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Russian Foreign Policy: On a Course Toward Concentration

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IN JANUARY 2012, Russian President V.V. Putin repeated the famous remark by Chancellor of the Russian Empire A.M. Gorchakov (1856-1882) in the title of his pre-election article, "Russia Is Concentrating: The Challenges We Must Address." Noting the difficult situation the country has found itself in as a result of "the deep recession that followed the collapse of the totalitarian model of socialism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union," as well as in connection with the crisis related developments in the world economy, the author observed: "Russia is not a country that shies away from challenges. Russia is concentrating, mustering its strength and responding to any challenges in a fitting manner. It overcomes trials and always wins... It only depends on us how we respond to the present challenges and how we use our chance to strengthen ourselves and our position in the fast changing world."

The use of A.M. Gorchakov's remarks here is certainly not an accident. Russia's situation today is complicated. Its aggregate power and influence in the world have significantly weakened compared to both the tsarist and Soviet days as its size and resources have contracted considerably. Soviet and post-Soviet experiments have failed to ensure an effective development of the country's economic potential. Nevertheless, it remains one of the world's largest states both by its resources and development potential. However, as in the mid-19th century, two conditions are needed to realize that potential: effective reforms and time. It is not an accident that V.V. Putin's article was devoted not only to foreign policy but also to the country's situation as a whole. Diplomats naturally cannot answer for the effectiveness of domestic reforms: That is a task for other agencies. Nevertheless, a correct foreign policy can provide conditions

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for their fulfillment, as well as provide the required time.

A unique situation has evolved in the world today, compared to any other historical period, when genuine external threats to Russia's security are minimal. Russian diplomacy is called upon to provide favorable external conditions to ensure a breakthrough in internal development. This requires a new course toward concentration.

THE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE of May 2012, On Measures to Implement the Russian Federation Foreign Policy, enumerates Russia's principal foreign policy tasks. One of the first among them is the need to "facilitate the creation of favorable external conditions for the long-term development of the Russian Federation, its economic modernization, and the strengthening of Russia's positions as an equal partner in world markets." The formulation of Russia's main policy goal as facilitation of the country's economic modernization and ensuring stable domestic development aimed at raising the people's living standards prioritizes the related scope of foreign policy tasks. All the other tasks, as well as those enumerated in the decree, should be made subject to this principal goal. Amid the instability of the global economy and the prospect of that instability affecting Russia, domestic diplomacy should abandon the "activism" of the Soviet era, understood as obligatory participation in all prestigious international events, the demonstration of readiness to resolve any conflict thousands of kilometers away from their territory, and fight "enemies" in any part of the world. It should not be forgotten that such policy by the USSR, even though it possessed significantly larger resources than Russia today, brought about overstrain, a profound social crisis, destabilization, and ultimately the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Pragmatism in this context should lead to greater effectiveness and a clear definition of the sphere of Russia's fundamental national interests that should be upheld by using the entire power, including the military power of the state (in case of a real threat to the country's security). Taking into account Russia's current status and the international economic situation, this sphere should not be defined loosely. In all other cases and situations that do not directly affect the country's fundamental interests, Russia's reaction should be restrained. It can state its opinion if something is at odds with its approaches and express its position by voting at the UN Security Council and other international organizations, but

it should refrain from such costly undertakings as military response or unilateral mediation in conflicts erupting far away from its territory. It is also important to avoid involvement in conflict situations that are difficult to exit without serious financial or image losses. Russia's fundamental national interests are:

- the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Russian Federation;

- the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its allies (CSTO members);

- preservation of peace and stability along the Russian borders and in neighboring states;

- integration in the post-Soviet space, including the creation of the Eurasian Union;

- active struggle for the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and

- active struggle against international terrorism and extremism if they pose an immediate threat to the aforementioned Russian fundamental interests.

Russia's territorial integrity is a fundamental principle of the Russian Constitution. At the same time, pragmatically the preservation of the existing borders is important not only for internal policy but also foreign policy reasons. The idea of the preservation of territorial integrity is quite popular among the people while failure to pursue a decisive line in that regard is seen as a sign of weakness. In this context, the hard line on the status of the South Kuril Islands seems to be well substantiated. This does not mean that the Kuril problem cannot be resolved through compromise, for example, in the spirit of the 1956 Declaration principles. Nevertheless, it is better to work on the practical resolution of the issue after Russia's power significantly increases and Russian-Japanese relations seriously improve. Otherwise the impression could be that Russia has succumbed to outside pressure. At present, it is advisable to freeze such issues.

Russia's effective assistance in ensuring the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of its allies will push back the threats from its own borders and will enable its partners to stop looking for security guaran-

The attempts to respond to the U.S. in the human rights area (the creation of lists of undesirable persons, "protection of the rights" of those convicted by U.S. courts for arms trade and drug trafficking, etc.) are counterproductive.

tees in other areas. The majority of the post-Soviet states are mainly concerned by different forms of separatism. In that regard Russia's concrete actions should promote the understanding that it guarantees its allies territorial integrity while states pursuing an unfriendly policy may end up one-on-one with separatists.

It is necessary to preserve peace and stability both along its own borders and in neighboring states. Systematic improvement of ties with neighboring states lays the groundwork for joint accelerated economic and social development. The majority of CIS countries, especially in Central Asia, are concerned by the threat of terrorism connected to Islamic radicalism, as well as drug trafficking. Russia's becoming a world leader in the struggle against these problems will significantly enhance its attractiveness in the region. Apart from forceful methods, economic leverage should also be used. Russia's friendly neighbors should receive real economic benefit from their position. This does not refer to subsidies but mutually beneficial economic measures (preferential access to markets, the awarding of contracts on a priority basis, etc.). It is essential to move decisively away from a situation where the most anti-Russian minded neighbors (for example, Estonia and Latvia) get the biggest dividends from economic cooperation with Russia. It is important to show firmness and subject the interests of certain business structures to the general foreign policy course.

Integration in the post-Soviet space, including the creation of the Eurasian Union, is an extremely important goal both economically and politically. This course brings not only genuine economic benefits to the member states but is also highly popular among their citizens. We should move toward the gradual lifting of customs duties, customs and border controls, and restrictions on visits and employment opportunities for all participants in the process, at the same time tightening control on the Eurasian Union's common borders. It would be very important to get as many countries as possible – not only the FSU republics (there can be no question of restoring a single state) – involved in Eurasian integration processes in some form or other. Integration should be equally beneficial to all participants and should proceed on an equal basis. It could be modeled on the EU, taking its positive experience into account.

The goal of the struggle against the proliferation of WMD is recorded in all the fundamental Russian foreign policy documents but in reality Moscow does not always hold leading positions on these issues. Meanwhile, possessing a significant nuclear capability, Russia remains

the only country that can deliver a retaliatory strike against any other nuclear power. That puts it on par with the U.S. and above some other countries. The proliferation of WMD devalues our country's military might, especially in the present-day conditions, when Russia is lagging behind in all other respects (conventional forces, the defense industry, the economic potential, etc.). Russia needs leadership in the implementation of collective measures against states suspected of seeking to acquire WMD. Russia should be able to take decisive and sometimes unilateral action against them.

It is also important that Russia today is better placed to take an active position on nonproliferation than the U.S., which is bound by an alliance with Israel and close ties with India and Pakistan. That could be used to secure image advantages. Russia could take a more proactive position on the Iranian and Korean nuclear problems, which would evoke a positive reaction in the West and could facilitate Western concessions in other areas.

International terrorism and religious, primarily Islamic extremism threaten Russia no less than they do the West. It is necessary to move away from passive participation, the position of approving/rejecting Western initiatives (as was the case, for example, with cooperation on Afghanistan) toward a policy of putting forward its own initiatives and backing them up with effective action. At the same time, the struggle against Islamic extremism should take into account the Islamic factor inside Russia. It should be accompanied by a decisive struggle against any religious extremism (not only Islamic) and against calls for separatism within Russia.

IMPLEMENTATION of the modernization program requires foreign investment and technology. Despite economic growth in a number of Asian and Latin American states, the main source of investment and technology for Russia are Western states (in the broad sense of the word). This presupposes an active search for mutual understanding regardless of the existing differences.

Relations with the U.S. are important for Russia as a successor to the USSR in the nuclear sphere and a member of the UN Security Council. With Barack Obama coming to power the atmosphere of bilateral relations has somewhat changed for the better. Without altering its basic

approaches the U.S. administration is showing readiness for cooperation and some measure of compromise. That situation should be used more actively. Growing hostility and the need to take retaliatory measures can lead to some rather costly decisions that will be a heavy burden on the Russian budget. In addition, the U.S. is the leader of the Western world and Russia's main partners in modernization largely orient themselves toward it. It is therefore necessary to look for mutually acceptable solutions to existing disagreements without confrontation, and strike the balance between independent policy and pointedly anti-American approaches.

The main irritant in Russian-American relations today is the stationing of U.S. missile defense systems in Eastern Europe. According to a number of Russian experts, Russia's reaction today is out of proportion to the actual threats posed by that program. In addition, the Obama administration has modified its original plan somewhat, taking Russia's proposals into account. A mutually acceptable compromise solution is paramount in this issue. Russian military programs, such as the creation of Aerospace Defense Forces, the development of the Navy, and the deployment of a new heavy ICBM, should be commensurate to the actual threats and the country's budget capabilities, taking into account the economic situation in the world at large.

The attempts to respond to the U.S. in kind, with its own weapons in the human rights area (the creation of alternative lists of undesirable persons, "protection of the rights" of persons convicted by U.S. courts for arms trade and drug trafficking, the writing of "white papers" on human rights in the U.S., etc.) are also counterproductive. The partiality of such an approach is too obvious. It would be far more productive to look for ways of developing trade and economic cooperation which could serve as a genuine foundation for U.S. interests in political compromise solutions, as is the case in U.S.-Chinese relations.

Cooperation with the EU should remain a key line of Russian foreign policy. The EU accounts for 50% of Russia's foreign trade turnover and for 70% of all foreign investment with about 40% of Russian budget expenditures coming from Russian energy sales to EU countries. In this context, it is very important to ensure the implementation of the joint Partnership for Modernization program which is intended to give Russia-EU cooperation a special vector, aiming it at fulfilling the task of Russian economic modernization. Today, new opportunities are opening for Russia in connection with the euro zone crisis, which compel the EU

countries to orient themselves more actively toward the Russian market.

It is also important that according to public opinion polls, the majority of Russians consider their country to be part of Europe; they also see European countries as the most popular destinations for tourism, business, work, and education. Rapprochement with Europe and the facilitation of the visa regime, including its complete abolition, would be quite a popular measure.

One impediment to Russia's rapprochement with the EU is the position of countries of the so-called "new Europe," former parts of the USSR and members of the Soviet bloc, which are afraid of the revival of "Russian expansionism" and see the U.S. and NATO as their security guarantors. Russia naturally is seeking to convince "new Europe" of its solely peaceful intentions. It seems reasonable to follow a course toward accentuating the drastic difference between the expansionist Soviet policy and the policy of democratic Russia which has recognized the sovereignty of all the newly independent states and former members of the Soviet bloc. Such a line would help strengthen mutual confidence with the states of "new Europe," enhance Russia's authority and not push "new Europe" toward rapprochement with the U.S.

Recently, the Chinese vector has become one of the most important directions in Russia's foreign policy. This is only natural: China is Russia's No. 1 trade and economic partner; interaction with it is a key condition to the success of Russia's multi-vector course. China shares Russia's views on the geopolitical situation, the role of international law, the preservation of the leading role of the UN and its Security Council, as well as on a number of regional conflicts. China can play an important role in the achievement of Russia's strategic development goal – the development of its Far Eastern economy. In that respect it is difficult to overestimate the successes made by Moscow and Beijing in resolving bilateral problems, putting in place a diversified infrastructure of strategic partnership, and achieving a new level of mutual confidence and interaction on the world arena. It is essential to continue the course toward the all-round development of partnership relations with China. At the same time, a number of factors need to be taken into account here.

First, China's economic and political strengthening is creating a new situation in the Asia Pacific region as well as in the world as a whole, which can cause some problems for Russia. Even now China's foreign policy is very proactive. Beijing is starting to include into the sphere of its vital interests not only the traditional Taiwanese problem but also a

number of others (territorial disputes with Japan, disputes in the South China Sea, the problem of resources for the nation's growing economy, etc.). This arouses concern in a number of neighboring countries that have started to regard the U.S. presence in the Asia Pacific region as a counterweight to China's growing influence. The list of countries that have already signed agreements on the establishment of U.S. military bases on their territory includes Australia and Singapore, and active negotiations are under way with the Philippines. Even Vietnam, a former U.S. enemy, has permitted the basing of U.S. warships at the former Soviet base in Cam Ranh Bay. The situation is exacerbated by some publications in China whose authors call for an even more confrontational policy with regard to the U.S.

Russia is extremely ill-served by U.S.-Chinese confrontation which can put it before a choice. Moscow should not unequivocally support China along all lines at the risk of running into disagreements with other traditional Russian partners (India, Vietnam, North Korea, etc.). Rather, Russia should use its influence on China to persuade it to stay within the bounds of its former policy and not take the situation to the point of confrontation with its neighbors. At the same time, it is essential to develop all-round trade and economic and political ties with other Asian states, which would create some counterweight to the growing Chinese influence and would reduce the interest of those states in U.S. activity in the region.

Second, the Russian public is increasingly discontented with facts that it perceives as unilateral dependence on China in the economic and political spheres. This mood should be taken into account. Work is under way to lessen the dependence of bilateral trade on the export of raw materials and to funnel Chinese investment not only in the raw materials sector; this work should be intensified. A number of measures could also be implemented in the political area. The unofficial visit by the Dalai Lama to Russia's Buddhist regions, a possibility recently mentioned by V.V. Putin, could play a greater role. That visit would be welcomed by a significant majority of the population in those regions. It should be explained to our Chinese partners that the visit is of an exclusively religious nature, since the Dalai Lama has quit all of his political posts, and the visit is taking place at the request of a part of the Russian population. In addition, it is well known that the Dalai Lama has never spoken out for Tibet's separation from China, but only for greater autonomy, and does not fall under the definition of separatist, an activity that is prohibited on

Russian territory under a bilateral treaty of 2001.

Third, despite its rapid growth, the Chinese economy is plagued by numerous problems. Its transformation into the world's leading economy is possible but that is not a foregone conclusion. In the 1970s, the Japanese economy was also defined as fast growing but soon after that it slipped into a period of stagnation. A slowing growth scenario for China is quite likely in the foreseeable future. In that case, the country could be confronted with a prolonged period of economic and political instability, which can also affect Russian territory (migration, crime, possible loss of control over nuclear weapons, etc.). Russia is interested in a political and economically stable China but an instability scenario should also be taken into account in foreign policy planning.

The "Arab revolutions" generate considerable interest in Russia but it seems that Russia is too involved in these processes, which do not directly affect its interests or its security. It is essential to work with all sides to conflicts, with any political parties and forces, whoever comes to power in those countries, without showing any political predilections. The idea that Russia in all cases benefits from the status quo is not always borne out by the facts. For example, it is difficult to pass judgment on the possible spillover of revolutions to Saudi Arabia, which is often accused of sponsoring terrorism. In addition, instability could bring about a rise in oil prices, which is also not at odds with the Russian interests. In any case, Russia should adopt a more neutral stance, confining itself to stating its position at the UN.

Russia should continue its efforts to facilitate the resolution of the problem of Afghanistan since it is a source of main threats related to terrorism, drug trafficking, and religious extremism to its neighbors and allies. It should also continue providing assistance to the international coalition forces, as well as contribute to revitalizing the Afghan economy and enhancing the battleworthiness of the Afghan Armed Forces and provide aid to the country's population. Such assistance, however, should be low-cost and mutually beneficial. It is also important to step up efforts to provide support to Afghanistan on the regional level, in particular through the SCO and G-4 (Russia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) mechanisms.

Russia's interests are well-served by a course toward further development of cooperation with Iran along multiple lines, including on the regional level. At the same time, Russia should intensify its efforts to exclude the possibility of Iranian nuclear arms production. There should

be a closer bringing together of positions with other members of the Group of Six on that issue. Reaching an agreement with Iran on guarantees of the peaceful nature of its nuclear program and the subsequent lifting of sanctions and the oil embargo on it would considerably contribute to strengthening stability in the region and on the international oil market. Furthermore, that would make it possible to get Iran more involved in cooperation on the settlement of regional crises (in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria), as well as interact with it via the SCO, considering its wish to become a SCO member. Iraq's successful experience in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking could be useful for Russia and its partners in Central Asia.

Russia is interested in stability on the Korean Peninsula. Any conflict there will imminently affect its territory. At the same time, it does not need to worry about the prospect of the two Koreas being reunited under the aegis of the South, since such a scenario would be entirely in its interests. A large state that would emerge as a result would be Russia's important trade, economic and political partner that would partially balance the influence of other players there, and Russia would have not political or territorial problems with it. In that context, Russia could adopt a tough position on Pyongyang's course toward the development of nuclear weapons, without taking into account China's positions on all matters and without fearing the possible collapse of the North Korean regime if sanctions are tightened. North Korea is not of much interest as an economic partner, and broad cooperation with it is unlikely before serious political changes. Politically, however, it only poses a big problem.

EFFECTIVE FOREIGN POLICY is both a precondition and result of Russia's comprehensive modernization. Today, amid the complex economic situation in the world, it is essential to concentrate on creating conditions for a breakthrough in internal development. There is everything that is required for that: a relatively peaceful environment and the absence of deadly threats. However, ambitions should be moderated a little, foreign policy needs should be reduced to the bare essentials, and it is important to learn to take in stride actions by other powers (especially far away from the national borders) if they do not affect Russia's fundamental interests even when those actions are at odds with our principles and wishes. Subsequently, as the country's economic power grows it will

become possible step by step to expand its foreign policy interests and make diplomacy more proactive. A good case in point is China which in the 1960s-70s pursued an excessively active (compared to the available resources) foreign policy course but moderated its ambitions with the start of reforms. Having mustered enough strength, Beijing could now adopt a more active line but continues to show caution so as not to overstrain its resources and jeopardize its successful economic development.

The goal of any policy in the modern world is to raise the wellbeing of the people in one's own country. Naturally, the achievement of this goal requires stable economic development. In Russia today, such development can be ensured through successful implementation of a comprehensive modernization program. Diplomacy is unable to ensure the success of that course but it can provide favorable conditions for its implementation. Only such diplomacy can be recognized as being genuinely in the interest of Russia's national interests and the interest of the people.

This article has used some ideas of T.V. Zvereva (on Europe) and N.I. Kozyrev (on Iran).

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