an end. There is little support within the Russian political elite for genuine partnership with the USA, thus any volte-face by Putin or a successor resulting in a rejection of close partnership would probably carry a good deal of support.

Russian approaches towards the USA have also been dominated by the fear that Washington may see Russia as irrelevant. This concern was heightened by attitudes displayed by elements of the Bush Administration when it first came to office. However, if the claims made by certain Russian analysts that the USA now sees Eurasia as a core interest are correct, then this should give Russia an opportunity to enhance her importance as a partner to Washington. This is certainly the approach that Putin has taken since September 2001.

Russia's relations with the USA always raise the question of the interaction between Russo-European, US-European and Russo-US relationships. In the Cold War, Soviet foreign policy was often seen as attempting to decouple the USA from Western Europe. Similar claims have been made about post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. The Putin leadership has taken great pains to deny this. Then foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated in March 2003 that Russia was "not interested in the aggravation of relations between the USA and Europe".

This is probably true. Moscow has no desire to introduce unnecessary and fruitless irritants into its relationship with the USA. To do so would jeopardize the policy of cooperation undertaken by Putin as part of his strategy of modernising Russia in order to ensure that it becomes an important part of a globalised world. Cooperation with the USA and with Europe can both be regarded as key components of this strategy.
There consequently has been relatively little concern expressed over the second wave of NATO widening that took place in March 2004, when Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia became members of the alliance. Whilst no Russian analyst or policymaker is likely to welcome the eastward expansion of the Alliance, particularly into the territory of the former Soviet Union, this is probably offset by their awareness of NATO’s reduced importance to the USA. If Putin is unconcerned about the stationing of US forces in Central Asia, then he is unlikely to be overly perturbed about US forces being stationed in Eastern Europe.

The possibility of the USA stationing its forces in Poland and other former Warsaw Pact states makes the development of Russia’s ties with “Old Europe” an important counterweight to the USA’s focus on “New Europe”. However, Russia is unlikely at present to desire a major rift, as she would hate to have to choose between the two, not least because of her current weakness. A strong Russia, on the other hand, may feel that if she ever did have to choose, then in the long term she is a European power, and therefore has more in common strategically with Old Europe than with the USA. Therefore, even though Moscow has in 2004 expressed some concern over the economic implications for her of EU widening, and has also been discomfited by EU criticisms of certain human rights issues, this will not dissuade her from seeking to see the EU as an important economic and security partner.

Russia will continue her rapprochement with the West whilst Putin remains president. The development of the Russia-NATO and Russia-EU relationship and also of the Russia-US relationship is likely to see the creation of a more institutionalised relationship, and the Russian leadership may also take up Karaganov’s suggestion of arguing in favour of developing the G8 into a more formal alliance. Putin considers that Russia has no alternative other than to develop close political and economic ties with the major western industrialised powers. He had embarked upon such a course prior to September 2001, and the events of “9-11” gave an impetus to this course. It confirmed to
the West the correctness of Moscow’s views on what it calls international terrorism, and thereby showed Russia’s value as a partner in cooperating to counter this threat. In the “least worst case” scenario for Moscow, the West is now less likely to see Russia as an irrelevance in the international system, which was a danger she faced at the turn of the millennium. The development of closer ties with NATO and the EU means that she is likely to play a greater role in the management of European security than she did in the 1990s. This is likely to be enhanced further if the USA becomes less interested in NATO and Europe. A less Atlanticist Europe may give Russia greater opportunities to develop ties with the EU and the major European powers.

Outside of Europe, improved ties with the USA may give Russia scope to play a greater role than hitherto in attempting to resolve crises in areas such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the Cold War, the USA sought to minimise the Soviet role in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Washington is now in favour of greater Russian involvement in the Middle East peace process, so enhancing Russia’s importance as a partner of the USA. Russia also has the potential to enhance her importance as an energy supplier to the West, and the energy dialogues she has with both the USA and the EU may help develop her energy sector. The desire to cultivate Russia as a partner may mean that both the USA and Europe may play down their concerns over Chechnya and press freedom in Russia. It is also possible that the Putin leadership may in the long term become more flexible about a greater western role in peace-keeping and other security operations in the former Soviet Union. The Putin leadership is certainly more relaxed about NATO widening, including even the possible accession of the Baltic States.

This is not to say that the new Russo-Western relationship will be without its strains. It is at the moment questionable to what extent the new US-Russian partnership goes beyond cooperation in the struggle against terrorism, or in taking steps to counter the spread of weapons of mass destruction. While it is clear that Russia and the USA have
common views on the Taliban and Al Qaeda, the Putin leadership does not share the Bush Administration’s perception that there is an Iraqi-Iranian-North Korean “axis of evil”. Russia did not welcome the US attack on Iraq. Russia and the USA also have significantly different views on Iran, which are unlikely to be reconciled. Although the USA’s withdrawal from the 1972 ABM treaty has not seriously damaged the US-Russian relationship, this action is seen by many in Moscow as an indication of how the USA is prepared to ignore Russia when it suits American interests.

Despite Putin’s tolerant attitude towards the US presence in Central Asia and Georgia, there are many in the Russian politico-military leadership that do not take this view, and this could become a future source of resentment. Therefore whilst the Russo-US partnership is currently very close, it may face significant problems in the future, irrespective of the extent to which the relationship is institutionalised. The USA’s greater willingness to use military force since September 2001, and the possibility that Washington may become more willing to undertake pre-emptive military action against certain states and organisations could also intensify US-European differences over global security management, and lead to a less close US-European relationship. If such a situation emerges, then this may create greater opportunities for the development of Russia’s relationship with Europe, which in Moscow’s view of the world will become her key foreign policy relationship.

Russia’s relations with Asian countries have witnessed marked improvement under Putin. Russo-Chinese rapprochement takes place against a regionally dynamic and unstable background that includes Russia’s decline and China’s rise. However Moscow will not accept this diagnosis. Thus it continually tries to revise the status quo to enlarge its role. China too is a revisionist power and both see the enemy of their objectives in US policy. The common threats that they see and shared interests that they have are increasingly propelling their partnership into a condition that transcends cooperation and approaches
coordination, especially as NMD becomes a salient issue. We see joint
Sino-Russian policies in Iraq, the CIS, the UN, Kosovo, and now on vital issues of their national defence. To pretend that this trend towards greater strategic coordination will simply dissolve before superior strength or wisdom or because in the past China and Russia have been unable to forge an enduring partnership is to abdicate the requirements of statesmanship.

India and Russia will continue to see each other as important partners. There never have been any major points of contention between Moscow and New Delhi since the mid-1950s, and it seem unlikely that any major disputes could arise in the foreseeable future. They have an obvious interest in maintaining a cooperative relationship. India aspires to being a major power in South Asia. Its armed forces are the fourth largest in the world, it has the fourth largest economy in 2000 in terms of purchasing power parity, the eight largest industrial economy, and the world's largest pool of scientists and engineers after the USA. The Indian economy has had an annual average growth rate of 5-7 % since 1991, and India could be the third largest world economic power by 2020. India is therefore capable of playing a major role outside the South Asian region, and may well become one of the major poles in the international system in the twenty-first century. It is therefore logical for Russia to endeavour to cultivate it as a major partner. Both powers have an interest in opposing Islamic inspired terrorism, and Moscow is likely to welcome an active Indian role in Central Asia for this purpose. Indian influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan is from Moscow's standpoint a useful counter to Pakistani influence, particularly if an extremist Islamic regime ever comes to power in Pakistan. Moscow may also see an expanded Indian role in Central Asia as a useful check on Chinese influence in this region.

Although Russo-Chinese relations are currently very cordial, China is arguably a serious long-term threat to Russian security interests, and Russia may see India as a counter-weight if this threat does emerge, much as the USSR did during the Cold War. As India plays a key role
in maintaining security in the Indian Ocean, a cooperative relationship gives Moscow the opportunity to play a role here too; hence the value to Moscow of close military ties with India.

The Russo-Japanese relationship seems likely to continue in much the same direction as it has done since the late Gorbachev period. In other words, it is likely to remain cordial, without developing into a close political, economic or military partnership. The economic relationship is meagre, compared with Japan’s with the USA, China and the EU, and the level of inter-personal contact between the two states is also low.

This is because the linkage with the Kurile Islands dispute is likely to remain despite the attempts of the Action Plan to develop relations in other areas. Whilst greater trust and cordiality as envisaged by the Action Plan are likely to develop, it is unlikely that such a rapprochement will succeed in completely delinking the territorial dispute from other aspects of the relationship. As Vladimir Putin has said, the resolution of the territorial dispute is something that will have to be tackled by future generations. The fact that Putin is the first leader to openly acknowledge and accept Article Nine of the 1956 Declaration since the January 1960 Soviet Memorandum to the Japanese government does constitute a small step forward. However, the status quo is likely to remain for several decades to come.

The Russo-Iranian bilateral relationship is an important one to both Moscow and Tehran. Russia’s interest in selling arms, supplying nuclear technology and expanding the economic relationship make clear her interest in cultivating Iran as a long-term partner. Russia intends to pursue this relationship in spite of US disapproval, and in spite of her own improved relationship with the USA. Moscow rejects the USA’s categorisation of Iran as a rogue state and a sponsor of terrorism, and instead sees Iran as an important actor and force for stability in the Persian Gulf region. By developing a close political, economic and security relationship with Iran, Moscow hopes to give herself a long-term presence in the region. This relationship is likely to endure irrespective of how the US-Russian one develops. Iran will look
to Moscow as a partial counterweight to the US imposed isolation to which she has been subjected since 1979. If the USA takes military action against Iraq, then Iran is likely to see her relationship with Moscow as being even more valuable.

The broad strategic goals of the Putin leadership towards the CIS remains the same as those of the previous Yeltsin leadership. Like Yeltsin, Putin desires to see a closely integrated CIS, united around a Russian core. There is however an awareness that Russia lacks the policy instruments to be able to bring about such a state of affairs. The failure so far to carry out an effective economic reform in Russia means that the Russian Federation is unlikely to become a pole of attraction for other CIS members.

The CIS' success in becoming a viable and dynamic bloc will largely depend on the success or otherwise of Russian economic reform. In one sense the energy dependency of many states on Russia does force many member states to look toward Moscow, which some elements in the Russian leadership may favour, as it arguably prevents these states from straying too far.

In the security sphere, there has been some progress from Moscow's perspective, first of all in developing a unified air defence system. The threat posed by Islamic extremists to the existing regimes in Central Asia increases the value of security ties to Moscow for these states, and the Putin leadership's strong emphasis on countering terrorism appears to be going some way towards strengthening relations with the states of Central Asia. The incursion of terrorists into Uzbekistan has resulted in a significant improvement in Tashkent's relations with Moscow. Relations have also improved with Turkmenistan, which is also a significant and welcome development from Moscow's standpoint. Significant differences remain however over the Caspian Sea with Ashkhabad. The importance of security issues will enable Russia to maintain influence in Central Asia.
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However whilst energy dependency and the threat of Islamic terrorism enables Moscow to bind some states closer to her, she lacks the resources to create an exclusive sphere of influence. States such as Georgia and Azerbaijan are likely to continue to look toward NATO. Outside of the CIS, all three Baltic states will continue to look westwards despite Moscow’s disapproval. All the states of the near abroad (with the exception of Belarus) will also seek economic partners other than Russia if such partnerships offer more benefits than can be offered by Russia and by Russian companies. The Russian leadership is undoubtedly sincere in its desire to encourage investment by Russian companies in the near abroad; the support for energy companies being a case in point, but Russian companies are unlikely to ensure that the near abroad will be an area dominated by Russian capital.