

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC A MONTRÉAL

RUSSIA IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD.  
ITS PLACE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE  
AND ITS FOREIGN POLICY

THESIS  
PRESENTED  
AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT  
OF THE MASTERS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE SCIENCE

BY  
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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC A MONTRÉAL

LA RUSSIE DANS UN MONDE MULTIPOLAIRE.  
SA PLACE SUR LA SCÈNE INTERNATIONALE ET  
POLITIQUE ÉTRANGÈRE RUSSE

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PRÉSENTÉ  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore Russia's foreign policy and foreign relations in the changing, multipolar world, specifically since the year 2000. The beginning of the twenty-first century was characterized by several major transformations in international politics. Two such transformations in particular stand out as having forced Russia to reexamine its position in the world, particularly in relation to the Western and Eastern powers. The first is the gradual decline of the United States as global hegemon, namely since 2003, which has created favorable conditions for the emergence of new poles. The second is the movement of the Kremlin's foreign policy away from the liberal course of rapid Western integration that it had adopted in 1992 toward the balance of power policies that had been in place since antiquity. While this shift began in 1997, it solidified after Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008. Russia's firm return to its balance-of-power policies is notable because it challenges the role of the United States in the former Soviet region (Mankoff, 2009; Hopf, 2010).

The central question this paper will explore is this: What is Russia's place in the new world order? More specifically, how does Russia perceive itself in relation to the West and East, and how has this self-perception shaped the priorities of its foreign policy? This paper will focus on Russia's relations with the United States and China since the millennium. It will be argued that these relations, together with Russia's general self-perception as a great power, have profoundly shaped the country's current foreign policy. It will be illustrated that, consequent to the fact that neither China nor the United States is willing to treat Russia as an equal partner, Russia has been (and will be) motivated to assert itself as an independent hegemonic power over the space of the former Soviet Union.

This position will be forwarded through the analysis of case studies on Russia's relations with the United States and China during the past decade. The essence of these relations is believed to be Russia's opposition to NATO's enlargement and Russia's cooperation with China on security and energy, respectively. To gain a holistic understanding of how the aforementioned relations have shaped Russia's foreign policy, neo-realist and social constructivist theories will be placed in juxtaposition to these case studies. Through the lens of Waltz's neorealist paradigm, this paper strives to outline the security threats and dilemmas for Moscow's policymakers at the structural level and their impact on the country's external affairs. Through the use of the constructivist lens, the influence of the Russian identity and Russia's historical background on the country's foreign policy at the state and individual level will be explored. These theories will subsequently be tested for their usefulness in understanding and explaining Russia's recent, significant political actions and the country's present place in the world.

This research is of value to the field of political science, as Russia's foreign policy has historically affected the stability and security of the European continent, and it continues to do so today. Recent events, such as Russia's relative success in opposing NATO enlargement, demonstrate the growth of the country's role and power in the world as well as the complexity of its political methods.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explorera la politique étrangère de la Russie et les relations internationales dans le changement, monde multipolaire, spécifiquement depuis l'an 2000. Le début du XXIème siècle a été marqué par plusieurs grandes transformations dans la politique internationale. Ce sont: la diminution progressive des États-Unis en tant que puissance hégémonique mondiale et l'émergence de nouveaux pôles; le revirement politique de la politique étrangère du Kremlin à l'écart du parcours libéral de l'intégration occidentale rapide. Tout cela force la Russie à réexaminer sa position dans le monde, en particulier par rapport aux puissances occidentales et orientales.

La question principale que cet exposé explorera est la suivante: Quelle est la place de la Russie dans le nouvel ordre international? Plus particulièrement, comment la Russie se perçoit par rapport à l'Occident et l'Orient, et comment cette perception de soi a établi les priorités de sa politique étrangère? Ce rapport se concentrera sur les relations de la Russie avec les États-Unis et la Chine depuis les années 2000. On dira que ces relations, avec la perception russe générale de soi comme une grande puissance, ont profondément façonné la politique étrangère actuelle du pays. On démontrera que, suite au fait que ni la Chine ni les États-Unis sont disposés à traiter la Russie comme un partenaire égal, la Russie a été (et sera) motivée à s'affirmer comme une puissance hégémonique indépendante sur l'espace de l'ex-Union soviétique.

Cette position sera transmise à travers l'analyse d'études de cas sur les relations de la Russie avec les États-Unis et la Chine au cours de la dernière décennie. L'essence de ces relations est considérée comme l'opposition de la Russie à l'élargissement de l'OTAN et de la coopération de la Russie avec la Chine en matière de sécurité et de l'énergie, respectivement. Pour acquérir une compréhension globale de la manière dont les rapports précités ont façonné la politique étrangère de la Russie, le néo-réaliste et les théories constructivistes sociales seront placés en juxtaposition à ces études de cas. À travers la lentille de néoréaliste le paradigme de Waltz, le présent document s'efforce d'exposer les menaces pour la sécurité et les dilemmes pour décideurs politiques de Moscou sur le plan structurel et leurs répercussions sur les affaires extérieures du pays. Grâce à l'utilisation de la lentille constructiviste, l'influence de l'identité de la Russie et le contexte historique de la Russie sur la politique étrangère du pays au niveau de l'individu sera explorée. Ces théories seront par la suite testés pour leur utilité pour comprendre et expliquer les récentes actions politiques importantes de la Russie et la place actuelle du pays dans le monde.

Cette recherche revêt une valeur dans le champ de la science politique, la politique étrangère de la Russie a toujours influé sur la stabilité et la sécurité du continent européen, et elle continue de le faire aujourd'hui. Les événements récents, tels que le succès relatif de la Russie en s'opposant à l'élargissement de l'OTAN, démontrent la croissance du rôle et de la puissance du pays dans le monde ainsi que la complexité de ses méthodes politiques.

**Mots clés:** l'élargissement de l'OTAN, politique étrangère de la Russie dans monde multipolaire, Chine, des États-Unis, CIS



## INTRODUCTION

### a. Problématique

Two important political milestones have restructured the international order for the past twenty-five years. The first is the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which marked the end of the Cold War. The end of global bipolarity signaled the promise and hope for effective cooperation in international relations. This re-inspired liberal scholars of international politics (Fukuyama, 1993) and challenged the traditional views of realist theory. By contrast, the end of global bipolarity would also ultimately give rise to a historically unprecedented unique global superpower — the United States of America.

The second major milestone comprises the tragic events of September 11, which highlighted different kinds of trans-national non-state security threats<sup>1</sup> in the international system. Despite the prominence of these threats, the liberal hope for interstate cooperation to fight these challenges did not occur. By contrast, states continued to play the major role in the international system, thereby firmly returning to balance-of-power policies. Russia – US relations in regard to NATO enlargement alone clearly demonstrate the return of realist principles in international affairs. Furthermore, the United States' decision to attack the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001) and the country's unilateral actions in Iraq (2003) subsequent to 9/11 fueled the United States' decline as a global hegemon (Haas, 2008).

The world is no longer the same as it was in 2000–2001. As underscored by several international relations scholars, in the past decade, a new order of the international systems and poles have emerged (Steve, 2002; Haas, 2008). The lack of a clear vision of the structure of the new world among international relations scholars has motivated

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I refer to phenomena that are characteristic of globalization such as international terrorism, transnational crime, famine, climate change, pollution, etc.

of the structure of the new world among international relations scholars has motivated me to research Russia's place in this new emerging world and Moscow's foreign policy priorities.

In this thesis, I shall examine the following questions: *What are the priorities of Russian foreign policy in the new emerging world order? Does Russia see itself in an alliance with the West, with China and other BRIC members, or as a new independent regional power?* To answer these questions, I will examine the priorities, goals, and methods of Russia's foreign policy under the leadership of Putin-Medvedev. Several case studies, specifically on Russia's relations with the United States and China, will be analyzed. Furthermore, the principles of neorealist, neoclassical realist and social constructivist theories will be juxtaposed with these case studies to gain a holistic understanding of contemporary realities in Russian foreign affairs. Through the use of the neorealist theoretical framework (determining factors generated at systemic level), the security threats and dilemmas for Moscow's policymakers and their impact on the country's external affairs will be determined. Through the lens of social constructivism, the impact of the Russian identity and historical background on Russia's foreign policy will be explored. Finally, I intend to test these theories for their usefulness in understanding and explaining recent major political actions carried out by Russia in its search for its place in the contemporary world.

Since 1992, Russia has significantly changed its foreign policy. At the end of the 1980s, the Kremlin, unable to compete with United States any longer, abandoned its traditional realist principles, namely security dilemma and balance of power that had been in place since antiquity. Through the adoption of a foreign policy centered on liberalism and cooperation, Russia sought to facilitate the country's rapid integration with the West. This Russian pro-Western policy and Gorbachev's "New Thinking" (1985) triggered the debate over the relevance of the realist theory among

international scholars in the 1990s. However, in this thesis, I will argue that irrelevance, or neo-realism, has been—to say the least—premature.

The first assumption of this thesis is that the negative outcome of Russia's adoption of the abovementioned liberal foreign policy in the early 1990s is the main cause of Russia's political return to the balance of power policies. Today, Russia's foreign policy is better understood through the theoretical lens of Waltz's structural realism.

A central tenet of the neorealist paradigm is the assumption that the international politics of any state (actor) depend on the structural properties of an international system (Waltz, 1979). According to Waltz, the primary goal of any international actor is the survival of the state. Pursuant to this thinking, one can deduce that to preserve their sovereignty, international actors act rationally, primarily by following rules dictated by an anarchic self-help system.

I will argue that Russia's decision to act otherwise, to abandon its traditional realist principles in 1992, is precisely what caused the country's economic and political decline paired with its security vulnerability from 1992 to 1995. In accordance with the neorealist concept of state power, the abovementioned decline must be understood as an unprecedented economic free-fall, loss of control over many federal administrative subjects (1994 war in Chechnya), and disaster in the military, industrial, and other critical areas that are important to the state's power (Waltz, 1979). The vulnerability of Russia's security during this period centers on the fact that NATO was still viewed by the Kremlin as a threat. This was largely due to the fact that NATO disregarded its previous promise to the Soviet Union to refrain from enlargement (1990) and instead decided to accept three new members from the Warsaw Pact (1997)<sup>2</sup> (Primakov, 1999; Putin, 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland

Russia's inability to rectify its newfound unfavorable position created security disadvantages for the country (Chapter I). It was therefore understood that the Russian international position would only worsen if the country continued along a liberal path. To ensure state sovereignty and to rectify the aforementioned misbalance, reverting back to balance of power policies (realism) emerged as the most rational option for Russia's policymakers.

In 1996, Evgeny Primakov, the newly appointed Foreign Minister, re-defined Russian political priorities. Euro-Atlantic integration fell to the level of less important concerns, while main accent became re-gaining the influence in post-Soviet republics, diversity in Foreign Affairs, and even counter-balancing the United States. Since these changes in foreign policy in some ways reflected a return to a Cold War mentality, Russia was criticized by the West as being old-fashioned. Nevertheless, directly in line with neorealist theory, this foreign policy shift ultimately afforded Moscow relative success in regaining some of its positions of strength in international affairs. A prime example of this reality is Russia's opposition to Ukrainian and Georgian MAP proposition in 2008 (Mankoff, 2009, Levesque, 2009).

Starting from 1996, Russian foreign policy focused on counter-balancing the U.S. and the West. This focus changed under Putin's leadership between 2001 and 2003 (after the events of 9/11 and until the U.S. invasion of Iraq). Putin proposed Russia's partnership with the U.S. so that they may fight together against the new types of global threats such as international terrorism. Putin's approach was pragmatic. On one hand, Russia was open to cooperation with the West, but only with reciprocal benefits. On the other hand, Russia weighted this stance equally with other options, namely Russia's partnership with the East (strategic cooperation with China, India and other Asian actors) and performing a leading role within CIS. This latter option indeed became a top priority for Russia, especially after the U.S.'s invasion of

Iraq in 2003, the Color Revolutions<sup>3</sup> (2003-2004), and finally the U.S.'s active support for Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership in 2008 (Asmus, 2010; Mankoff, 2009).

Consequent to these political policy shifts, the newly appointed President Dmitry Medvedev signed the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation<sup>4</sup> in July of 2008. This consolidated Russia's chosen political course. The document covers rather ambitious plans, including expanding its sphere of influence in the world, continuing a multidirectional policy in diplomatic relations, emphasizing bilateral relations with select EU members (thereby avoiding dealing with the institution itself), placing CIS in the main regional priority, and opposing Ukrainian and Georgian NATO membership<sup>5</sup>.

These official declarations found their practical implementation in a number of foreign actions by the Russian Federation. One chain of events in 2008 is particularly illustrative of this fact. Putin's forewarning of the negative impact of Kosovo's independence issue<sup>6</sup> was followed by the war with Georgia, and subsequently the recognition of the separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Later in 2009-2010, the Kremlin regained political influence in Ukraine. Together, these events completely eliminated further NATO membership perspectives for these two republics for some time (Levesque, 2009; Mankoff, 2009).

The second assumption of this thesis is that the current foreign policy of the Russian Federation is largely shaped by the country's traditional national interests, which can be deduced from security dilemmas and realist notions of power. As will

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<sup>3</sup> Namely 2003 in Georgia, 2004 in Ukraine, 2005 in Kyrgyzstan – all former Soviet Republics

<sup>4</sup> Available in English at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/cef95560654d4ca5c32574960036cddb!OpenDocument>

<sup>5</sup> In this official document, found on Russian Foreign Affairs official website, the text mentions "[...] negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, [...] plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership [...]".

<sup>6</sup> Putin: "In the end, this is a stick with two ends and that other end will come back to knock them on the head someday." - "Kosovo precedent 'terrifying': Putin" Associated Press, 22 February 2008

be illustrated, after Russia's failed attempt to collaborate/cooperate with the West, the "old-school" priorities that were adopted by Primakov's cabinet were shaped by traditional security threats, such as state integrity, keeping potential enemies away from national borders, economic prosperity, and keeping political eggs in different baskets. Later, Putin and Medvedev did not significantly alter the core content of these national interests. In addition, Waltz's so-called ingredients for power (Waltz, 1979: 106)<sup>7</sup> were taken into consideration by the actual Russian political elite, aiming to restore Russia to its the traditional level of World's great power.

My third assumption is that, at present, Moscow is leaning toward asserting itself as a regional hegemon over the former Soviet territory rather than favor alliances with the Western or Eastern powers. This assumption is founded on the premise that Russia's alliances with the West (United States and European Union) or East (China) are characterized by geopolitical limitations and, as such, do not have long-run reliable perspectives. Russia's interests in establishing relations with Europe, the United States, China, or India in particular are mostly pragmatic in character; they center on economic gains and favorable shifts in the international balance of power. However, these relations in practice are both limited and contradictory.

From a strategic and geopolitical standpoint, Russia perceives the West through the prism of NATO, in which the United States plays a leading role. NATO's policy of enlargement through the acceptance of former Soviet republics, which is largely backed by the United States, has for the last 10 to 15 years created tensions and limitations in Moscow's relations with Brussels and Washington. The Kremlin has on multiple occasions declared its strong opposition to the Alliance's enlargement policy, but these declarations were largely ignored, and the Alliance's troops closely approached the Russian border.

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<sup>7</sup> Namely: size of the population, natural resources, and military and economic power, political stability and competence (discussed in detail in Chapter I).

Furthermore, Russia continuously seeks equal partnership with the United States and the European Union through their recognition of Moscow's dominant role in the former Soviet Union. This, however, contradicts the Euro-Atlantic interests in the region, which aims for former Soviet Republics to be less dependent on Russia and more integrated with the West. Similarly, Russia's relations with China and India, although often mutually beneficial, have significant limitations as well. Because Russia's relations with Beijing on security, trade, and energy issues largely exceed its cooperation with New Delhi, only China's case will be considered for further analysis.

Not only common borders, but also common interests between Russia and China lay the foundation of the relationship between these two countries. For one, both countries want the world to be multipolar and, accordingly, contest US hegemony. They also both seek to obtain enhanced economic cooperation, particularly with respect to energy. In regard to military cooperation, their interests are both rooted in security issues within the Security Cooperation Organization (SCO). Furthermore, both countries oppose separatism, and China recognizes Moscow's traditional role of supremacy in the post-Soviet region, including Central Asia.

Despite these commonalities, Russia's relationship with China has significant limitations. For one, Moscow's energy policy significantly limits China's access to Russia's resources, to which Beijing cannot turn a blind eye (Lo, 2008). There are also some contradictions, or at least misunderstandings, between the two countries regarding their security cooperation within the SCO and in their relations with the United States. Moreover, the fact that China did not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence in 2008 further reinforces the limitations of their political partnership. I intend to further examine these limitations in my research.

All this in my opinion, will force Russia to take a very careful and calculated position in regard to its Eastern neighbor, with whom it shares five thousands

kilometers of borders filled with potential security issues. As argued by Russian foreign policy experts, Russia's internal political structure has a direct impact on its external affairs. In line with other scholars who believe that Waltz's theory is missing a domestic element, in my analysis, I strive to emphasize the importance of Russian internal processes, the division of its political elite, and the role of its identity in the country's foreign policy.

Russia stands in contrast to the mature powers that have had long-standing stable courses of their internal and external policies. Russian foreign policy cannot be reduced to questions of power and tradition. In particular, Russian identity and the way Russia sees itself in regard to the rest of the world should be carefully analyzed. The way Russians, or rather the political elite, identify themselves presents valuable pieces of information that need be taken into account.

Some Russian political leaders, such as Gorbachev and Kozyrev, represent the *westernizers* (Hopf, 1999; Tsygankov, 2006), whose stance can be tied to principles of European political economic model. This group sees the achievement of democratic values and integration with the West as its ultimate political goals. The other two types of political elites in Russia, *statists* and *civilizationists*, have their own different perceptions, which center primarily on notions of Great Power. The way that these respective perceptions and according priorities impact the greater course of Russian foreign policy constitutes the core of the final chapter of my thesis.

Social constructivism proposes an alternative approach for analyzing Russian foreign policy. It brings us to the level of identity and historical continuity. This in turn helps scholars to better understand the Kremlin's decision-making process. This theoretical paradigm offers a comprehensive portrait of Russian foreign policy and the opportunity to better identify its main characteristics, as declared at the outset of this thesis.



b. Methodology and Organization of Content

This thesis will utilize qualitative research derived from several case studies, in addition to analytical deduction of collected data in my conclusions.

I will first introduce the reader to the *problematique* and research questions related to Russia's foreign policy priorities and its ambitious quest for a relevant place in the new multipolar world. I will then use the neorealist theoretical framework to determine the factors at the structural level that influence the Kremlin's political behavior and the country's priorities at the regional and global scale, the latter of which are shaped largely by the country's security dilemmas in dealing with West and East.

Taking into account realist assumptions, I intend to subsequently examine two case studies. The first case study explores Russia's foreign policy towards NATO enlargement, which is believed to best reflect Russian-Western relations at the structural level. It will be argued that Russia's foreign policy towards NATO enlargement involves many realist issues such as security dilemma, balance of power, and elements of survival, amongst several others. It will also be argued to involve multiple political and security issues over the Euro-Atlantic space, such as the bombing of Yugoslavia, Kosovo's independence, and Russian-Georgian fallout in 2008.

The second case study examines Russia's political relations with China. Here, I limit myself mostly to Russia's political cooperation with China within SCO, as well including energy. Security and energy dimensions will be argued to have particularly large repercussions on the international scale and best demonstrate power relations from a realist point of view. Moreover, China-Russian relations are more significant at international level in comparison to other Asian countries, such as India, Iran and Japan.

The social constructivist paradigm will then be used to examine Russian foreign policy from an alternate perspective, with the intention to complement the “dryness” and pragmatism of realism. My purpose is not to test these theories but rather to better understand Russia’s political direction. Social constructivism here is aimed foremost to introduce the reader to Russia’s political particularities, the importance of its internal variables (such as the divergent visions of foreign policy and interpretations of democracy among the political elite), the role of identity and how all of the aforementioned influence the Kremlin’s foreign policy.

By completing the above, the direction and priorities of Moscow’s foreign policy and the place that Russia is most likely to hold in the changing world can be determined.

In summary, four chapters and a conclusion will be used to present the results of my research. The introduction will reveal the *problematique* and methodology of this thesis. The first chapter will recapitulate neorealist principles and its relevance in examining Russia’s foreign policy. The second chapter will examine Russia’s policy of opposition to NATO enlargement, which epitomizes Russia-West relations. The third chapter, named “Sino-Russian relations: security and energy dimensions”, will be divided in two logical parts: security and energy. The fourth chapter will cover elements of social constructivism in order to complement neorealist limitations, which, again, is intended to explain Russia’s internal particularities that influence its foreign policy. As previously mentioned, the conclusion is intended to synthesize the main priorities and directions of Russia’s foreign policy in the aim of ascertaining its place in the multipolar world.

#### c. Sources

In order to achieve my ambitious goals I will be using various sources and empirical data. The theoretical component of this thesis will be based on the classic

works of Waltz, H.E. Carr, Rose, Schweller, Wendt, and other theorists, as well the critical papers of several IR scholars, such as Keohane, Krasner, and Mershaimer.

Thanks to the good fortune of my bilingualism in Russian and English, the case studies that will be explored in this thesis will be a combination of printed sources in both of these languages. This is especially beneficial, as the two often offer opposing perspectives.

Case studies written in English include the related works of Hopf, Tsygankov, Lo, and Mankoff, amongst others. Other sources written in English comprise articles by IR scholars related to specific topics (such as SCO cooperation, New global order, etc) derived from the University database and seminars readings.

Works written in Russian include those of political scholars and important policymakers in Russia, such as Tsygankov, Arbatov, Primakov, Kozyrev, and Lavrov. Official documents on Russian foreign policy, the EU commission on the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, SCO declaration and the minutes of official foreign visits all originally written in Russian will also be used.

Furthermore, traditional Russian mass media sources will be integrated into this paper. The aim of so doing is primarily for data collection and/or cases wherein I strive to illustrate Russian propaganda.

## CHAPTER 1. WALZ'S NEOREALIST THEORY AND IDENTIFYING RUSSIA'S SECURITY THREATS

This chapter aims to outline the factors that influence Russian foreign policy at the level of the international system, primarily through the use of the neorealist theoretical paradigm.

This paper's first assumption is that Russia's international behavior can be better explained and to a certain extent forecasted using the core principles of Waltz's structural realism. A central postulate of neorealism is that the international politics of any state depend on the structural properties of the international system (Waltz, 1979). An analysis of a country's foreign policy conducted through the lens of neorealism thus involves full independence from other variables such as the country's internal policy or structure, historical background and role of certain political personalities.

I found this type of analysis to be very useful when looking at Russia's foreign policy. It enables the examination of particular mechanisms and variables of international politics, such as international structure and security dilemma, and helps one understand the limitations of cooperation among main actors (states).

I would, however, have to agree to a certain extent with other realist scholars, such as Schweller, Rose and Zakharia, who criticize this paradigm for being too distant from real politics. In the case of Russia's foreign policy, the use of strictly Waltz's theory severely limits the ability to achieve this paper's secondary objective: to ascertain a complete picture of Russia's foreign policy, which inevitably involves lower levels of analysis.

Consequent to the fact that no single theory of international politics accounts for all levels of analysis with a sufficient degree of detail, I have decided to combine

two theories to grasp a full understanding of Russia's contemporary foreign policy, foreign relations, and place in the multipolar world.

The neorealist paradigm will be used to determine the factors and variables that influence Russian politics at the systemic level. Structural realism offers a relatively impartial view and ontology, as it distinguishes itself from the unpredictability of human nature and idealism, culture and historical influence. In particular, it is with the help of neorealism that I intend to determine Russia's security dilemma, its external threats, and the role of the state's power and of its resources.

Social constructivism will, alternately, serve as a lens of examination for variables related to Russia's domestic particularities and mechanisms of political decision-making. This paradigm allows us to delve deeper into our analysis of Russia's foreign policy and foreign relations, namely by affording a particular focus on state and person, where the role of history and identity are pivotal. This theory thereby provides us with other relevant details and explanations as to why states react differently to similar systemic factors.

This combined theoretical approach of neorealism and social constructivism is believed to offer a most holistic understanding of occurrences past and present that have together shaped Russia's contemporary place in the multipolar world.

### 1.1 Waltz's Structural realism

This section will discuss the main assumptions of Waltz's theory of structural realism. More specifically, it will answer in detail two main questions related to this paper's use of the neorealist paradigm:

- Why was realism selected as a lens of analysis as opposed to other theoretical paradigms?

- Why was Waltz's neorealist theory selected for the first portion of this paper, among the multitude of other streams of realism?

First and foremost, structural realism is not only the most popular theory but also one that has remained highly relevant over time. While the theory may be thirty three years old (in 2012) it remains amongst the most referenced in international politics today.

Neorealism is particularly useful for our analysis, as it offers an objective perspective for the examination of international politics. Other competitive theoretical frameworks, such as liberalism, poststructuralism, and post positivism, for example, are of lesser value to the Russian case. Liberalism, neorealism's main competitor, for example, places an exceeding focus on the supremacy of international institutions and their regulating capacity. The cases of the U.S's bombing of Iraq (1997) and Serbia (1999), and invasion of Iraq (2003), wherein Washington acted unilaterally despite the objections of international institutions, namely the U.N. Security Council, together illustrate the shortcomings of this theory.

On the flip side, these cases support Waltz's neorealist theory, which is founded upon the following assumptions: the international system is anarchic (there is a lack of supreme power to rule over states), the main drive behind the actions of the state is survival (the preservation of state sovereignty), states act according to the logic of self-help (states seek to maximize their utility (power)), and the uneven distribution of power leads to the creation of alliances and bandwagoning (balance of power).

Waltz also contends that the power of the state is dependent on the resources it possesses, namely its population, natural resources, and military and economic power, combined with its skillful management of these "commodities" (Waltz 1979: 106). The lack of supreme power, which would serve as the role of global policemen or judge to regulate relations among states, creates insecurity and mistrust among states. This lack of trust is also consequent to the fact that states cannot predict the

future intentions of other states. Waltz argues that states are thus forced to ensure their survival through external or internal balancing. The former involves the creation of alliances with other states, while the latter involves the growth of a state's own "commodities"; maximizing its power through use or growth of its available resources. The growth of the power of one state renders its competitors insecure, thereby forcing them to react to and to compensate for the created misbalance. Mistrust among states, fueled with the uncertainty of competitors' intentions, leads to what has been coined the security dilemma (Herz, 1950; Jervis, 1978).

These variables and factors offer quite clear and simple explanations as to why states attack one another, compete for power, and form alliances. A statement made by H.E. Carr (1963:111) regarding the relations Japan's bombing of the Russian fleet in the Pacific in 1905 underscores the impact of the security dilemma on international policy:

"It was clearly an act of aggression from a technical point of view, but, politically speaking it was an act caused by the aggressive policy of Tsarist Government towards Japan, who, in order to forestall the danger, struck the first blow at the adversary."

History is full of similar examples as such, including the competition that existed between Sparta and Athens (Thucydides), the two world wars and many others. Together, these serve as brilliant illustrations of Waltz's assumptions about the security dilemma, balance of power theory and the instability of a multipolar or unipolar system (Waltz, 1979:163-170).

But as we may see, neorealism offers only a general and relatively impartial framework; it neglects to cover other important details such as internal political structure. In the case of Russia, for example, its limited scope of analysis offers highly simplistic answers for the following questions:

- Why did the Soviet Union abandoned its zero sum game in the 1980's and has since chosen to open up the country to its adversary (the U.S.A.), as well as to embrace democratic change in the 1990s?
- Why has USSR rejected the idea of global confrontation or alliances with other actors to compensate for its economic decline in the 1980s?

Realists would forward the reductionist explanation that the USSR's decision to soften its ideological line and to ally itself with the West (1980s and 1990s) resulted from the exhaustion of its resources. However, Russia's complex case makes evident that it is far too simplistic to limit one's understanding of an actor's decision making strictly to notions of "bandwagoning". So doing certainly omits the important role of domestic factors. For example, in the case of the USSR, those factors would be the structure of the political elite and its historical legacy.

While several other streams of realism preserve the core elements of the theory, they differ in their level of analysis or/and consideration of other variables. It is precisely on this premise that the central criticism of neorealism arises.

## 1.2 Criticism of Neorealism

As aforementioned, Waltz's neorealist theory strives to explain the conditions that give rise to global and inter-state wars, the principles of forming alliances, and the ways in which international structure influences world politics. As was also previously mentioned, this framework fails to account for particular situations, and to give insight as to when and how certain actors will act. To compensate for its isolated level of analysis, Waltz accordingly proposed that neorealism's focus on international politics be compensated through the examination of another 'science' – foreign policy (1996).



Not all realists, however, agree with this contention. One opponent in particular, Gideon Rose, proposed that realist theory ought to be perceived as a composite whole; without its division into parts (classical realism, neorealism). The main argument of his work (*Neoclassical Realism*, 1998) is that systemic parameters influence international politics but to a lesser degree than neorealists contend and that the importance of domestic variables need be taken into account in the analysis. Rose forwards a stream of realism, known as 'neoclassical realism', that asserts that a state's domestic attributes, such as its skillful management of resources and internal politics, are equally as influential on foreign policy as is the international structure. Accordingly, he contests neorealism's limiting, simplistic notion that the state's main goal is one of survival (1998:146). Rose founds his position on the works of other scholars, namely Zakharia (1998), Schweller (1998), and Christensen (1996) who also take factors like a country's tradition, place in international politics and history into account. This recently popularized paradigm has largely been criticized for the lack of clarity of its central assumption. For example, while neoclassical realists contend that "domestic politics is a key for understanding state behavior, they do not share an integrative framework for analyzing the actual process through which states formulate and implement policies."<sup>8</sup>

Michael Spirtas (*A House Divided: Tragedy and Evil in Realist Theory*, 1999) offers another critique of Waltz's theory. He proposed a fusion of Waltz's neorealism and Morgenthau's classical realism but with a division in the level of analysis between systemic and elemental. Through this trying to achieve complete grasp of complex international politics (Spirtas 1999: 385-424).

Other types and variations of realism, namely defensive and offensive realism<sup>9</sup>, would have very little value for the thesis since they do not explain Russia

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<sup>8</sup> *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Edited by Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Define Defensive and offensive realism and main theorists-- works of Modelsky's long cycles, etc

foreign policy to the same extent as do neorealism and social constructivism. It is for this reason that they are neither considered for our analysis. Instead of exploring other variables like domestic policy, history, and human nature through another stream of realism, this paper will instead use social constructivism to achieve this end.

Taking the above into account, I conclude that neorealism, being relatively impartial and affording an abstract perspective, is best suited to cover the top tier of our analysis of Russia's foreign policy, specifically at the level of the international system, in which elements of international structure play the central role.

### 1.3 Applying Neorealist Principles to Russian Case

From the outset, I will apply Waltz's assumptions directly to Russia's case; the Russian Federation is an actor on the international political stage and it does not have any other supreme power above itself. The same situation is valid for other actors with whom Russia interacts. One may argue that international institutions, such as the United Nations and its Security Council, are supposed to regulate the security aspect of the world's anarchic environment. However, in accordance with the realist perspective, institutions in actuality do not constitute the superior component of the international system. Rather, they serve as vehicles for cooperation among actors and the expansion of states' own national interests (Mearshaimer, 1994; Waltz, 1979).

Let us recall that neorealism contends that state survival is the fundamental goal and priority of any actor and its policy. While it is evidently not the state's only goal, it is its most fundamental. Accordingly, the state is said to react to any danger and/or risk that threatens its existence and sovereignty. Of course when security guarantees are achieved, others goals come into play as well. Whenever the security balance is affected, however, actors are said to immediately start striving for their

survival. The following brief examples of the European Union and NATO members' behavior are particularly illustrative of this contention.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union posed the greatest security threat to European countries (NATO members). In order to address the European security dilemma, European countries' alliance with the United States and the admittance of U.S. troops into their lands emerged as the most rational solution. The U.S. guaranteed security for NATO members (through Article 5)<sup>10</sup> while also ensuring strategic positions for its own security from the USSR in so doing. As a result of their alliance with the U.S., European countries found themselves in a markedly more secure space in the period 1980 – 1990 than they had during previous decades. In accordance with this fact, military spending was reduced (Table 1) and cooperation within the EU increased. As demonstrated by this increased cooperation within the EU, actors for whom the security dilemma is no longer a top priority are willing to give up bits of their independence in order to profit from absolute (cooperative) gains (Keohane, 1984, Nye, 1994)<sup>11</sup>.

That being said, if at any point the security balance is affected, one can observe that state survival at any cost immediately re-emerges as a top priority for any actor in the international structure. For example, during the 2008 economic recession, many states, such as Germany, France and the UK, ignored the EU's free-trade policy and instead increased their customs tariffs. This was primarily aimed to keep foreign companies out of their economies, thereby protecting their local producers.

Similarly, the Gas Pipeline Agreement between Germany and Russia (North Stream, 2006) polarized the EU due to active Polish and Baltic protests against the resurgence of 'Big Power' domination (Wist, 2008). Here, Poland and Baltic

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<sup>10</sup> In accordance with which all Allies must engage if any of the members is under attack.

<sup>11</sup> As well in details see Keohane's: «Governance in a Particular Globalized World», 2002.

countries found themselves in a position of security vulnerability, which forced them to react in a way that would restore their prior state of security (namely protesting).

Both of the abovementioned cases make evident that the moment that economic prosperity or national security are in danger, pre-established agreements between European countries and the EU take a secondary role to national self-interests. In accordance with Waltz's theory of balance of power, the growth in power of other competitors (states or alliance of states) creates a security dilemma that is responded to with states' prioritization of their survival (Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau, 1963).

In Russia's case, in 1992 the U.S. and NATO members promised Moscow's policymakers economic assistance and security guarantees (Primakov, 1999:96). I will forward the argument that the West's promises and its possession of a certain degree of parity in nuclear arsenal together created the illusion of security for Russia and temporarily eliminated the country's security dilemma. Furthermore, this sense of security, in turn, allowed for the prevalence of other political goals. Moscow's top priority became rapid western integration (Kozyrev, 1992), the so-called "Kozyrev Doctrine". The other central concerns of the Kremlin's policymakers included economic prosperity and Russia's obtainment of strategic gains through its cooperation with the most developed countries. Meanwhile, presence in the CIS space and diplomatic relations with other states became second in priority.

However, shortly thereafter, Russia's sense of security vanished. Russia found itself in a very miserable and unfavorable position:

"The country's frontiers were pushed back farther than they had been since the seventeenth century, while the once-mighty Red Army (Soviet) simply collapsed. And then Russia was no longer feared, it was no longer accorded the respect given to major powers. Its objections were ignored as NATO moved to take in its closest neighbors. Even pieces of the former Soviet union began freeing themselves from the Russian yoke." (Mankoff 2009:2)

In the absence of a true alliance with the West, Russia was confronted with a multitude of internal and external problems. The long list of external problems includes security threats generated by a destabilized situation in the former soviet republics, and military conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Tajikistan. Amongst the many internal crises, there existed severe tensions in Chechnya, Dagestan and other federal subjects, which challenged the central role of the state. The Russian armed forces demonstrated their incompetence most notably through their inability to adapt their tactics to different types of conflicts in the Chechen conflict (1994-1995). On top of this, Russia's most important revenue branches, namely the gas and oil industries, brought profits to tycoons as opposed to the state. Overall, the economic situation became catastrophic by the mid- and late-1990s.

In the external realm, Russia lost most of its political power. A primary source for this loss was NATO's active engagement of most of the former communist republics through the Partnership for Peace Project<sup>12</sup> (launched in 1994). The PFP's main objective de facto became to prepare candidates for NATO membership<sup>13</sup>. Three former Warsaw Pact members: Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic opted for NATO membership at this time, while Russia could not influence this outcome (in more details in Chapter 2).

As assumed by realist principles and the structure of international politics, one actor will not encourage or support its competitor to grow in power but will instead take advantage of other's weakness(es). Neorealism and its structure of international politics would presume that one state would only help another if it is in line with its own national interests and the balance of power. In all other cases, cooperation is said

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<sup>12</sup> More details are found on [www.nato.int/pfp](http://www.nato.int/pfp)

<sup>13</sup> This objective is not officially declared as the main but the energy and political will invested (by the USA) in this project reveal it as clear, as well looking through realism lens.

to be limited by the security dilemma and other systemic factors (Waltz, 1979:105-106).

The Russia-West case in the 1990s is sound example of this. The West's enthusiasm to support Russia's promotion of democratic values should be understood as being truly pragmatic in nature. In line with the West's own national interests, by becoming more democratic, Russia was believed to become more secured and transparent, conformed to the rules and policy of the international liberal institutions (the U.N., European Council, WTO, etc.) and, in this way, eliminating security threats which communist or imperialistic Russia used to generate. By the same token, the West did not seek to excessively weaken Russia, which would be in itself problematic and irrational. A destabilized and divided Russia would introduce an immense, unsecured area next to EU borders with many implied consequences (uncontrolled nuclear arsenal, arms smuggling, demographic issues, unsecured energy supplies, etc).

The introduction of American economic advisors to Russia was likewise also conducted out of the West's own national interests. While the West did not strive to completely destroy Russian or divide the country, their investments were minimal while the expectation of Russia's output was anticipated to be maximal (Primakov, 2011:73). Russian oil and gas fields were placed largely under the control of Western companies (BP, Exxon mobil, etc.), not for Russia's benefit, but rather for the extraction of much of the country's oil for American and European export.

The West also actively engaged former Soviet allies through European and NATO institutions in an effort to distance them from the Kremlin's sphere of influence. Russia would ultimately not be delivered the promised help and assistance of the West (Primakov, 1999:98; 2011:73-74).

Conversely, Russia was perceived as the West's competitor. In 1992, despite its proclaimed pro-western policy, Russia was still not a friend of the West. I would

argue that the West's competitive stance at this time was consequent to the following three central factors:

- Russia was the only country with nuclear parity at a strategic level with NATO. More generally, Russia held, and continues to hold, aggressive politics, due to its imperialistic vision towards former communist countries, which necessitates its treatment by the West as a potential security threat.
- Europe became dependent upon Russian fossil commodities since the 1980s due the untenable growth of its economy. Furthermore, Russia under Putin started using this dependence as its bargaining power to achieve its political goals.
- Economic competition between Russia and the West in general, with particular emphasis on arms sales, has put the two severely at odds since the Cold War. Russia is one of the world's main armament suppliers today and has been since 1992. Among its major customers are Asian countries like India and China that are especially viable customers because of the great demand that they represent. This reality inevitably overlaps with and challenges American political and economic interests (Primakov, 1999: 163).

By the mid-1990s, Russian leaders began realizing that the rules of the political game, inspired by realism, had not altered much since the Cold War.

Consistent with Waltz's neorealist principles, Russia subsequently "naturally" acted in a self-help system in accordance with its own selfish interests and possessed power (capability) (Waltz, 1979:131; Ili, 2010).

At the structural level, the biggest challenges that Russia was faced with were: NATO's plans to enlarge closer to its borders; the loss of its influence among former communist allies, and the lack of Western reciprocity with respect to its decision to become a true ally of the West. This grim dynamic, combined with Russia's own internal problems (described above), led the Kremlin to foresee future dilemmas for

Russia and brought into question Russia's continued existence in the international arena (due to fast and stable decline). If we take a look at later minister Kozyrev's declaration about Russian priorities, we can see that previous idealistic visions had yielded to "traditional" Russian interests, namely CIS space and Russian security (Levesque<sup>14</sup>, 2010). At first, in Kozyrev's scandalous speech at the European Council in 1992 (which was not published but presented as misunderstanding) would describe what Russia's foreign policy might look like in spite of the lack of democratic support from the West and disregard for Russia's interests.

Russia's pragmatic and realist calculations, dictated by the state's primary mission - survival -, started to dominate the Kremlin's foreign politics in 1996. Russia's national interests and the country's need to oppose security threats again resurged as top priorities. At this time, the new Minister of foreign affairs and former chief of Foreign Intelligence Agency, Evgeny Primakov, redefined Moscow's political priorities, thereby changing the vector of its cabinet back to "cold peace"<sup>15</sup>.

Primakov listed the following as the priorities of his cabinet: building the integrity of the Russian state; establishing "central" relations with CIS and playing the prime role within it; stabilizing of the former Soviet region; restricting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; emphasizing Russian national interests (including the export of hydro carbonates as the key to sustainable successful economy) and unifying Georgia (1999: 218-219). Primakov also identified NATO's enlargement policy, by accepting former Soviet allies, as a threat to Russia's geopolitical situation.

Upon review of this list, one can note the substitution of idealistic goals for pragmatic ones. This decision has, again, been dictated by factors such as the security dilemma, the country's potential threats, national interests and its quest to restore state power.

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<sup>14</sup> Russian Foreign policy on CIS space. Political Science Seminar in UQAM in 2010

<sup>15</sup> [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-06/news/mn-5629\\_1\\_cold-war](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-06/news/mn-5629_1_cold-war)



Let us now look at Russia's re-defined political aims through the realist lens and juxtapose the same with Russia's actual political actions. NATO and its plans to expand to the East, which threatened Russia's balance of power, led Moscow to react by actively trying to ally itself with China, India and other Asian powers. In so doing, it sought to compensate for the created misbalance. Primakov coined this project "Triangle: Russia-China-India" (1999: 197). In 1999, Russia and China together created the Shanghai Five, an organization aimed to counterbalance the American presence in Central Asia. While the former, the "Triangle" was rather unsuccessful, the efforts of the Shanghai Five resulted in relative effectiveness, by keeping the U.S. out of Uzbekistan in 2006 (to be explored at greater length in Chapter 3).

Russia's political actions would also be shaped by its newfound vision of being situated in a world marked by a new world order; a Twenty-first century multipolarity. In his book (2009), Primakov highlights the fact that while the U.S. remained the unchallenged world super-power it was unable to control the entire globe. The end of the Cold War, and the rise of rapidly developing countries and regions like China, the Asian-Pacific, and Latin America, together served to reduce global economic and political dependence on the U.S. thus illustrating Primakov's assertion (Haas, 2008; Primakov 1999: 209). This reality served to inspire Moscow's policymakers to promote multipolarity through its political agenda, such as by expanding G-8 to G-20. Russia's ultimate goal in so doing would be to carve its own central place in the world. Moscow's aspired sphere of influence would of course largely be concentrated on the geopolitical area of the former Soviet Union and its allies.

The former Soviet republics represent Russia's major geopolitical interests for multiple reasons. From the neorealist perspective, the territory of the Ex-USSR comprises vital security, strategy and resource assets for Russia. This is closely interconnected to the state's security and the "commodities" that contribute to its power. Ukraine, for example, borders the Black Sea from its West coast, and thus

provides Russia with a strategic base for its naval fleet. Both Ukraine and Byelorussia's territories also host major gas and oil transit pipelines to Europe. Additionally, both represent important Slavic population reserves (totaling approximately fifty million people) that are beneficial for Russia's decreasing demographics.

Other countries, like Kazakhstan, offer strategic bases for Russia's space missions. Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also possess important gas, oil and uranium reserves, over which Russia tries to keep a monopoly so as to maintain stable prices on the international market and eliminate concurrency. Georgia offers important strategic access to the Black Sea and to the Caucasus, which promises the hosting of a pipeline, Nabucco (Lukas, 2008; map 1.1), aimed to diversify European energy supplies and reduce European dependence on Russia (more details on this topic will be provided in Chapters 2 and 4). Furthermore, all ex-Soviet republics represent a valuable security buffer zone for Russia from potential hostile actors, such as the NATO bloc, as well as a strategic base for the Russian military (Table 2).

At present, most of these republics, with the exception of the Baltic States, are all members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) wherein Russia has a leading role and intends to intensify its cooperation (for further discussion in Chapter 4).

Russia's intention to expand its power in the region displays a clear alignment with the neorealist paradigm. One recalls that, in the realist world, power is of the greatest importance for the state's fulfillment of its goals and the defense of its sovereignty. In the beginning of the 1990s, Russia, in a state of weakness, had no means to influence international politics and defend its interests. Examples extracted from the 1990s support this argument. Russian national interests were largely ignored

it the following cases: NATO enlargement and Serbia bombing in 1999, Iraq bombing in 1997, US unilateral decision to leave ABN treaty and others.

In order for Russian leaders to expand the country's power, they would have to consider the country's resources. As broken down by Waltz in his neorealist theory, a country's power depends on: "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (Waltz 1979: 131).

By taking a close look at Russia's case, it becomes strikingly evident that Russia strove to maximize its power through the maximization of its resources, precisely as was argued by Waltz.

#### *Size of population and territory*

Russia has the world's largest territory and Europe's largest population. The demographic situation in Russia nevertheless raises grave concerns for Moscow's leaders. These concerns include major issues such as the ratio of territory to population, the population's quality of life, internal migrations from East to West, illegal immigration, and emigration. After the Soviet Union's collapse (1991), the Russian population has been in constant decrease. Under Putin's presidency several major initiatives for the achievement of demographic stabilization were launched. These included the provision of financial support to families with children, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and "Inducing immigration of compatriots", which was designed to stimulate Russian labor emigration from former Soviet republics (Kumo, 2010). Russia continues to experience serious falls in demographics, but for the moment the situation is less dramatic compared to the 1990s.

#### *Resource endowment and Economic capability*

Much like the political priorities defined by Primakov, Putin identified natural resources, particularly gas and oil, as central to Russia's economy from the outset of

his presidency. Accordingly, Putin capitalized on the high market price of gas and oil to restore power to Russia's economy (Lukas, 2008; Mankoff, 2009). These high market prices brought Russia immense revenues, which served to stimulate the country's economic growth. More specifically, they enabled Moscow to pay out its external debts and create financial reserves to reduce the impact of economic crises (Mankoff, 2009).

The role of natural resources in Russia at this time was not only economic but also served as a strong political tool for Putin. During Putin's first term (2000-2004), most private owners of hydro carbonate commodities in Russia (including foreign and local investors) were forced to sell their assets back to the State. In 2006, the Kremlin started to use the energy dependence of its customers (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia) for the achievement of its political goals in an unprecedented fashion. Essentially, by blackmailing these countries with high gas prices, Russia was quite successful to forestall Ukraine and Moldova from carrying out their Western aspirations, and to make those republics to fall back under Moscow's political umbrella. Russia also uses its oil and gas resources as a bargaining political tool with the West, as well as the East (China, Chapter 3) and as mentioned with other former Soviet republics. This phenomena is called "Russian pipeline diplomacy" (Lukas, 2008; Hinski, 2009).

### *Military strength*

Prior to 2005, Russian armed forces suffered a considerable economic and technological crisis due to its limited financial resources in 1990. Since 2005, Putin started some initiatives to revive the country's military. Amongst these initiatives were, for example, new armament procurement, which was aimed primarily at restoring Russia's strategic military capability. In order to achieve this goal, Russia increased its military spending and made efforts to replace its obsolete military equipment with new airplanes, helicopters, tanks, air-defense artillery and even 4th

generation aircraft fighters between 2005 and 2010. However, as it may be deduced from official declarations and political internal actions, Russia did not intend to participate in full-scale military engagements<sup>16</sup>.

While it is no secret that Russia, compared on a conventional scale, is at present, no match to the Alliance, its military strength continues to exceed its neighbors from the ex-USSR. As argued by Gillpin, and liberal scholars more generally, a country's economic power is in the twenty-first century, far more influential in shaping the degree of its power, than is its strict military capacity (Gilpin, 1994). This fact was acknowledged by Russian leaders and thus explains Moscow's prioritization of its economic interests, despite having evidently made investments in its military strength.

#### *Political stability and competence*

A country's political stability and the stability of its political course in international affairs comprise the main credo of Putin's team for the last twelve years. Periods of instability and insecurity, economic shocks and changing priorities in external affairs have exhausted Russia's population and create a negative attitude towards West. Putin has performed enormous work to return the population's confidence in the Russian state and to achieve contemporary Russia successes.

Putin took Russia's problems and lessons learnt from the 1990s into political account. All of Russia's potential internal threats were eliminated during his presidency (2000-2008) through various mechanisms, such as "democratic sovereignty" and building "power vertical" (Mankoff, 2009; Chapter IV). The latter resulted in raising the election threshold from 4% to 7%, which was unattainable for the Russian pro-Western parties. Moreover, the heads of Russian regions (federal administrative units) are no longer elected but appointed by the President. Even with

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<sup>16</sup> S. Ivanov: «Russia has no political or military enemies», quote from Munich Security Conference in 2007.

the results of Duma's recent election (2011), wherein Edinnaya Rossia (Putin's Party) gained just above 50% of votes, Putin's team continues to control every dimension of power in Russia, including "special force structures", constituting "total control". The Russian press, television and mass media are under similar tight control and are, accordingly, widely used by the Kremlin for its "propaganda".

Russia's political stability is also closely connected to the country's economy and GDP. The general welfare of the Russian population has experienced a pronounced increase, which has served to legitimize Putin's chosen political course among Russians. In comparison to the financial crisis of 1998, Putin and his team significantly better managed the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. However, given Russia's vast territory, the country continues to struggle with points of instability, including the Caucasus region. These instabilities are nevertheless far better managed now than they had been during the period of Yeltsin's presidency (1991-1999). The relative peace in Chechnya and in the Caucasus region today attest to the actualized success of the Russian political elite in their efforts to restore Russia's political power.

#### 1.4 Defining National Priorities

The following conclusions about Russia's political dynamics for the last twenty years have been analyzed through the lens of Waltz's neorealist theory.

Foremost, Russia, as any other major international actor, has acted and continues to act in accordance to its fundamental mission – to survive and to preserve its sovereignty. Neither superior international body guarantees Russia's survival, nor does one regulate conflicting situations between Moscow and other international actors. Russia's survival thus becomes a mission of "self-help". While other political

goals remain present, they are awarded less priority in comparison to the state's abovementioned fundamental mission.

In addition to this, the Russian case illustrates the neorealist tenant that the international system directly impacts international politics and shapes actors' behaviors. Both Russia and the West, namely the United States, would arguably only gain from cooperation with one another in all spheres (military, security, fighting transnational threats, such as terrorism, crime, and traffic, and so forth) if factors such as their lack of mutual trust, anarchy at the international level, fear of each other's growth in power and inevitable contradictions related to the distribution in gains were not present. Conversely, however, since these system factors continued to play a central role in their relations regardless of Russian decision to become ally of the West, the (im)balance of power has deterred their effective cooperation. Instead, and as a result, Moscow motivated, by its national interest to preserve its statehood returns to traditional and rational balance of power politics.

The sudden change in Russia's political course in 1995-1997 can be explained as a reaction to these systemic factors. Despite Russia's will to abandon its zero-sum game practices in international affairs in 1992, this decision did not alter the West's political objectives and methods. European countries and the United States continued their policy of power expansion, namely through NATO enlargement, thereby outbalancing Russia's sphere of influence on the European continent. Russia's perception of NATO's enlargement as a threat motivated the alignment of its foreign policy with realist principles, specifically the diversification of its diplomatic relations and the counter-balancing of the Alliance. Russia's opposition to NATO's eastward expansion would remain the top priority of its foreign policy for some time (Chapter 2, 3).

Russia's prioritization of its security and the protection of its sovereignty can likewise be seen through Moscow's efforts to stabilize and promote the growth of its

economy, primarily through the maximization of its profits from high oil and gas prices. The elevated prices of these resources have, and continue to be, sustained through the resource dependence of European countries and former Soviet republics. This dependency has, alternately, also served to endow Moscow with financial and negotiating capital with these entities. Russia has consequently continued to act to in such a way as to use its available resources to promote its national interests.

Finally, it is in Russia's national interest to increase and consolidate its power in the space of the former Soviet Union. This contention is based on simple pragmatic calculations. For one, Russia already possesses the means, assets and necessary levers to influence the politics of the former Soviet Republics. Amongst these means and assets are the existing regional institutions where Moscow hold the leading role (CIS, CSTO, others), bilateral relations, "pipeline diplomacy", military presence in most of these republics (Table 2), and a multitude of other valuable resources (historical and identity proximity, trained personnel, existing diplomatic channels, mass-media, finances, etc). Russia's increased power over this region would contribute directly to the achievement of its national interests, as stated in the Concept of Russian Foreign Policy (2008), specifically through secured/enlarged geostrategic borders, maintaining strategic assets such as the Black Sea Fleet, Baykonur, etc. (in details elaborated in Chapter 4).

The following chapter will argue that Russia's relations with the West have been, and continue to be, gravely affected by NATO's policy of enlargement. More specifically, it will be argued that this enlargement policy has limited effective strategic cooperation between Russia and the West, and that this has, in turn, served to eliminate Russia's discovery of its place in the new world through the formation of strategic long-lasting alliance with Euro-Atlantic region.



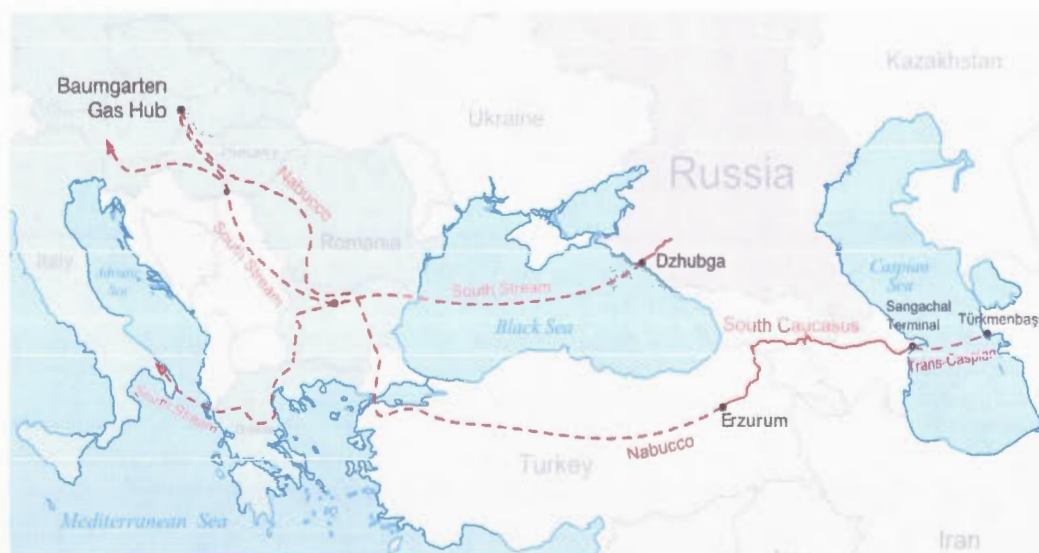
**Table 1. Military spending in % of GDP in EU countries<sup>17</sup>**

	1961-70	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2005
Austria	1.22	1.15	1.17	0.91	0.8
Belgium	3.2	3.05	2.95	1.62	1.3
Denmark	2.73	2.3	2.22	1.74	1.54
Finland	1.73	1.56	1.85	1.61	1.2
France	5.15	3.87	3.9	3.05	2.56
Germany	4.18	3.42	3.14	1.73	1.44
Greece	4.14	5.83	6.11	4.54	4.24
Ireland	1.32	1.52	1.47	0.99	0.72
Italy	3.11	2.52	2.25	1.99	2.04
Luxembourg	1.18	0.92	1.04	0.8	0.86
Portugal	6.76	5.09	3.13	2.42	2.18
Spain	1.94	2.03	2.66	1.48	1.14
Sweden	3.93	3.29	2.62	2.16	1.74
Holland	4	3.24	2.99	1.97	1.64
UK	5.74	4.85	4.77	3.09	2.64
EU15 (average)	3.36	2.98	2.82	2.01	1.74
NATO (Europe)	3.86	3.48	3.26	2.39	2.1
US	8.61	6.15	6.35	3.79	3.66
NATO	5.22	3.85	3.89	2.56	2.3

<sup>17</sup> Main Source SIPRI (<http://sipri.org>) and <http://carecon.org.uk/DPs/1102.pdf>

**Table 2. Presence of Russian Military troops in former Soviet Republics <sup>18</sup>**

	1993	2007-2012
Armenia	5,000	3500-5000
Belarus	30,000	900
Estonia	5,000	Withdrawn
Georgia	20,000	3500 <sup>19</sup>
Moldova	8,000	1500
Tajikistan	23,000	5500
Kazakhstan	n/a	n/a
Kyrgyzstan	n/a	700

**Map 1.1. Nabucco gas pipeline project vs Russian South Stream gas pipeline**

<sup>18</sup> Main Source Tsygankov, 2006

<sup>19</sup> Most of Russian troops were withdrawn in 2007 from Georgia, but this number represents Russian troops remaining after military conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia after 2008

## CHAPTER 2. RUSSIA AND NATO: FROM CONFRONTATION TO COOPERATION AND BACK TO REALISM

This chapter will explore one of the avenues through which Russia may find its place in the multipolar world: its alliance with the West. The theoretical advantages and existing limitations of this option will be explored.

An alliance with the West makes sense for Russia because of the geographic and ideological proximity shared with Euro-Atlantic civilizations according to Huntington (1996). Russia and the West also share notable historical experiences such as, for example, their successful cooperation in opposing Nazi Germany (1944-1945) and defeating Napoleon (1813). Additionally, the probability for military conflict within Europe is presently less likely, which diminishes the role of the security dilemma in Russia's relations with the West and thus opens the doors of opportunity for their cooperation.

There are also many pragmatic advantages to Russia's alliance with the West. These center primarily upon factors related to energy supply and demand. Europe and North America together represent the world's largest and most developed region, and one that is perpetually consuming energy. Russia, on its part, is resource rich in gas and oil. Europe is a particularly viable customer for Russia's energy market because this region pays higher prices for Russia's "commodities" than any other part of the world. These high prices are due to the soaring demand from European countries (most of whom use gas for heating, and as a clean and efficient fuel for industries) and Europe's limited alternatives (alternate sources from Norway, Algeria, Qatar lack the infrastructure and stability to fulfil the growing demand). Moreover, the infrastructure for Russia's procurement of energy to Europe is mostly already existent (since the 1970s, map 2.4) and is thus simply in need of modernization, as opposed to wholesale construction. EU and American companies also possess different, unique

hydro-carbonate extraction technology that has the capacity to boost the energy partnership between these two regions of the world.

Moreover, from a security perspective, both Russia and the West face the same types of new global threats and challenges. These include, for example, transnational crime, migration, smuggling, climate change, and separatism. In a globalized and highly interdependent world, teaming up to combat or at the least reduce the abovementioned emerges as the most effective solution.

The advantages of Russian-West cooperation, however, remain theoretical. As such, these benefits contradict the realist state-based self-help system, as described in Chapter 1 and in the classic works of Waltz (1979), H.E. Carr (1963) and Morgenthau (1968). Russia and the West, in actuality, are fixated on their respective mercantilist, selfish and self-interested goals to (separately) expand their domination in Europe. It will be argued that their formation of an effective and mutually beneficial alliance is thus limited by the realist security dilemma. Russia sees itself as a Great Power with exclusive rights of influence in former Soviet republics. Conversely, the U.S., acting as a global hegemon, ignores Russia's interests and instead encourages the departure of ex-Soviet republics from Moscow's sphere of influence. In addition, NATO's enlargement policy to the East and its politico-military agenda abroad<sup>20</sup> are perceived by Moscow's policymakers as a direct threat to Russia's geostrategic security.

Historically, however, Russia's relations with the West have not always been cold.

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<sup>20</sup> Here I refer to NATO's active military engagement in Yugoslavia (1999), Afghanistan (2001), and Libya (2011), despite Russia's objections to the same in the UN Security Council (to be developed in more detail in this chapter).

## 2.1 Russia's Warmed Relations with the West Turn Sour

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has made newfound attempts to Westernize, which translated into warming of its relations with the U.S./NATO. The newly democratic Russia (1991) was motivated primarily by Western promises of financial aid (Primakov, 1999). The cornerstone of Russia's Westernization efforts was the country's adoption of the so-called "Kozyrev Doctrine" (1992-1994). This was a pro-Western external political course that was oriented toward Russia's integration with the West to the detriment of the country's own traditional interests, namely Russia's domination over the post-Soviet space.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, by the second half of the nineties, however, Russia's internal political elite and domestic society became highly critical of the "Kozyrev Doctrine". Criticism of this Doctrine stemmed from internal problems, such as failed economic reforms, and external factors, such as NATO's enlargement (by inviting former Russian allies: Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic). Alliance coming closer to Russian border and altering the European balance of power, paired with Moscow's total inability to anyhow influence NATO decision was a major point of rethinking its foreign policy. With the rise of the first diplomatic crisis between Russia and the U.S./ NATO, their recently warmed relations began to turn sour.

Along with NATO enlargement the Balkan Crisis as well played an important role in determining the subsequent orientation of Russia's foreign policy. Both political events would ultimately divert Russia's focus away from the West and revert it back toward balance of power politics. A crumbling Yugoslavia and the drive for independence of each of its small states called in the defence of the Big Powers. Russia, Germany, France, and the United States each pursued their own narrow political interests by lending their support to particular states in the region (Brossard, 2001).

Russia lent its support to Serbia. However, despite its efforts to support this country, namely through the Balkan Contact Group<sup>21</sup>, it was unable to prevent the U.S./NATO's bombing of Belgrade in December of 1999 (Primakov, 1999). This caused Moscow's already dwindling illusion of being a "Great Power" to vanish completely. Moscow's false impression as such first came to a head two years earlier (in 1997) when Russia's opposition towards NATO's intentions to accept three new members (see above) was ignored. Despite the creation of the Russia-NATO Counsel (1997), which was intended by the U.S. to be a kind of compensation for Moscow for the abovementioned NATO membership of ex-communist countries, Moscow in reality did not obtain any tool to influence NATO's decisions in regard to European Security. This is exemplified by the aforementioned NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999.

The NATO membership of the three previously mentioned countries was perceived by Russia as a major threat to its national security. From the realist perspective, the reason is self-evident. Realists would argue that Russia feared the increased imbalance of power. Moscow had realized after three to four years of continuous political and economic decline (1991-1995) that Western promises of support have no power and no value in the self-help system. However, the limited available resources or leverages that Russia had to influence the situation facilitated the Western allies' ability to simply take advantage of the country's weakness.

## 2.2 NATO's Enlargement to the East; a Perceived and Real Threat for Russia

Russia's threatened sense of security would subsequently be heightened by the U.S./NATO's foreign policy agenda for Central Asia and encroachment on the ex-Soviet space after the events of 9/11 (2001). It is a well-known fact that Moscow's

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<sup>21</sup> Negotiation group/committee over the Balkan problem, in which both Russia and US were part

political interests have focused on dominating former Soviet republics since the Russian Empire. The Ex-Soviet space represents vital security resources for Russia, as described in Chapter 1.3.

The U.S./NATO's foreign policy agenda for Central Asia (including military action in Afghanistan, and U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan) and lately "Color Revolutions"<sup>22</sup> (discussed later in this Chapter) thus represent considerable conflicts of interests, which still persist at present, that negate the potential for Russia's cooperation with the West.

The most notable perceived security threat for Russia was NATO's enlargement over time and the pattern of this enlargement. The former has changed the balance of power in Europe, situating Alliance military bases next to Russia's border.

In 1992, the Warsaw Pact led by the USSR was terminated with the collapse of the Communist Bloc. Russia's power and especially its military capabilities subsequently largely declined<sup>23</sup>. Conversely, over the course of the last twenty years, NATO has had four rounds of enlargement. Through these rounds it has accepted thirteen new members, most of whom are former allies of the Communist bloc.

As one can observe from Figure 2.1, the pattern of NATO's enlargement has positioned the Alliance's bases increasingly close to Russia's border. The realist explanation for this strategy would be a simple one: NATO's enlargement to the East seeks to limit Russia's ability to influence its former Soviet allies, thereby excluding

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<sup>22</sup> Since 2001, the U.S. has installed its military bases in Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan (to support its operation in Afghanistan). Since the U.S. was supporting the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005), this gravely irritated the Kremlin and thus impacted their bilateral relations. In 2006, the U.S. military base in Uzbekistan was withdrawn (Chapter 3).

<sup>23</sup> I refer to considerable cuts in military personnel, total decrease of pilots' skills, obsolete equipment and other related problems, which are attested to by Russia's poor performance in the First Chechen War (1994-1996).

it from the European Security's decision making processes and affecting the balance of power in Europe in favour of the West.

Why does Russia see itself as having to be included in European decision-making on security issues? The most summative explanation that I found was one of Kosacev's arguments, which was cited in Primakov's book, "*Gody v bol'shoy politike*"<sup>24</sup>, «since Russia represents half of the Euro-Asiatic continent it *shall not be excluded*, especially by the U.S. who does not belong to this continent» (1999:175).

The balance of power in Europe is also shaped by a so-called "soft power" employed by Brussels and Washington. This can best be understood through the mechanisms of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program<sup>25</sup> and the Warsaw Initiative Funds<sup>26</sup> (both launched in 1994). These aimed to find opportunities for cooperation between NATO members and any non-members (PfP nations) in a legal and transparent way.

The launch of PfP initially represented a diplomatic solution between Washington and Moscow. It allowed NATO to interact with other countries (Partners) that were non-NATO members without enforcing NATO membership. Later (in 1996) the notion of NATO membership was introduced to the Partners as optional. Very soon thereafter, PfP related programs and mechanisms allowed Partners to seek full membership if they so desired, specifically through the Membership Action Plan (MAP)<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, since 1994, twelve new members that are former Soviet allies have been invited and/or accepted to join NATO. From this reality it may therefore be deduced that even though their membership was not

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<sup>24</sup> Years in big politics (my translation)

<sup>25</sup> [www.nato.int/pfp](http://www.nato.int/pfp)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.pims.org/eucom-pfp/pfp-wif> - US financial support program to PfP developing countries

<sup>27</sup> Ibid



mandatory, PfP motivated most European Partners from the former Soviet bloc to join NATO or at the least consider this option.

The joining of these new NATO members ultimately changed the balance of power within NATO and enabled the U.S. to increase its influence in Europe (Primakov, 1999:178). A notable example of this fact is the military and political support that Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other PfP Partners lent to U.S. operations in Iraq in 2003, despite direct opposition to the same by France and Germany.

Since the beginning of the Twenty-First century, NATO has, through PfP and bilateral dialogues, actively engaged with Partner Nations to build their democratic institutions and to help draft fundamental strategic documents (such as national security strategies and military doctrines) in their respective countries. In this way, NATO has penetrated different political levels of Partner Nations, thereby extending its tools of influence, access to information, and overall power in the Euro-Atlantic region and Eastern Europe.

Moscow's policymakers and security experts share concerns over NATO's Eastward expansion. Yeltsin and later Putin repeatedly warned the West, in particular the U.S., about Russia's perspective on the matter. Then-president Putin's famous speech at Munich in 2007 serves to illustrate the Kremlin's standpoint on NATO's policy of enlargement:

“It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, [...] I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Full text: <http://www.securityconference.de/Putin-s-speech.381.0.html?&L=1>

Statements as such make evident that, as neorealists would argue, Russia perceived NATO's policy of enlargement to the East as a direct threat to the country's security for reasons relating to balance of power.

Security expert Alexei Arbatov<sup>29</sup> shares same realist vision that NATO's enlargement represent a threat to Russian security. He adds that Russia conversely has no control or influence in this regard due to its political and economic weaknesses. Apart from altered Balance of power in Europe in favour of Brussels' headquarters for the last two decades NATO has altered its military policy in the Euro-Atlantic region from defensive to offensive. NATO has participated in major operations in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Iraq in the absence of the consent of the U.N. Security Counsel. NATO's enlargement and its newly adopted tactics (military operations), which surpass its traditional Euro-Atlantic area of responsibility, combined with Russia's considerably weakened armed forces, has made it imperative for Russia to focus on state security (Arbatov, 2009).

It should be mentioned here that similar explanations have also been offered by other Western experts, such as Kramer (2009), as well<sup>30</sup>.

Other important Russian political figures present a radical view of "Great Russia". Ziuganov and Jirinovski, for example, take distant position that NATO's policy as being aggressive and aimed to take control of Russia. Zyuganov writes:

"Facts are stubborn things. They attest that NATO is quietly continuing to prepare an invasion of Russia. Our troops on the European theatre are outnumbered by 10-12 times by those of NATO. In Europe alone NATO has 36 divisions, 120 brigades. 11,000 tanks, 23,000 pieces of ordinance and 4500 war planes. What is the purpose of having such huge military might? To fight international terror which today is held

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<sup>29</sup> To mention that Alexei Arbatov, he is widely recognized as a security expert in Russia and represents pro-western Russian political party – "Yabloko", which is in opposition to Putin's party.

<sup>30</sup> KRAMER, M. "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement. Pledge to Russia". The Washington Quarterly, April 2009

up as the main justification for the existence of NATO? ” (Zyuganov, 2010) <sup>31</sup>

It is quite clear that neither the Kremlin nor the Russian political elite as a whole (including the opposition) has any confidence in NATO’s democratic intentions for a “partnership for peace”.

### 2.3 Russia Addresses its Perceived Security Threat from the West: from Retaliation to Cooperation

Beginning in the late twentieth century, Russia made attempts to retaliate against NATO for its Eastward enlargement through the use of several diplomatic counter-measures. At first, Moscow closed the country’s NATO information center (1997). Russia’s leading politicians from the Legislative Duma, such as Zyuganov and Stepashin (future prime-minister of Russia in 1998) publicly discussed the need to lend military support to their Yugoslavian brothers (then aggressed by NATO) and to accept Serbia in the Russian-Belorussian Union (April 1999)<sup>32</sup>. Through the latter Russia signalled to the West that it would fight with Serbia against NATO. These proclamations, however, ultimately proved to be political bluffs. The weakness of Moscow’s executives prevented Duma’s aggressive political reactions from being realized.

In 1999, Russian Prime Minister Primakov would show a historic sign of protest against the U.S . Subsequent to U.S. President Clinton’s decision to bomb Belgrade (1999), Primakov announced the cancellation of his planned meeting with the U.S. high officials by turning his plane around mid-trip (Primakov, 1999).

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<sup>31</sup> “Can one trust NATO's friendliness?” <http://www.northstarcompass.org/nsc1012/zyuganov.htm>

<sup>32</sup> TV program “Segodnea” on NIT Russian channel on 15 april 1999 at 9.00. “Fraction “Yabloko” refuses to vote for accepting Serbia in Russian-Byelorussian Union”.  
<http://www.yabloko.ru/Publ/RadioTV/ivan-ntv-2.html>

Newly elected President Putin (2000) was left with a complex dilemma in dealing with West. On the one hand, he needed to find alternative financial and political resources to rectify the distorted balance of power for Russia in Europe. On the other hand, he needed the West's help and recognition in order to overcome Moscow's economic difficulties.

The events of 9/11 (2001) motivated a pragmatic Putin to re-try to make Russia an equal partner of the West. Russia offered its assistance to the U.S. in its global war on terrorism. This was namely in the form of intelligence sharing. The U.S. accepted the provided information but never responded to the Kremlin with clear signs for a partnership. The relatively warmed U.S.-Russian relations lasted until around 2003-2004. In the latter period, the U.S. capitalized on Russia's openness to cooperation by inviting seven other members (including the Baltic states', former Soviet Republics) to join NATO. Once again, from Russian perspective, Moscow's "good will" benefitted only U.S. interests. This brought to head the second major crisis in Russia-NATO relations.

#### 2.4 Russia-West Relations Turn Sour Anew; Provoking More Aggressive Russian Retaliation

After the millennium, a wave of democratic "Colour Revolutions" in former Soviet republics would bring pro-American politicians to power. As a result of the Revolution of Roses (2003)<sup>33</sup>, Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze<sup>34</sup> was substituted by pro-American Mikhail Saakashvilli. Pro-American leaders were similarly brought to power by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) and the Tulip Revolution in Kirghizstan (2005). Russia not only lost its influence in these

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<sup>33</sup> Georgia After the 'Rose Revolution'. Eden Cole & Philipp H. Fluri, Vienna and Geneva 2005

<sup>34</sup> Although Shevardnadze was not entirely loyal to Moscow he profited from the "convenient for Moscow" status.

strategically vital areas wherein pro-Russian leadership previously prevailed but the leaders of both Ukraine and Georgia declared their states' intentions to join NATO in the near future (Herd, 2005).

This marked "Russia's worst foreign-policy defeat in the post-Soviet period" (Herd, 2005:17). In 2005, a message from the central federal TV channel in Russia proclaimed the following with respect to the prevalence of pro-Americanism in former Soviet republics: "to put it simply, the view of the progression is as follows: 'The day before yesterday: Belgrade. Yesterday: Tbilisi. Today: Kiev. Tomorrow: Moscow'" (Herd, 2005:17). In addition to Pro-Western regime changes was the threat of the launch of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission whereby NATO air fighters were to police the airspace of the Baltic States next to Russia's airspace<sup>35</sup>.

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the international structure forced Russia to react in order to ensure its survival. In accordance with realist theory, Russia consolidated its available resources in an effort to correct the created imbalance of power and to defend its interests. Moscow had no choice but taking counter-steps.

The Kremlin's policy was initially aimed to quell the Western aspirations of former Soviet republics. Among its first actions taken to punish those who left its sphere of influence, Russia demanded higher prices for its natural gas. It then imposed an embargo on goods from states that were highly enthusiastic to Westernize, namely Georgia and Moldova. Furthermore, Russian gas company Gazprom engaged in controversial pipeline wars with Kiev<sup>36</sup> (map 2.4), causing Europe to suffer from the cold in the middle of January in 2006. Over-all Moscow was able to take advantage of the polarized political situation in Ukraine, since color revolution, by supporting pro-Russian candidate Yanukovitch who was elected President in 2010.

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<sup>35</sup> [http://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/structure\\_1469/air\\_force/nato\\_air\\_-\\_policing\\_mission.html](http://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/structure_1469/air_force/nato_air_-_policing_mission.html) and [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_85569.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_85569.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>36</sup> Over 60% of Russian gas is transported through Ukrainian territory

In 2006-2007, Georgia-Russian relations also became very tensed and full of provocations. Multiple diplomatic scandals and disputes were on the first pages of Russian newspapers. Amongst these were the introduction of a visa regime between the two countries, spy scandals<sup>37</sup>, and Moscow's hidden (later open) assistance to separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Much in line with Machiavelli's realism, Moscow discarded the severity of the means that it employed to achieve the ends that its foreign policy sought to achieve, which was to punish those who decided to leave its sphere of influence.

Another dimension of the political confrontation between Russia and the West, which only served to overwhelm the situation even more, was Kosovo's independence in February 2008. This sparked a furious reaction from the Kremlin. Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs considered it a grave violation of international norms and a "big mistake" on the part of the West (Lavrov, 2007). Moscow had in multiple ways warned Europe and the United States that their decision to recognize Kosovo's independence could lead to the recognition of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and other similar cases abroad. In 2007, Minister Lavrov wrote:

"Regarding Kosovo, independence from Serbia would create a precedent that goes beyond the existing norms of international law. Our partners' inclination to give way to the blackmail of violence and anarchy within Kosovo contrasts with the indifference shown to similar violence and anarchy in the Palestinian territories, where it has been tolerated for decades while a Palestinian state has yet to be established."<sup>38</sup>

Despite Russia's objection, and violation on UN Security Council resolution (1998), Kosovo's independence was recognized by most European countries in February 2008. The Kremlin condemned this decision and proclaimed that it would

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<sup>37</sup> <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2010/11/10/another-spy-scandal-in-georgia/>

<sup>38</sup> Sergey Lavrov "Containing Russia: Back to the Future?" link:  
[http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/8F8005F0C5CA3710C325731D0022E227](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/8F8005F0C5CA3710C325731D0022E227)

'open Pandora's box'<sup>39</sup>. During a meeting with colleagues from the ex-Soviet republics, Putin harshly remarked:

"The Kosovo precedent is a terrifying precedent. It in essence is breaking open the entire system of international relations that have prevailed not just for decades but for centuries. [...] And it, without a doubt, will bring on itself an entire chain of unforeseen consequences. [...] In the end, this is a stick with two ends and that other end will come back to knock them on the head someday."<sup>40</sup>

In addition to Kosovo's independence, another major concern for Russia's foreign policy in relation to the West and NATO's enlargement was potential NATO's proposal of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine at its summit in Bucharest in April 2008. This marked a solid red line in the relations between the U.S./NATO and Russia.

Since both Ukraine and Georgia represent vital geostrategic spaces in which Russia wants to remain the absolute power, the "survival" element of Waltz's neorealist theory came into play. Moscow, in defence of its security and resources, was forced to fight for its place in the international system. As will be illustrated below, 2008 marked a real breakthrough year for Russia's Foreign policy in its opposition to NATO enlargement and the restoration of the relative balance of power in Europe.

Despite the U.S.'s support of Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership (through offering MAP to these republics), Russia convinced major European powers to refute their acceptance of the same prior to and during the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April of 2008. Putin and his team used multiple diplomatic tactics to achieve this end, namely numerous meetings and bilateral relations, and personal relations with Moscow's European counterparts. Germany, Italy and France

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<sup>39</sup> "Kosovo precedent 'terrifying': Putin" Associated Press, 22 February 2008

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

ultimately opposed granting MAP to Georgia and Ukraine<sup>41</sup> at the 2008 Summit (Mankoff, 2009; Levesque, 2009; Asmus, 2010). Although President Bush succeeds in letting the following statement to penetrate the official NATO Summit declaration:

“ 23. NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.”<sup>42</sup>

This statement initiates a strong reaction from Kremlin towards Georgia. Moscow started a quite open and aggressive policy aimed to increase the destabilization of the political situation in this republic. Russia ultimately willing to bring Georgia back to the point of departure from its sphere of influence, Moscow withdrew itself from the interdiction regime of economic relations with Abkhazia and immediately afterward rendered open its special political relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which had since 1992 been discrete). Russia provided these unrecognized states with both military and financial aid<sup>43</sup>. These factors together served to escalate tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia<sup>44</sup>.

Culmination point of the events, that would have the most profound impact for Russia in its relations with the West, was Moscow's military engagement with U.S.-backed Georgia in South Ossetia and its later recognition of two separatist republics (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). This was a classic Cold War –style clash between Russia and the United States on territory that was external to both. Through this incident Russia communicated a strong message to both Washington and Brussels about its determination to protect its vital interests and the consequences that contenders would have to face for their disregard of the same. Russia also deterred the possibility that Georgia, and similarly U.S.-backed Ukraine, would join NATO for a long time. Furthermore, Moscow warned other ex-Soviet republics of the

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<sup>41</sup> Although the final NATO Summit declaration in paragraph #23 states: “We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO”.

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm)

<sup>43</sup> <http://kommersant.ru/doc/864557> and <http://kommersant.ru/doc/883332>

<sup>44</sup> *Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout*. Crisis Group Europe Report N°195, 22 August 2008



possible outcome of their seeking membership with NATO (Mankoff, 2009, Levesque, 2009).

To mention that similarly to Cold war era, the U.S.A., on its part, has since 2003, provided large military support to Georgia. The majority of U.S. assistance has to this day been effected via cooperative bilateral programs, such as Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), special operation training with U.S. experts, and International Military Exchange Training (IMET), amongst others. With the help of Ukraine<sup>45</sup>, the U.S, and other countries, Georgia's military budget has increased from 18 million USD to 780 million USD between 2002 and 2008<sup>46</sup>. This figure represents a 40-fold increase and about 8.8% of Georgia's GDP in 2007<sup>47</sup>. With increased military and economic power, as well as the desire to restore its territorial integrity, Georgian President Saakashvili's was determined to solve internal conflict through the use of military force (Rice, 2011).

On August 7th, 2008, Georgia initiated military actions against South Ossetia. Within a few hours, however, Russian peacekeeping troops, reinforced with other military reserves, entered the conflict zone and forced Georgia's retreat.

According to the Crisis Group Europe (Report N°195, 22 August 2008), the Kremlin anticipated Georgia's military aggression towards South Ossetia and possibly towards Abkhazia. Russia proved to be fully prepared for military action against Georgia.

Russia's intervention considerably weakened Georgian Armed Forces. Tbilisi did not receive any military help from NATO or the U.S., who limited themselves to empty promises and a minor "show of force" by sending warships into the Black Sea.

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<sup>45</sup> <http://podrobnosti.ua/power/security/2008/08/07/545634.html>

<sup>46</sup> *Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia*. Crisis Group Europe Report N°193, 5 June 2008 (p.9)

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

Shortly after Georgia's attack on Tshinvali, Russia referred to the "genocide of the Ossetian people"<sup>48</sup>, same argument which was used by NATO in Kosovo. Ultimately, Moscow recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as the only solution to protect these republics from Georgia's aggression. This phenomenon is evidently paralleled with Russia's previous warnings of the consequences of the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence as a "terrifying precedent".

As a result of this military conflict, Russia not only prevented Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership for the near future and showed its determination in the protection of its national interests, but as result destabilized Georgia also dissolved the interests of foreign investors to continue building the Nabucco pipeline (map 1.1). The latter was aimed to provide European countries with an alternative to Russian gas (Lukas, 2008). In addition, South Ossetia and Abkhazia granted Russia with military basing rights in their territories as a source of security for both republics<sup>49</sup>. To this day, this provides Moscow with important geostrategic assets in the region.

It is important to note that Russia invaded Georgia in spite of its acknowledgement of the risks involved in so doing, namely the onset of a major political conflict with the West. In order to prevent Georgia and Ukraine's tentative NATO membership, Russia willingly jeopardized the absolute gains of its profitable relations with European countries. The above is a notable illustration of Russian reaction facing major security threat to its statehood (element of survival) forwarded by Waltz's neorealist theory (Chapter 1).

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<sup>48</sup> At the beginning of the conflict Russia's mass-media and politicians were claiming that the death toll among Ossetians was approximately 2000, which turned into around 117 after independent analysis. Russia has never officially commented on this discrepancy. Source: Russian mass media during the conflict and *Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout*. Crisis Group Europe Report N°195, 22 August 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Russia has announced where exactly its military bases would be located. Multiple news channels one of which is here: <http://korrespondent.net/russia/639702-minoborony-rf-opredelilos-s-mestom-dislokacii-voennyh-baz-v-abhazii-i-yuzhnoj-osetii>

## 2.5 Summary of Russia-West Relations

As has been illustrated above, from the 1990s until present, Russia and the West have clashed on major security issues, which have limited and continue to limit their effective strategic cooperation. It can also be said that the severity of their discordance has worsened over time. Over the last two decades, NATO has advanced up to the Russian border (2004), Moscow briefly lost its influence in Georgia and Ukraine due to the US-backed Color Revolutions in these countries (2003-2004), and in 2008 Russia undertook military operations to protect its core national interests and prevent potential Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership.

At present, Russian-American (Western) strategic alliance at global level is definitely excluded. Both the U.S. and Russia's vision of European security remain conflicting and neither party has expressed any intention to shift its perspective towards finding a compromise. Russia's self-perception as a Great Power with exclusive rights of influence in former Soviet republics contrasts the U.S.'s actions and encouragement for the departure of ex-Soviet republics from Moscow's sphere of influence. It should be said that the U.S.'s conduct in this regard is more prudent than it was before the military conflict of 2008.

In addition to the failed alliance between Russia and the West, the 2008 military conflict has highlighted an important reality for Russia, which is that it has no other allies in the region. Not a single Russian partner supported Moscow in the conflict nor in recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence. Despite forming the CSTO with Russia, and sharing strong and friendly ties with Russia since the fall of the USSR, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan refused to recognize the independence of the separatist republics. Likewise, China, who has consistently respected Russia's protection of its national interests in the former Soviet Union (although in a very reserved fashion) also did not support Russia in the matter. The

details of Russia's relations with China, and the benefits and pitfalls of their cooperation will be examined in the next chapter.

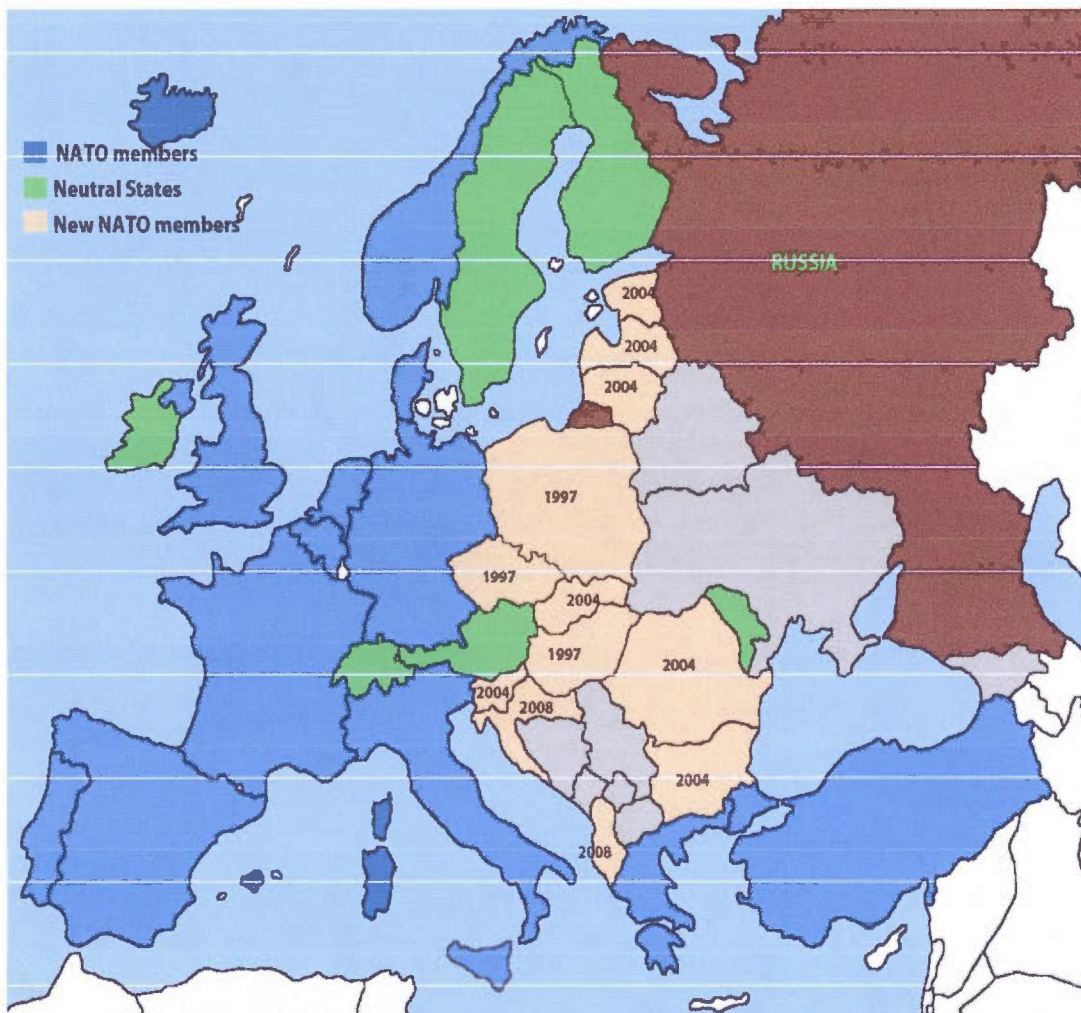


Fig. 2.1 NATO New Members since 1997



### CHAPTER 3. SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

This chapter will explore another dimension of Russia's quest to find its place in the multipolar world, which could be a possible alliance with the East. As aforementioned, given its present military and economic state, previous and present cooperation China may stand out for Russia's as one of the most interesting partner for a strategic partnership in the East. In Russian bilateral trade China ranks first (before Germany)<sup>50</sup>. Sino-Russian relations related to economic trade, military exports and political cooperation by large bypass other significant actors from Asia, namely India, Japan, Korea, Iran, etc (Lo, 2008; Trenin 2005).

There are a number of reasons for which dialogue between China and Russia should be advantageous for both countries. The major argument is that, at a systemic level, both countries oppose the unilateral actions of the West. This includes their shared opposition to past NATO operations in former Yugoslavia and Kosovo, and recent NATO operations in Libya. Beijing and Moscow also share views on international politics, the cornerstone of which is their opposition to U.S. global hegemony and view of the world as multipolar.

Amongst other reasons for co-operation we may consider geopolitical argument. The enormous size of their territories equips Russia and China with major global potential. Taken together, the Sino-Russian territory comprises 1/5 of the globe. These two countries also border important geopolitical regions such as Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Asia Pacific, the U.S. and Canada.

One may recall that size of territory, size of population and military strength are among Waltz's several "ingredients of power", alongside resource endowment, economic capability, political stability and competence (Waltz 1979: 131). Well, in this case China has the world's biggest population (1.4 billion), both countries

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<sup>50</sup> China ranks second compared to EU as whole.

possess advanced military technologies and nuclear arms, and both are permanent members of the UN Security Council.

In addition to the above, China and Russia share common historical experiences in the twentieth century as communist countries and allies (except after 1960s). They also presently share a common view on several global challenges, namely U.S. hegemony, separatism, trans-national crime, and arms smuggling, among others. One can reasonably assume that these commonalities would produce a situation favorable to their long-term cooperation.

Another argument in support of a Sino-Russian alliance has its root in China's energy needs and Russia's natural resource endowments. China is presently in constant, growing need of resources such as oil, gas and raw materials to sustain its rapid economic growth. China currently imports half of its oil needs. Russia, on its part, overproduces and continuously exports these commodities. Oil and gas represent 60 per cent of Russian exports and almost half of its GDP<sup>51</sup>. In addition to its high level of energy consumption, China is a viable customer for Moscow's resources by virtue of it being an alternative to the West. As such, it contributes to Russia's reduction of its dependence on European buyers.

Despite the great opportunities available for Sino-Russian cooperation at international level, it will be argued that the relations between the two at bilateral (inter-state) level, outside the global balance of power, are not exempt from the negative influences of systemic factors, as described by Waltz's neorealist theory. On the contrary, these factors and other difficulties in the relations between China and Russia (namely the security dilemma, conflicting national interests of China and Russia including the influence in Central Asia) significantly limit, the opportunity for their long-term stable alliance.

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<sup>51</sup> Multiple sources including Bobo Lo's 2008 *Axis of Convenience* (Chapter 8).



In order to illustrate this reality, this chapter will focus on two central dimensions of Sino-Russian relations: energy and military-political cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

These are particularly worthy of examination because they encompass China and Russia's common political interests, political visions and supply-demand formulas. Furthermore, both are central topics of discussion at the highest political level in each of these two countries. As such, they constitute an important strategic role in Sino-Russian relations, which impact on global politics.

### 3.1 Sino-Russian Energy Dialogue

China constitutes the world's second largest economy in terms of GDP after the United States<sup>52</sup>. At present, China's internal production of oil and gas satisfies approximately 50 per cent of its actual needs. China's ability to secure reliable energy supplies has thus evidently become critical for its continued growth. Given China's continuous and projected economic growth, the domestic demand for oil will only increase in the long term (fig 3.1).

At present, China imports roughly half of its yearly intake of oil, which is approximately nine million barrels per day<sup>53</sup>. The growing demand for oil in China has rendered the cost of this commodity high and its access limited. The country continues to derive the majority of its energy from coal. This is mostly because it does not have any other alternatives to this obsolete and inefficient energy resource. Coal continues to comprise approximately 65-75 per cent of China's energy resources and is mostly domestically produced. Alternatives such as natural gas represent less

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<sup>52</sup> Source: IMF and World Bank

<sup>53</sup> EIA: international petroleum. Link: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=CH#pet>

than 3-4 per cent of the country's total energy intake. As such, they are not as noteworthy for our analysis as is oil.

Oil and its continuous demand play an important role in China's foreign policy. It is highly important for the country to have access to reliable and diverse oil supplies. As evidenced by the diagram (fig 3.2, fig 3.3), China imports from at least twenty different countries. Each supplier is viewed with importance by the growing super-power because of the respective number of barrels of oil that each represents. Russia's share in this oil supply-chain is 6 per cent, with potential future growth (explained below).

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium, Moscow experienced a crisis with the United States/NATO (Chapter 2) and, under Primakov, subsequently shifted its foreign policy from the West towards the prioritization of a partnership with East: China and India and other Eastern countries. One of the products of Russia's cooperation with China was the latter's active negotiation for the construction of an oil pipeline from Russian Siberia to the Daiqin in Northern China. While at first this project seemed simple it grew to be quite complicated, mainly due to political reasons.

In 1999, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former head of Russia's then-biggest oil company, Yukos, negotiated an agreement with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to construct an oil pipeline from Angarsk to Daiqin with the capacity of 20-30 million tones/year, which was signed in March 2003. "Putin and Hu Jintao endorsed this agreement two months later" (Lo, 2008:143)

Few months later (2003), however, Putin's actions would change the course of these plans. In that year, Putin's team openly declared a war to Russian oligarchs to regain full political power in Russia. In this way Kremlin assaulted Yukos by charging the company with tax evasion. This led to the imprisonment of Khodorkovsky, which in turn led to the disintegration of this oil giant (Yukos). The

Russian-Chinese joint oil project therefore came to a standstill, new players came to this political-economical struggle.

I will refrain from going into depth about the Kremlin-Yukos scandal and instead reflect mostly upon the systemic factors related to Russian-Chinese relations, as they are of the greatest importance to our analysis.

Here it is important to mention that by 2001-2003 Russia – US relations had relatively improved. Since the events of 9/11, Putin's administration made several steps forward in favor to restore the positive political climate between Russia and the West (U.S.). At that time, Russia's relations with Japan were also on the rise.

In 2004 Tokyo proposed to sponsor an alternative route proposed by Transneft<sup>54</sup> for the Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean oil pipeline – towards Nahodka, a seaport in the Pacific. Japan was proposing both a better financial package than China and more oil to be sold (Lo, 2008: 143-145) (map 3.1).

By building a pipeline to the Pacific port, Russia would have access to more customers from a single location, specifically China, Japan, and Korea, as opposed to provisioning its resources to simply *one* of these three countries. In this way, Russia would secure itself with diversified customers.

Amidst these propositions, Russian Ecology Service suddenly announced in 2004 that Russia's original pipeline project to Daiqin represented a serious ecological threat to the Baikal Lake. This forced the discontinuation of this project in this particular direction. Russia used these ecological alleged reasons to explain to China the need to halt this project indefinitely. The desperation of Chinese part resulted to extreme measures, such as CNPC would later even try to offer Transneft the gift of 400 million USD to keep the project running, to no avail (Lo, 2008:144-45<sup>55</sup>). At the

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<sup>54</sup> Russia's major oil transit company, favored by the Kremlin

<sup>55</sup> Lo references Moscow Times from March 23, 2006

political level, China nevertheless continued to keep its relative calm and relentlessly sought to persuade Russia's political leaders to construct a joining pipeline.

China's balanced and persistent position, paired with its diplomatic pressure and its taking advantage of the political changes in Russia's external situation in 2005-2006, did result in relative success for Beijing as described below.

The period 2005-2006 is characterized by a complicated situation for Russia in terms of foreign policy. This period comprised a series of Color Revolutions, the next round of NATO enlargement (Chapter 2), and increasingly tensed political relations with Japan, specifically over the Kuril Islands dispute. At the same time, Russia again changed its political line by announcing anew its decision to build a pipeline to Daiqin, this time by bypassing the Baikal Lake to the north. Furthermore, at one of the Valdai meetings (related to Energy security) Putin declared that about 30 per cent of Russia's oil and gas would flow Eastward in near future<sup>56</sup> (Lo, 2008:132).

The above matches the neorealist assumptions: Russia, driven by the security dilemma, considered it irrational to build a strategic pipeline destined solely to China, which could limit higher profits and providing cheap<sup>57</sup> resources for the growth of a potentially competitor on its border. In addition, the above emphasizes the importance of natural resources in international politics and the fact that decisions related to oil and gas are made at higher political level in both countries.

The final design of the East Siberian oil pipeline was decided upon in 2005-2006. It represented a compromise between Moscow's interest to bring a main pipe to a seaport in Pacific and China's interest to have it directly linked to its Northern

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<sup>56</sup> "We anticipate ... in the next 10-15 years ... that around 30 percent of Russian oil exports will go to Asian countries" – V. Putin, September 2006. cited from Bobo Lo's book (2008)

<sup>57</sup> In 1999-2000 the discussed price was around 25\$ a barrel, and price disputes continued until 2011

province. The pipeline was constructed from Taishet to Perevoznaya with an offshoot to China's Daiqin at the Russian village of Skorovodino<sup>58</sup> (map 3.1).

From a pragmatic standpoint, the construction of the pipeline to Perevoznaya was the best option for Russia. This is because this port opens the country's wealth of resources to any potential Asian Pacific customer. Even if China were not to buy its natural resources at market price, Japan and Korea certainly would, thanks to the logic of competition. Despite what may have been the logical and the most economically profitable choice, Chinese diplomacy and Russia's deteriorated relations with the West may have ultimately played the main role in Russia's decision-making.

Despite this decision, in 2008 Russia and China remained in dispute over the price formula for Russian oil. The following citation best demonstrates this situation:

"the two sides were laboring through several rounds of negotiations over the loan rate, repayment guarantee, and pricing mechanism for oil shipment to China. The Russian side preferred a floating, or market, price for oil delivery and a fixed rate for loans from China. China insisted on the opposite: fixed pricing for oil from Russia and a floating credit rate to Russia at LIBOR+5 percent. Calling it "absurd lending terms," *Russian negotiators simply broke away from the talks in Beijing* (my italics) [...] the two sides met in Moscow again [...]. Rosneft indicated that China has agreed to the principal terms of the Russians. There was, however, no signing of the final agreement by year end."<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup>

To revert back to a previously mentioned point of analysis, it can be said that oil undoubtedly plays a central role in Sino-Russian relations at a political level. As rendered evident, energy resources have soured the dialogue between Beijing and Moscow.

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<sup>58</sup> The entire segment from Skovorodino to Daiqin is build by Chinese part and presently this pipeline is operational.

<sup>59</sup> China-Russia Relations: "Embracing a Storm and Each Other?" Comparative Connections v.10 n.4 2009

<sup>60</sup> To mention that Sino-Russian oil pipeline was launched in 2010-2011

The progression of Sino-Russian oil relations over time, as seen mainly through the lens of the East Siberian pipeline project, serves to highlight the following limitations in their long-term cooperation: China lent its political support to Russia primarily in an effort to address its resource needs, while Moscow offered its resources to China foremost in an effort to develop a new partnership subsequent to its deteriorated relations with the West.

For China, the pipeline deal served as a reality check; it rendered evident that Russia is not willing to honor its promises at the price of Russian national interests. The following statement by then-Vice-Minister of the National Development and Reform Commission, Zhang Guobao, illustrates China's negative perception of the "East Siberian Pipeline Saga":

"One moment Russia is saying they have made the decision, the next saying that no decision has been made. To date, there has been no correct information. This is regrettable... Currently, the Sino-Russian pipeline question is one step forward, two steps back. Today is cloudy with a chance for sun while tomorrow is sunny with a chance for clouds, just like weather forecast" (March 2006) -(Lo, 2008: 132)

Russia, on its part, experienced the shortcoming of its relations with China predominantly with the little support that Beijing lent to its military campaign in Georgia (which also unfortunately coincided with the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing) and the non-recognition of the independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

### 3.2 Sino – Russian Cooperation within Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

When looking at the political relations between Russia and China from a realist perspective, several important factors must be considered.

For one, both countries have issues and discordances with the United States. Russia's relations with the U.S./West were mostly covered in Chapters 1 and 2.

China's main dispute with the U.S. centers on, but cannot be reduced to, the issue of Taiwan.

Many of Beijing and Moscow's political contentions with the U.S. are shared. As previously mentioned, both countries are opposed to U.S. unipolarity and NATO's unilateral military actions in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Kosovo, which were conducted without a UN Security Council mandate. They are also opposed to the American presence in Central Asia and the U.S.'s intentions to build the Antibalistic Shield<sup>61</sup>, which would cover Europe and potentially Taiwan. Both Russia and China feel a similar threat being posed by this global superpower to their respective political interests.

It is assumed that in accordance with the balance of power theory, common contentions such as the United States hegemonic actions in Central Asia (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) would encourage Russia and China to undertake joint efforts in order to confront these challenges threatening their security.

The following will explore arguments in support of this assumption, as well as the limitations and contradictions imposed by systemic factors such as presence of security dilemma in their bilateral relations, which hinder effective cooperation between Beijing and Moscow.

While both countries cooperate with one another in many ways, the most significant political dialogue remains at the following levels:

- Cooperation amongst political leaders
- Cooperation within Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The relative "warming" in relations between Russia and China started under the leadership of USSR President Gorbachev in 1989, but were more significantly intensified under Foreign Affairs Minister Primakov (1996-1999) and recently under

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<sup>61</sup> [http://dni.gov/press\\_releases/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf)

Presidents Putin and Medvedev since 2000<sup>62</sup>. In 1989, Gorbachev conducted a 'friendly visit' to China for the first time since the Sino-Russian border disputes that arose in the 1960s. In 1996, Moscow, Beijing and other Central Asian republics (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan) signed the so-called Shanghai Agreement, which was originally aimed to suppress radical Islamist movements in Central Asia and in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Although it is quite obvious that the main political drive for both powers was and remains to keep the United States out of Central Asia.

The 1996 Agreement evolved into the Shanghai Five and then into Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. So let us look in details of evolution of Sino-Russian relations and development of SCO.

For the past twelve years, the presidents of China and Russia have met on an annual basis to discuss energy and military procurement. They have also conducted several major social and cultural events in promotion of one another over time. For example, 2005 was proclaimed the year of Russia in China and 2006 the year of China in Russia (Mankoff, 2009). In 2008, the newly elected president, Medvedev, made his first official visit to Beijing (Levesque, 2009, Mankoff, 2009). So-doing symbolized Russia's chosen political orientation (toward the East).

The realized cooperation between Moscow and Beijing can best be understood through their mutual recognition of each other's actions and claims that were frowned upon and refuted by the U.S./ West (Mankoff, 2009: 207). More specifically, China's decision to politically support Russia's military efforts in Chechnya<sup>63</sup> (1994 and 1999) and Beijing's shared concerns with Moscow over security issues regarding the 'Color Revolutions' (2003-2005) through SCO

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<sup>62</sup> In fact the real intense cooperation under Putin started after 2004-2005, when Russian-western relations faced another crisis after the series of Color Revolutions (Chapter 2)

<sup>63</sup> Russia has been heavily criticized by West for abusing human right in Chechnya during these conflicts (also see MacMillan 2009).



declarations. Russia, on its part, recognizes “one China” and refrains from criticism of China’s internal affairs, namely its relations with Tibet (Mankoff, 2009: 206).

One of the most significant products of Russia and China’s political cooperation remains the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The five original members were Russia, China, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. In 2001 it evolved into SCO, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan as its sixth member. Presently India, Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia are observers in the organization<sup>64</sup>.

The present SCO agenda has grown to have a more complex agenda in Asia (the territory of its members and observers) over time. SCO today deals with energy security and economic development, opposition to separatism and terrorism, and comprises military cooperation among its members. In contrast to NATO, however, SCO has never identified itself as a military bloc (Mankoff, 2009: 205-210).

The map below renders evident that the organization covers a large area of the Asian continent (Map 3.2).

Here, we will apply the neorealist paradigm to analyze the impact of this organization on international politics and also on Russia’s place in the multipolar world.

As one would assume, given their size and relative power, Russia and China are the major players in the Central Asian region, each pursuing their own agenda based on their respective political interests.

However, both also see the purpose of SCO differently. On the one hand, Russia sees the organization as a counterbalance to NATO and its enlargement policy. Scholars have argued that at the inception of SCO, Russia was trying to emphasize the importance of its military component and even the consideration of the

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<sup>64</sup> Official web site of SCO: <http://www.sectsco.org/EN/secretary.asp>

reproduction of the “Warsaw Pact” (Mankoff, 2009). This vision was not, however, shared by China. The latter saw SCO as more of an expansion of its power. China uses more soft power methods to promote its interests, such as economic and bilateral relations with SCO members (Mankoff, 2009:217-220; Lo, 2008).

These realities lend further support to that which was discussed in Chapter 1; that stronger powers use global and regional institutions to promote and legitimize their political interests (Mearshaimer, 1994).

Despite their different visions, the two cooperated through SCO to achieve their central common interest, which is to keep the U.S.A. out of Central Asia. During the SCO summit in 2005, one of SCO’s decisions was to request that Washington set a timetable of withdrawal of American troops from the territory of SCO members Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The latter requested that US remove its troops from the K-2 air base<sup>65</sup>, which were used to support NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Let us review the following outline of the events that led up to the abovementioned goal.

The year 2001 was one of great importance for their bilateral relations. In that year Russia and China’s relations experienced increased strength as well as the rise of several contentions. SCO was officially created and during the meeting of Russia and China’s presidents, Zemin and Putin, the necessity to keep NATO and the U.S. out of Central Asia was agreed upon (Levesque, 2011; Mankoff, 2009). However, Putin saw the events of 9/11 as an opportunity to restore Russia’s good relations with the U.S. Immediately after these events, Moscow supported Washington’s decision to attack Afghanistan by consenting to the U.S.’s use of Kirgizstan and Uzbekistan as military

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/HL08Ad01.html>

air bases (Chapter 2). This evidently irritated Beijing given Moscow's disregard for their aforementioned agreement (Mankoff, 2009: 207; Lo, 2008).

By 2005, the political relations between Russia and the U.S., and Russia and China had significantly changed. NATO, led by Washington, had in 2004 invited seven new members to join the Alliance (Chapter 2), and a series of Color Revolution took place in a number of former Soviet Republics, including the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (Chapter 2). The spread of U.S.- sponsored democratization in the world worried both Beijing and Moscow to the same degree. The departure of the influence of the U.S. from Central Asia accordingly resurged as the common goal of both powers.

As a result of SCO meetings and a series of bilateral meetings between China and Russia, the setting of a timetable for American withdrawal was agreed upon, executed, and achieved. In 2006, the U.S. withdrew from Uzbekistan. In that same year, SCO also rejected the U.S.'s request to become an SCO observer. While this decision was explained to the U.S. as being consequent to the lack of land borders that the U.S. shared with any of the SCO members, Beijing and Moscow in reality simply opposed the U.S.'s presence in SCO as part of its common goal to keep the U.S. out of Central Asia. This reality lends further support to the neorealist contention that threats to state security are dealt with quickly and made a top political priority.

Despite the obvious shared geopolitical interests of China and Russia in Central Asia in 2005-2006, their relations were limited by a number of factors.

For one, China has thus far never risked its good relations with the U.S. by lending too much support to Russia. For example, since none of SCO declaration contains direct offensive text towards USA, we may deduct that China stood firmly behind this. As one may recall, China also did not support Russia when it recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008. China evidently has its

own separatist problems (Taiwan and Xinjiang), which due to other pragmatic reasons restrain it from supporting Russia in this regard.

A second, correlated limitation to effective Sino-Russian relations is the lack of a common view between both countries on the purpose of SCO. Russia envisions the future of SCO as a “full-fledged” security organization (Mankoff, 2009:221). It is obvious that Russia tries to find ways to counterbalance NATO’s enlargement policy. Conversely, China’s policy is oriented toward peaceful coexistence and promoting its national interests in Central Asia (mostly energy; oil). Accordingly, Beijing does not support the idea of provoking the U.S., and the West more generally, through the policy of NATO counterbalancing.

The following highlights the fact that both Russia and China do not in fact share long-term common interests and even fewer common views on the same issues. Their cooperation can be described as very pragmatic in nature and relatively short-termed. In 2005, when both China and Russia pursued the same goal to keep the U.S. out of Central Asia, namely by forcing the U.S. to close its bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the cooperation was at its peak. SCO’s requisition that the U.S. leave Uzbekistan was pronounced and in 2006 actually implemented (described above). One year earlier, both China and Russia also hosted the biggest military SCO exercise ever, the Peace Mission 2005, in which approximately 10000 troops from SCO members participated and all heads of SCO states attended. However, in later years, the dynamics between China and Russia slowed down considerably, which demonstrated their decreased commitment to one another. For example, the Peace Mission in 2009 and 2010 involved only 1000 Russian soldiers and far less mass-media attention (Table 3.1). In 2012 about 400 Chinese and about 500 Russian troops were participating in Tajikistan<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/node\\_54180.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/node_54180.htm)

A close look at China's policy and interests within the SCO may further enable us to predict potential future contradictions between Beijing and Moscow. Both countries are big and significant regional players. China has already reached the rank of world's second largest economy and its spectacular growth continues today. In the realist anarchic world, two powers' policy toward one another is by default constrained and shaped by the security dilemma. Presently China is a rising power with global potential bordering Russia and with whom the country shares previous historical disputes. This potential security threat, cannot be ignored by Russian policy makers.

Presently there are some Russian concerns in regard to potential problematic issues that occur in the past such as previous border issues (1969) and the illegal immigration of Chinese nationals to Russia's undeveloped Far East.

The resolution of the Amur River border issue is one of Putin's renowned successes that was resolved in 2004-2008 through the signing of a border agreement between Russia and China. Consequent to this resolution Russia presents itself as free of past problems, and in a position to turn over a new leaf in its relations with China and achieve mutually beneficial cooperation. This also demonstrates Russian commitment to maintain good relations with growing power such as China. Despite this success, however, the potential for future contradictions over borders is not excluded.

The immigration of Chinese nationals to the Far East is a very sensitive and controversial security challenge for Russia. Many scholars have underscored the fact that Russia's Far East (RFE) is very rich in mineral and oil but continues to be undeveloped in terms of its poor infrastructure, and lack of basic social services and essential goods (e.g. milk and meat). Given its remote location, RFE is a territory that is very difficult to monitor and control (Mankoff, 2009).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic gap in the Far East was largely compensated by Chinese goods brought by Chinese sellers. This, in its turn, stimulated the phenomenon of Chinese nationals immigrating to Russia. In 2006, Putin drew the attention of the Russian Security council to the possibility of losing the Far East if the situation persisted. He warned that the immigration of Chinese nationals could be coupled with the emigration of Russian inhabitants.

Some sources have highlighted the potential for the millions of illegal Chinese immigrants in RFE to aggravate Moscow's sense of loss of control over the region. Others (Lo and Mankoff) claim that the actual number of Chinese immigrants (in total) is between 100 – 200 thousand, and thus only consider it a minor problem for demographic challenges (Lo, 2002; 2008; Mankoff, 2009:224). Whether or not the issue of Chinese immigration to RFE is indeed problematic for Russia's territorial integrity remains to be seen. However, one can say with confidence that this threatened sense of security impacts Russia's cooperation with China in the long term.

Russia's cooperation with China in the long-term is equally negatively impacted by the variety of previously mentioned problem areas, which all have the capacity to become larger issues over time.

By taking a brief look at Sino-Russian relations from the social constructivist point of view, we may learn the following interesting facts.

As aforementioned, the relations between the two countries have deep historical roots. I will forward Voskresenski's argument that "the history of Sino-Russian relations has still not been as fully studied as it deserves to be" (2003:3). History plays a significant role in the complexity of Sino-Russian relations because, in the past, Russia and China's warm relations nearly always ended in serious conflicts (1960s, 1989) and previous military confrontations (when Russians occupied Manchuria in 1900). The above undoubtedly impacts on the Russian

perception of China and Chinese as potentially unpredictable ally, limiting mutual trust in a long term.

One of the main reasons for which the history of Sino-Russian relations has not yet been fully studied is due to the lack of knowledge of both Chinese and Russian languages and cultures among scholars (Voskressenski, 2003).

This cultural dimension of analysis is offered by the social constructivist theory. Cultural differences between Russia and China are important for our analysis because they likewise frame the terms of their cooperation. As noted by Voskressenski, "Russian researches [in the 1960s -1980s] began to stress the incompatibility between Asian (Chinese) and Western (Russian) tradition in establishing equal diplomatic relations" (Voskressenski, 2003:15). An exemplification of this incompatibility would be the ten-year-long negotiations between Russia and China on a common vision for the Eastern Siberian pipeline, and more recent disputes on oil prices<sup>67</sup> due to not only economic but, as we may assume from above also due to cultural reasons.

### 3.3 Resuming Sino-Russian Relations

The social constructivist elements of history and culture in fact underscore the same conclusion that was highlighted by our neorealist analysis: that Sino-Russian relations are far from being perfect, rather they remain highly unstable. The aforementioned limitations, security dilemmas, multiple historical precedents, and cultural differences reduce the potential for an effective, long-term and mutually beneficial alliance between Russia and China.

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<sup>67</sup> As quite known fact that in Eastern cultures (ex, Chinese and Japanese) agreed price in negotiations does not guarantee respecting it, often parties would try respectfully increase or diminish agreed prices due multiple not often objective reasons.

Bo Lo's *Axis of Convenience* (2008) argues that the main goal of Beijing's cooperation with Moscow is to keep Russia as a "resource cow", which remains too simplistic and narrow. I would agree with Professor Levesque (2011) that this conclusion does not reflect the true depth of their cooperation. Even though the goals of both parts are different and based on their respective national interests, China needs support in its foreign political agenda, as much as Russia needs China's.

Sino-Russian relations are pragmatic in their nature; each part strives to achieve their respective goals through their partnership with one another, however their self-interested motives, often overlap. Examples may show competing interests in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics (Mankoff, 2009). And similarly, the most recent one in Vietnam, when in April 2012 Russian Gasprom signs a deal of exploration of continental shelf in the South China Sea<sup>68</sup>. This is again taken painfully by the Beijing:

"...Russia should not send any wrong or ambiguous signals about the South China Sea. It will not only make the dispute (Vietnam and Philippines) even more difficult to settle for China, but also raises doubts about Russia's real intentions behind the gas deal."<sup>69</sup>

All of the above brings to the general conclusion that Sino-Russian relations remain efficient for short-term goal such as counter-balance US policy in Central Asia, but quite unpredictable in the long-term, affected by multiple limitations (security dilemmas) and preserve room for potential disputes.

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<sup>68</sup> Point of territorial dispute between China and Vietnam

<sup>69</sup> M.K. Bhadrakumar «A fly in China's Russian ointment». *Asia times*. April 17, 2012



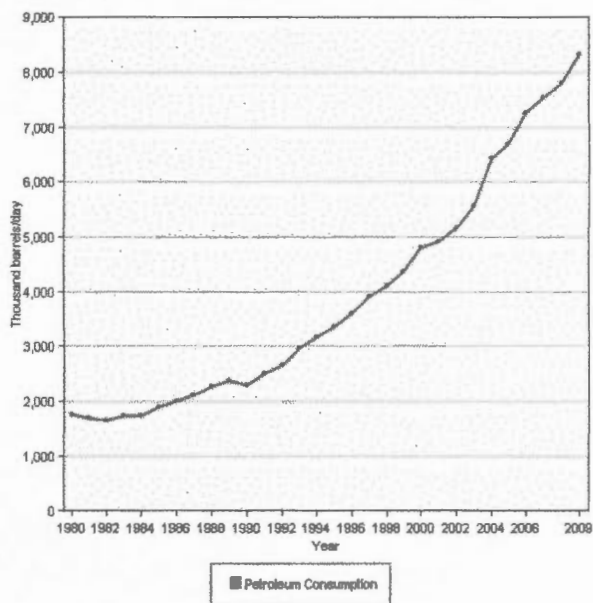


Fig. 3.1 China's oil consumption (Source: EIA)

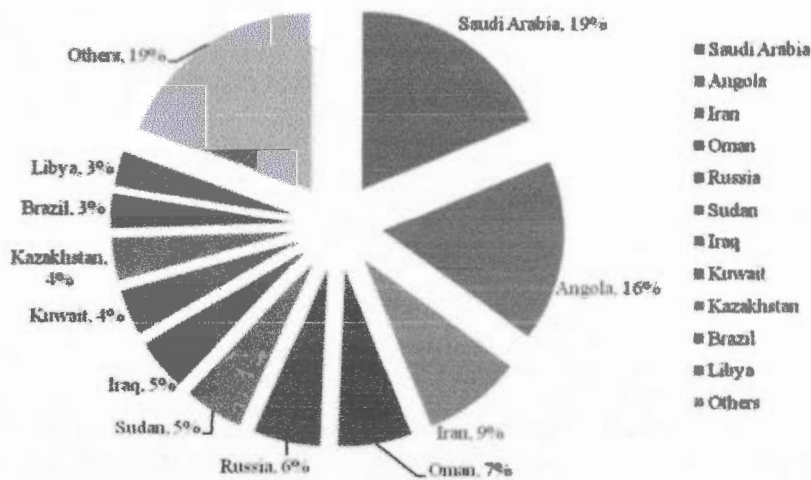


Fig. 3.2 Chinese oil imports in 2009<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> For fig. 3.2 and 3.3 others are: Brazil, Kazakhstan, Libya, UAE, Yemen, Congo, Venezuela, Colombia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Equat. Guinea, Qatar, Gabon, Australia, Cuba, Vietnam, Equador, Thailand, Mongolia

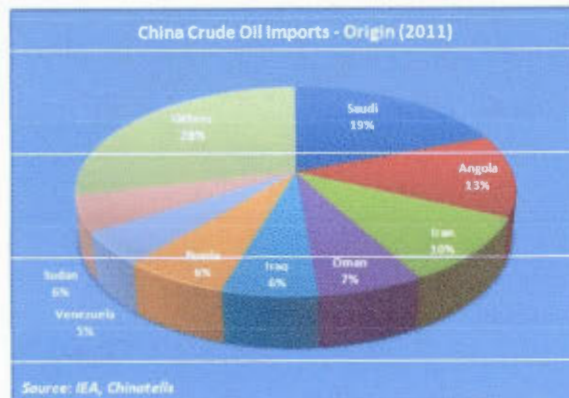
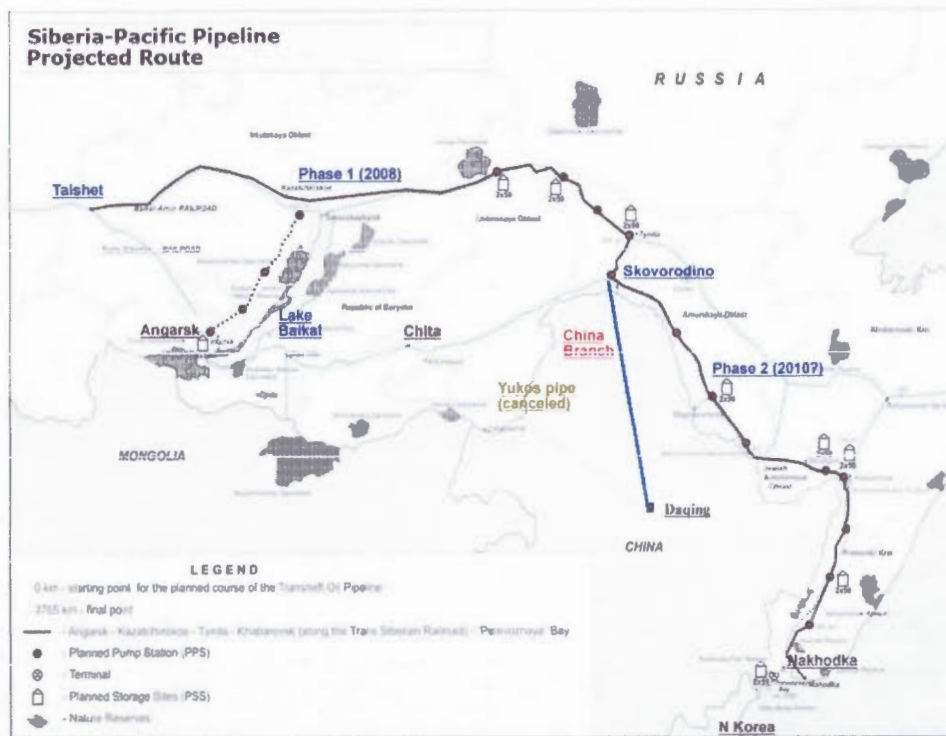
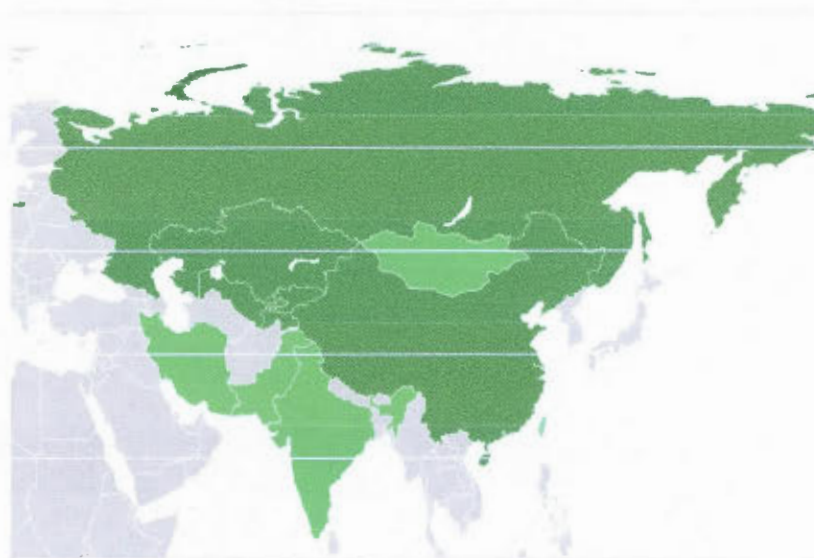


Fig. 3.3 Chinese oil imports 2011<sup>71</sup>



Map 3.1 Siberian-Pacific Pipeline project

<sup>71</sup> ibid



**3.2 Map of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation<sup>72</sup>**

<b>Codename</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Troops involved</b>
Peace Mission 2005	18-26 August 2005	Vladivostok, Russia; Shandong province, China; Yellow Sea	China, Russia	10 000 soldiers
Peace Mission 2007	9-17 August 2007	Urumqi, Autonomous Region Xinjiang, China; Chelyabinsk Oblast, Military District Volga- Ural, Russia	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	6500 soldiers
Peace Mission 2009	22-26 July 2009	Taonan, Jilin province, China; Khabarovsk, Khabarovsk Krai, Russia	China, Russia	2600 soldiers

**Table 3.1: Forces Participating in Military Exercises “Peace Mission.”<sup>73</sup>**

<sup>72</sup> Dark green color represents full members, light green represent the observers of SCO

<sup>73</sup> Sliwa, 2010

#### CHAPTER 4. RUSSIAN ROLE IN POST SOVIET REGION. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In previous chapters we have analysed the potential for Russia's alliance with the West (U.S.) and East (China), and defined the significant limitations of Moscow's long-term cooperation with each. In addition, both case studies were aligned with Waltz's neorealist theory and its central tenets, namely: the elements of survival, balance of power, role of resources, *etc.*, which excludes variables such as role of history and identity.

In this final Chapter, we will examine Russia's third foreign policy option in the multipolar world: consolidating itself as an independent pole and regional hegemon in former Soviet territory. Russia's position as a dominating regional power is not a historic anomaly. This extended reach and control began under the Russian Empire as early as the 1700s and continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, this political objective of regaining control is a central goal of Russian foreign policy since it is central to state security as well as international recognition.

It is argued here, that at present, the Kremlin will lean to position itself in the world as an independent pole that will be in control of the former Soviet republic nations. Furthermore, seeking an alliance with either the East or the West (but likely not both) remains a secondary priority for Russian policy makers, serving for pragmatic, often short term political (balance of power, bandwagoning, *etc.* ) and economic purposes. Current external systemic factors and internal variables are prompting Russia to continue its foreign policy strategy of regaining and consolidating control over post-Soviet territory as part of vital national interests. The main analytical lens that will be used to illustrate this position is social constructivism, specifically the role of historic continuity, national identity, and social factors (Finnemore, 1996).

#### 4.1 The Russian Ruling Elite and the Three Visions of Russian Foreign Policy

We will first examine the pattern of Russia's foreign policy from a historical perspective. Over the centuries, the foreign policy of what is today called the Russian Federation has fluctuated between alliances with the West (Peter the Great, Gorbachev, Kozyrev), consolidating itself as a regional power (Russian Empire), and even at times having global ambitions (Lenin, Stalin, Marxists Global Revolution). This fluctuation has been analysed by several scholars of international relations, primarily through the use of the social constructivist lens. Ted Hopf and Andrey Tsygankov are the two central authors that have attempted to explain Russian foreign policy through the application of this theory. Both emphasize the impact of identity and ideology of the Russian elite on the Kremlin's foreign policy (Petersburg in the Tsarist past). The visions of these two scholars differ slightly from one another but the core of their analyses remains the same.

In Hopf's work (1999) we may distinguish between two different national identities: (1) The New Western Russian (NWR) aspiring toward Europeanization (seeing themselves as part of European civilization), democratization and the decentralization of state control; and (2) The New Soviet Man (NSM) that sees Russia as "the Great Power which Russia always was", rather than just being a "part" of Europe, while placing an emphasis on the strong centralization of state power (Hopf, 1999).

Tsygankov has a slightly different and more detailed division of Russian national identity into three types. The First, *Westernizers*, comprise those who identify themselves as part of European (Western) civilization and strive for liberal reforms, as well as a decentralized state. Second, there are the *Statists*<sup>74</sup> who are characterized by a pragmatic vision of balancing alliances between the West and the East, emphasizing internal stability and centralized power control. *Statists* also strive

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<sup>74</sup>From "derjavniki". *Derjava* stands not only country and state but as well Great Power.

to ensure that Russia is recognized internationally as a Great Power. Third are the *Civilizationists*; those with an extreme vision of Russia as a civilization apart, pursuing its own course in world politics (apart from the East or West), as an independent empire with control over neighbouring regions.

There are a number of historical examples of the different national identities presented by Tsygankov. The identities of the *Civilizationists* and *Westernizers* will be explored very briefly before we delve into the identity of the *Statists* in depth. The reason why our analysis will focus on the latter is because the current ruling political elite in Russia are *Statists*, and thus focusing on this identity will enable us to better ascertain Russia's current and projected position in the multipolar world.

*Civilizationists* have been prominent throughout Russian history. For example, the Tsar Ivan IV ("The Terrible") and the powerful role of the Russian Orthodox church in the region in the sixteenth century, Lenin-Trotsky (1917-1921) and the central role of Russia in the global Marxist revolution, who perceived Russia as an independent civilization and empire wherein Soviet republics are its provinces (presently, V. Jirinovsky and G. Ziuganov represent this identity stream).

The famous *Westernizers* in Russian history are Peter the Great and Alexander I (Holy Alliance) who reformed Russia's foreign policy and military through the implementation of Western ideals. Recently, Gorbachev and his *New Thinking* (1985-1990) together with Kozyrev's pro-West policy (1991-1993) also represent this vision (Tsygankov, 2006).

It should also be mentioned that there have historically been Russian national identities that balance between two different spheres. For example, Primakov's Great Power constituted a balance between *Civilizationists* and *Statists*. He put a focus on power balancing in international politics and aimed to position Russia as a great world power with an independent foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2006:9-12 and Ch 3).

Putin and the current Russian political elite are clearly *Statists*. As Mankoff remarks in his book *Russian Foreign policy* (2009), the design and execution of Russia's foreign policy remains the exclusive right of a small circle of political elite, with no input from independent political organisations. This Russian political hegemon is contrasted with the West's policy making, where political think tanks, institutions and NGOs equally contribute, shape and influence foreign policy of Western states. The ideology and identity of Russia's political elite determine the country's present political course (Mankoff, 2009). While the above internal elements are disregarded by neorealism, it will be shown here that they have a significant impact on Russian foreign policy as do Waltz's external systemic factors. Furthermore, they explain the radical shifts in the course of Russia's foreign policy in greater depth.

Serghei Medvedev's *Power, Space and Russian Foreign Policy* (1999) presents a historical continuity that illustrates the relations between the centralized and decentralized power and the stability and instability of the Russian state from the 1480s to 1993. In his work, "Culture One" (*Westernizers*) are associated with the decentralized leadership that is characterized by more freedom, which in turn produce societal progress. However these reforms weaken the state power and often result in internal political turmoil and instability. Conversely, "Culture Two" (*Statists*), are associated with vertical leadership and constraints, apparently resulting in a stronger and more stable state able to maintain internal discipline influence international politics. Though, having a "strong" state is also characterised by societal stagnation and a resistance of progress. (Hopf, 1999).

The above descriptions serve to underscore Russia's continuous dilemma between maintaining a "strong" yet stagnant state produced by the *Statists* and a state characterized by societal modernization and followed by weakness of state (defined above), produced by *Westernizers*. In this cycle, when the state weakens there

becomes a necessity to restore its power, which often results in a dictatorship that subsequently ends with painful reforms or revolutions.

Here I'd like to emphasize the importance and the year – 1999, which is prior to Putin's era –, and to link it to subsequent and present circumstances in Russia. Putin, who came to power in the year 2000, started to act exactly in accordance with the above description of a *Statist*. One of the main goals of his leadership would be the consolidation of state internal and external power and, by consequence, restoring Russia as a great power. The latter implies making Russia as independent international actor, with regional hegemon capacity able to exert control over former Soviet Republics, which represents vital territory for the Kremlin. This will likely happen at cost of confrontation with other great powers for incidences wherein Russian national interests are not respected or are challenged (as demonstrated through recent Russian-Georgian military conflict).

Knowing the political identity of the present ruling elite helps to identify the main priorities of its internal and external political course, which directly or indirectly impact Russian foreign policy.

Internally, one of the main goals for the *Statists* (in our case for Putin and his team) is to remain in power by all means necessary. Some reasons for this are self-evident, but below are some arguments related to Russian particularities that may explain this. In the last century every Russian leadership change has been dramatic. The new power, which replaces the old one, is always characterized as revisionist and revanchist to its predecessors. Soviet history contains both: examples of Machiavelli struggles for power and the “revanchism”. In 1917, Bolsheviki assassinated the Tzar's family; Stalin killed his opponents after Lenin's death; Khrushchev executed Beria and dismissed from positions those who served with Stalin; Democrats in 1991 dismissed Communists, *etc.* (Lukas, 2008, Lo, 2002).



This phenomenon of power transition, characteristic to Russia, is clearly a cultural particularity found all over post-Soviet territories. The roots of this are in a history having a lack of any traditional practical mechanism of giving up or transit to the succeeding power. The most common reason for political replacement in Soviet and Russian history was death, revolution, or critical illness. Today this regional particularity is not much different. The most sound and recent example is the ongoing imprisonment of Timoshenko (former Ukrainian prime-minister) by president Yanukovitch in Ukraine (2011).

To demonstrate why the aforementioned details are relevant to the thesis topic let us examine the following point. Since at present there are no indicators of any sufficiently challenging opposition ready to take over power from the *Statist* regime, the assumption is made that Putin's team will maintain and further consolidate its power over the State and the current foreign policy will persist for the foreseeable future. Let us review some facts that support the above assumption. First, the most evident argument is Putin's "tandem formula" which allows him to bypass constitutional limitations in regards to presidential terms:

"No one person shall hold the office of President of the Russian Federation for more than two terms in succession." (article 81.3 of Russian Constitution)

Near the end of Putin's presidency he neither immediately sought an extension of office into a third term nor attempted change the duration of the presidential mandate (four years). A solution was found by the Russian leadership: the appointment of Medvedev for Russian presidency in the interim and make Putin the prime-minister with enlarged power, including power over foreign policy issues (which *de facto* kept Putin in power). Shortly after, the Duma council, mostly controlled by Putin's party "Yedynnaya Rossia" (United Russia), voted to change the constitution in order to increase the presidential term for up to six years<sup>75</sup>. In 2012, to

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<sup>75</sup> Article 81.1 of Russian Constitution

no surprise, the president of Russia was once again Vladimir Putin. Of course there is very little doubt that his stay in power is intended to be for the minimum of the next 12 years. This example demonstrates a clear intention of current leadership to find legitimate (constitutional) ways to stay in power for longer.

The second argument I will present here serves the ruling elite's purpose of complete elimination of "pure" opposition to the present regime. In 2000, The Russian Duma council consisted of parties from about 6 major political blocs, two of which were pro-Western democrats before Putin and the election threshold for parties was 3%. However, in 2007 and in 2011 the election threshold was raised to 7%<sup>76</sup>, which made it impossible for the smaller parties to surpass it. Today only 4 parties represent the Russian Duma: Putin's Edinnaya Rossia, Communist party (KPRF), Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and Spravedlivaia Rossia (Fair Russia). Two of those parties, LDPR and Spravedlivaia Rossia are supportive of Putin's actions, but KPRF maintains its status quo in Russian politics (mostly not limiting present Power).

Other tactics may serve the long term goal of maintaining control, many of which Putin has launched in the last 12 years. It is assumed that Putin and his party are trying to legitimize their long stay in power by being citing a need to "finish started projects" in the "biggest country of the world"<sup>77</sup>. Among these projects we may stress the restoration of Russian power and seeking international recognition, as well the integration process with the former Soviet territories. In large part these goals are accomplished through the use of existing regional institutions (CIS, CSTO, Customs Union)<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> If a party scores between 4-6% they are granted 1-2 seats (not proportional to percentage)

<sup>77</sup> Then Russian Duma voted increase of presidential terms from 4 to 6 years, one of the main arguments served that such a big country as Russia 4 years is not enough to implement long term projects.

<sup>78</sup> Presented later in the chapter.

Also, these projects go hand-in-hand with an identity quest for Russia.. So let us look briefly into this further.

#### 4.2 Russian Identity and Russian National Idea

It was already mentioned that the role of identity in Social Constructivism is important, which helps explain the direction of the state's foreign policy in Russia. For example, the Russian political progress towards Westernisation between 1992 and 1995 may be linked with a pro-European identity, while sudden turns in 1996 and since 2004 are connected with a "westernization identity crisis" (Huntington, 1996: 76) and a pro-nationalistic response to this crisis. The path to Westernization had failed, and under Primakov Russia had distanced itself from Europe. However, between 1996 and 1999 Russia was still unable to re-build and establish itself as a true big power with International influence comparable to other great powers of the world. The economic crisis of 1998 created prospects of an even gloomier future for Russian ambitions to become one of the globe's poles. Nevertheless, Putin's actions aimed to restore Russian internal stability and economic recovery through the centralization of power coupled with high oil prices started to bring positive results (since 2001). The catastrophic events in the United States on September 11th, 2001 were seen by Putin as an opportunity to re-build relations with the USA and the Western world. From the realist point of view this can be explained as a pragmatic calculation (bandwagoning, balance of power or economic gains). But from a constructivist point of view this is a decision that can be explained through the role of identity, In this case, it is the natural desire (due to its identity and historic past) to be part of Western civilization. Russian internal debate over the question of Russian identity (European or Asian) may be summarized in the following quote by Putin:

"We are part of the Western European Culture. No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the South, we are Europeans." – V Putin (Tsygankov, 2006:127).

However today, we may observe that Russia follows the path of a so called “unique identity”<sup>79</sup>, with a direct connection with neither the East nor West. Under this identity, present Russian leaders aim to re-build a great Russia, but to do so Putin and his team need to unite its people under the same national idea. Finding the Russian national idea remains a hard task for the current leadership. Let us briefly look at how these factors impacted internal and external policies of the Russian Federation.

At first, the main Russian national drive (as part of bigger National idea) under Putin was to rapidly increase the wealth of the general population, trying to reach the level of those living in Western European countries (in the long run). Consequently, In 2000-2004 the Russian economy demonstrated significant recovery and growth stimulated by the rising prices of hydro-carbonates coming from Russia, while Putin promised to double GDP by the end of 2008. The goal of “Udvoennie VVP<sup>80</sup>” (double GDP) was largely supported during Putin’s first presidential term. Those ambitions were mostly welcomed by with the West and Putin’s personal friendship with German and Italian leaders strengthened, which was hoped to help open European doors for economic cooperation<sup>81</sup>. But in 2004, after the presidential re-election, the “double GDP” ideology was quickly discarded due to the impossibility of fulfilling of this goal in such a short term. For some time the main ideological goal remained to “improve the wealth and life-style of the Russian people”. Later this populist goal has also failed, mainly due to internal problems related to Russian chronic problems: poor management, and corruption which has persisted in Russian society since Soviet times.

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<sup>79</sup> In Huntington we may observe term of Orthodox civilisation (1996), but it is definitely more than just religious.

<sup>80</sup> VVP stands for GDP (in Russian) but also the first letters of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin’s name (VVP)

<sup>81</sup> EU remains Russia’s biggest economic partners and contributor to Russian GDP

The second term of Putin's presidency (2004-2008) is characterized by further attempts to consolidate a national idea, which would unite Russian people and will drive them to ultimate goal to build a strong and capable Russia. This time, the Kremlin put an emphasis on vital national interests (chapter 1) to preserve Russia as a united and strong state, capable of conducting independent foreign policy, and defending its interests while being internationally recognized for doing so. These interests held important geo-political significance for Kremlin regarding the surrounding independent territories of the post-Soviet territories. Presidential declaration as well as many important strategic documents clearly stress Russian political objectives of restoring former power and might, and to place itself as one of the globe's independent influences. In other words, they felt that: "the Russian Federation possesses real capacity to play a well deserved role globally".<sup>82</sup>

Since 2004/2005, Russia has dramatically changed both its internal and external policies. This has mostly been fuelled by worsening relations with USA, political crisis and revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as internal problems and counter-measures aimed at straightening state control. As seen by the Russian people, Moscow gradually generates a negative image of NATO, which is lead largely by the USA, which is threatening stability of the Russian state. This Kremlin-originated propaganda is massively supported by Russian mass-media, which happens to also be run by the Kremlin. The USA and other Western countries are presented as hostile entities with the goal of weakening Russia and gaining control over their resources. Russian ideology makers are certainly well aware of the fact that nothing unites people more efficiently than having a common enemy and threat. This also serves to reduce public attention from other problems within the country such as corruption and the low standards of life that the majority of the Russian population live in.

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<sup>82</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation from July 2008

From a theoretical perspective, this may be paralleled with constructivist view of Wendt:

“This seems to be happening today in the United States and the former Soviet Union: without the cold war's mutual attributions of threat and hostility to define their identities, these states seem unsure of what their "interests" should be” (Wendt, 1992)

By presenting a negative image of NATO to the Russian people, the Kremlin legitimizes its controversial internal and external policy actions. At first, Moscow interdicts any foreign financial support to Russian NGO's and created its own youth organisation, called “Nashi” (ours) aimed at opposing the pro-Western organisations which stood behind the revolutions in Belgrade, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kirghizstan (MacKinnon, 2009).

It should also be noted that Russian mass media has radically changed its content from highly political program into highly entertaining programming. The purpose behind this seems quite evident: once again to distract people from the important issues faced by the country and to lessen awareness of any opposition to those in power. Most Russians get their information from TV and Radio. Since Putin's people controls all opposition channels, previously sponsored by oligarchs (tycoons), *via* the purchase through the Kremlin's loyal companies and holdings. Today Russian mass-media is quite distant from politics, does not permit any critique of Putin's policy and most of the news look like it did in the former Soviet Union: presenting only successes of current leadership and “evil” plans of the West, led principally by the USA<sup>83</sup>. At the same time those watching Russian TV may observe a tendency to promote the image of “nashi”. However, I would like to make an important point that in Russian the term “nashi” (ours) has a very strong meaning: those who come from Soviet Union, identified as soviet brothers. Russian TV and mass-media is still widely popular over the entire ex-Soviet territories (especially first Russian Chanel – “Pervyi Kanal”). Since 2008 (when Russian-US relations were at a

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<sup>83</sup> Multiple examples may be found in Russian media for example “Magnitski Act” as most recent.

maximum tension over disputes in Georgia) the above-mentioned propaganda became even more intense.

Another example to support propaganda of a nostalgic common past and shared interests is that Russian BBC radio, when discussing political news *via* public debates, receives phone calls from all nations of the former Soviet Union. Then the most famous humoristic TV show titled “KVN” (has been on TV for 50 years already) in 2010 included contestants on teams from all the ex-Soviet Republics including Baltic States, but not including Georgia. The main message here was that of regret of no longer being united in a once strong country (USSR)<sup>84</sup>.

Putin as well Medvedev have always presented their position in regards to re-building the Soviet Union as non-sense since the authoritarian system of the USSR is a political and ideological dead-end (Hopf, 2010). However, in reality it is not always as they say. Hopf presents arguments of contemporary Russian manuals for history where communist ontology persists (e.g. division of society in working class and bourgeois). In addition, both Russian leaders and multiple political figures in other countries are quite nostalgic for the former Soviet might. Putin (2005) personally stated that:

“First and foremost it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”.

There are little hints present in the details surrounding this quote referring to a hidden agenda to re-build not Soviet-Union *per se*, but certainly Russia having a similar capacity and influence as the USSR did in the past. For example, when Putin met with George Bush to discuss Kiev’s potential intention to join NATO (2008), Putin was quoted as saying that “Ukraine is not even a state” (Levesque 2009, 2012). Further, in April of 2007 on one of the political news TV editions, presenter Leonov would name Ukraine as a Russian province trying to play dangerous games with

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<sup>84</sup> The popularity of that show can be also supported by the fact that President Putin and Medvedev would assist on this 3 hours show as part of their electorate program in 2004, 2009 and 2011

Moscow through its aspirations to join NATO. Historically Ukraine has never existed as independent state and for the last 300 years was part of the Russian empire. In this light, most Russians and even many Ukrainians see Ukraine as part of Russia and not as an independent state. Similarly, quite recently, a teacher at a Russian school in Moldova wrote a letter to president Putin asking for help and protection from the Russian leader (20.08.2012), thereby ignoring pro-Western Moldovan leadership of today. This presents Putin's power and authority as unchallenged in the entire post-Soviet region. This is not random or unique in post-Soviet space, and there are many other examples demonstrating a very strong legacy of Soviet identity (*nashi* – ours) which is still so strong that often challenges other post Soviet republics national identities. The majority of Byelorussians, Ukrainians and a big part of Moldovans still identify themselves with Russian speaking population loyal to Moscow, often nostalgic for Soviet past.

Let us briefly summarize this: tens of millions of people all over of former Soviet Union still identify themselves as Soviet . Using the term “*nash*” (our), they regret the dissolution of the mighty USSR. This enormous human resource, which identifies itself under the same is definitely not ignored by the Kremlin. And why should it be ignored? Presently only a few have profited from the market economy and improved their lives accordingly, while the huge majority of the former Soviet population, mostly those who are now 40 years old or over, have a lower quality of life and certainly miss Soviet times. In the same light, older populations remain suspicious of American (Western) intentions, and support the Kremlin's hard line for power centralisation. Many of those pro-“*nashi*” live in near abroad: Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and even in Baltic States and have a strong Russian speaking community which supports Kremlin's policy at the level of the society.

Russia in 1992 is not comparable in strength to Russia today. Available economic resources collected from oil and gas revenues since 2001 have allowed



Moscow to defend its vital interests, including through challenging global powers in regional affairs. As well, the Kremlin uses alternative means to exert its influence which are not exclusively realist by nature: the role of identity in trying to legitimize Russian "rights" over the neighbouring territories and dealing with ex-Soviet Republics.

"The history of Russian Soviet control has created a series of cultural-economic and political linkages that make reliance on Moscow a relatively familiar strategy for the soviet trained elite of most CIS countries" (Mankoff, 2009: Cp6. Conclusions).

Beginning from this perspective, let us now examine how today Russia is using the non-declared idea of re-integrating Post-Soviet territories under its leadership in order to legitimize its foreign policy interests of controlling neighbouring states and consolidating itself as regional hegemon.

#### 4.3 Russian Influence and Actions in Post-Soviet Territories

In order for Russia to carry out its mandate of expansion, consolidation of strength in the surrounding region, and international recognition, the government must at times be aggressive and even ruthless with its actions. Although this is not a quality that is unique to Russia, there are multiple signs, indications, declarations, and other actions which demonstrate Russia's intentions to become a regional hegemon and be recognized internationally for its power and legitimacy. Below I would like to bring several facts to light regarding Russia's prioritization and efforts in foreign policy aimed at the consolidation of its position as leading power in post-Soviet territory and restoring its international role as a "great power".

As mentioned already, Russia's priority for state security is to be able to control the neighbouring countries due to the geopolitical values for Moscow, here are some examples. Ukraine rents maritime bay to Russian Black Sea Naval Fleet, similarly Moscow rents the Baykonur cosmodrome from Kazakhstan and

successfully negotiates with Astana over oil exports. Moldova remains an important territory for Russian military bases and ammo depots. Abkhazia retains value to Moscow due to accessibility to the Eastern side of the Black Sea; and Turkmenistan is valuable due to its natural gas. Post-Soviet territory represents major political interest for Moscow (also see chapter 1). Through its aggressive actions in South Abkhazia against Georgia (2008) and political involvement in Ukraine (2009-2010), Russia recently has demonstrated that it is not ready to give up crucial territories such as Ukraine and Georgia while being “completely encircled by NATO” (Mankoff, 2009: 241-243).

The geopolitical importance of former Soviet republics for a Russian sense of security is not a deduced conclusion based on a political analysis of Moscow’s actions in this regard, but it is also officially declared in fundamental Russian documents.

In reading the recent “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” (July, 2008), which is defined as: “a system of views on the content, principles and main areas of the foreign policy activities of Russia”<sup>85</sup>, we instantly grasp the importance of the former Soviet Republic territories also known as Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS). Here are some self-explanatory quotes from this document in regard to CIS and Russia’s vision of itself as global great power and their envisioned ways to fulfil these priorities:

“The Russian Federation possesses real capacity to play a well-deserved role globally.”

“Russia pursues an open, predictable and pragmatic foreign policy determined by its national interests.”

“Development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS Member States constitutes a priority area of Russia's foreign policy”. (Found in part IV. Regional priorities)

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<sup>85</sup> <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

“Particular attention is paid to supporting compatriots who live in the CIS Member States, as well as to negotiating mutual agreements intended to protect their educational, linguistic, social, labor, humanitarian and other rights and freedoms.”

“Russia will increase cooperation with the CIS Member States [...]

To achieve these goals Russia will:

- take steps to ensure further realization of the potential of the CIS as a regional organization [...],
- continue agreed efforts to create favorable conditions for effective establishment of the Union State by gradually transforming relations between Russia and Belarus [...];
- actively interact with Belarus and Kazakhstan within the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in order to establish a customs union and common economic space and encourage other EurAsEC Member States to participate in this work;
- promote in every possible way the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key instrument to maintain stability and ensure security in the CIS area.”

The above citations also confirm the commitment of the Russian federation in continuing its leadership role within the CIS, CSTO, EurAsEC, and other institutional projects.

To probe even further, let us question why Russia would be unwilling to give up its leading positions in the region? It may be evident at this point that Russia's survival depends largely on maintaining a geographical and ideological separation from the Western world in order to survive; in order to maintain geographical separation Russia must maintain control over neighbouring states. Nevertheless, we have already discussed the importance of maintaining control over former-Soviet territory and briefly mentioned that parts of this region have become points of interest for other global powers such as the USA (Georgia, Ukraine, Central Asia), the EU (Ukraine, Moldova), and China (mostly Central Asia). Now I would like to elaborate on the details of the available tools of influence that Moscow has at their disposal which distinguish them from other major powers.

As well, Russia shares a huge historic and cultural past, and by consequence ties, with the surrounding republics. Currently, most of the political elite over the post-Soviet territories share the same upbringing and education connected in some

way to Russia. It is also important to mention the Russian presence and available tools within each of the respective republics. When analyzing the appearance, size, and agenda of Russian Embassies in republics like Moldova, Bulgaria, Ukraine and others, we would come to the same conclusion: Russia is sending a strong message of long-term presence and influence in the region. By mere presence and presentation of this presence in these countries, Russia is asserting dominance over their people in a strength comparable to the governing body within that country.

Apart from symbolic messages such as the placement of these embassies, there are of course much more solid reminders of Russian power in the former Soviet Union. Namely, this is the presence of Russian military in several states previously mentioned (see table 1.1) cooped with Russian role in frozen conflicts all over post-Soviet land. This not only demonstrates a Russian commitment to defend its interests at all cost, but it empowers Russia with colossal tools do so when at any moment of its choosing.

Another major tool, sometimes compared to nuclear weapons in terms of importance, is of course Russian natural gas and Moscow's policy to push on so-called "rebels" by raising gas prices. The reality today that natural gas is a rare commodity lacking alternatives for most of former Soviet republics located in Europe. They are entirely dependent on Russia for gas imports. In viewing Moscow's political behaviour one can clearly notice that since 2005 the Kremlin has never hesitated to use this dependence as a tool to reach its objectives (examples include; Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and even Byelorussia). This form of economic levers, that effectively amounts to acts of extortion, are likely not practiced only by Russia and in all likelihood are a common occurrence in political or military conflicts throughout the world. Nonetheless, here it is used to further the agenda of the consolidation of post-soviet era territories and the further strengthening of the Russian state.

#### 4.4 Russia's Leadership Role in Regional Institutions

Finally, and probably most significantly, Russia continually re-affirms itself as regional hegemon through the integration processes occurring within existing institutions in the area now dominated largely by Moscow. Some of these institutions have existed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These institutions represent mostly declarative or formal value in reality, but some of them nevertheless have recently evolved much more solid forms of cooperation.

In this thesis we will only introduce these institutions and briefly touch upon significant achievements and weak points related to our topic.

The most well-known institution is of course CIS, which includes all the former republics under its umbrella with the exception of the Baltic States<sup>86</sup> and Georgia (since 2008)<sup>87</sup>. The significance of this institution is uncertain however, since most of the declarations and agreements it has made have never been implemented and were lacking political will and a clear agenda. Most meetings are held with only at vice-ministers level, and they cover various subjects related to economy, military, and culture. Nonetheless, CIS remains an important vehicle of bilateral and multilateral political and economic affairs. Using the CIS platform, several larger projects have been launched. For example, integration initiatives like Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Community are discussed below.

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) was signed into existence in 1992. CSTO unites the most significant allies of Russia: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Byelorussia. Collective security is the main

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<sup>86</sup> Baltic States never shared identity proximity with Russia even during Soviet times and were largely supported by EU to leave Moscow's orbit and lately accepted in NATO and EU since the collapse of USSR

<sup>87</sup> immediately after the military collapse with Russian in August 2008

purpose of this organisation and has many similarities with the concept of a European NATO.

We may note that Central Asian republics demonstrate a recognition of the leading role of Russia in the region. Historically since Soviet Union, these countries have profited the most from donations and were at last recognized as independent in the 1990s. A significant achievement for Moscow through this institution (CSTO) is Russia's deployment of military troops to Kyrgyzstan in 2003 (Mankoff, 2009: 268). As well, apart from SCO, where Russia shares a leading position with China, CSTO "has emerged as primarily vehicle for the re-establishment of Moscow's strategic influence in central Asia." (Mankoff, 2009: 270)

In 2008 this institution demonstrated some limitations of its potential. During the Russian-Georgian conflict, CSTO members supported Russia's actions; however, none of the CSTO members supported Russia's recognition of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Levesque, 2012). This in turn may be explained by internal separatist issues in some of the CSTO members. As well, despite the fact that CSTO has a joint general staff, its "cohesiveness" and ability to react to common threats remain under "serious doubt", thereby limiting military effectiveness of the organisation (Mankoff, 2009:270).

Russian foreign policy actions aimed at re-installing its influence in post-Soviet territories can also be demonstrated by the intensive re-integration into existing institutions. Primakov was the first to re-energize the existing Russian – CIS community relations and, as we may observe, during Putin's second term. Moscow actively promotes integration initiatives (not only under CSTO and SCO) with pragmatic purposes. First foremost is the significant breakthrough in the CIS Customs Union which tightens the economic space between Russia, Byelorussia, and Kazakhstan. The agreement was originally signed in 1995-1996, but was revived again in 2009. Its practical phase started in 2011-2012, opening its doors to other

participants if they so desire. Kyrgyzstan is among the first candidates to join the union. Russia currently wishes to bring Ukraine closer in this sense, but the main obstacle remains to be the intensive struggle for Kiev between Russia and the West as well as counter-lobbying of Ukrainian oligarchs who have a lot to lose through this integration.

In the same light, Putin's initiative reflected in Russian Izvestia in October 2011 is the development of Euro Asiatic Union (EuRasEC). This is an ambitious project by Putin that aims to build a strong economic institution mainly formed from "near abroad" countries. The core participants remain state-formers of Customs Union but other republics "are invited".

This initiative is of course in part a strong PR tool for Putin to gain favour before the presidential elections which took place in March of 2012. This initiative in fact helps Putin and its ruling elite in many aspects.

(1) At first it helps to legitimize Putin's come back: to lead a long-term project in which Russia is playing the key-role in the region which requires a strong leader that very likely can only be Putin himself;

(2) From a marketing point-of-view it hits hard: The majority of Russians and the entire Post-Soviet territory population which is quite nostalgic for former Soviet times, and as we have previously mentioned they have been prepared for this possibility through different means of indoctrination including pro-Russian and anti-Western propaganda over the last eight years;

(3) Covers the ideological gap discussed earlier in this chapter and replaces the previously failed goals such as quickly achieving national prosperity and restoring Russia as a great global power. Russia leading the EuRasEC means a strong and powerful state able to compete with other world's leading powers;

(4) By looking differently (at a personality level) at this initiative and its key leaders we may remark that all of the head participants such as Putin, Nazarbayev and Lukashenko all share common goal: prolonging their stay in power. For all of these leaders the participation in the new union opens a legitimate door to introduce changes in the existing constitutions and other fundamental acts; and

(5) Despite Putin's declarations regarding the role and place in the region of the Eurasian Union:

"We do not intend to cut ourselves off, nor do we plan to stand in opposition to anyone. The Eurasian Union will be based on universal integration principles as an essential part of Greater Europe united by shared values of freedom, democracy, and market laws."<sup>88</sup>

Creation of the above union in its way *de facto* challenges the existing European integration processes through creating an alternative for polarised populations in countries like Ukraine and Moldova. In both countries, local opinion is divided with regard to which political option to choose, European integration, and promoting Western values or Cooperation with Russia and energy security. So in this way Russia proposes an alternative way to cooperate with the new institutions and with all members in the fields of economics, energy resources, and national security.

Once again, through integrating into already-existing regional institutions as well as through the creation of new institutions, Russia is elbowing its way into world politics and regaining political strength. In a new multipolar world of rising economic and political power rather than pure military might, Russia is clearly taking steps in the direction towards securing itself as one of the global centers and an internationally respected nation.

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<sup>88</sup> Article by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin "A new integration project for Eurasia: The future in the making" ("Izvestia", 3 October 2011) <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3->



#### 4.5 Resuming Russian Foreign Policy in “Near Abroad”

In consideration of the above facts, Russia’s commitment to becoming a regional hegemon is clear and their tactics for achieving this goal are intensively implemented throughout the neighbouring regions. These tactics include: strengthening of their political and economic leadership in regional institutions (e.g. CIS, CSTO, EurAsU), encouraging bilateral co-operation with former Soviet Republics, formation and strengthening of a national identity, and exerting constraint measures on nearby nations which may include energy blackmail and military action.

This Russian “third option” (being an independent pole with a global influence) in deciding its place in a multipolar world fits “naturally” with Russian foreign policy. The outcome produces results such as: the geopolitical advantage of having more secure borders for Russia, limiting NATO’s further enlargement to the East (to Russian borders), and even the securing of its relative monopoly over the Russian gas supply to Europe (through the strengthening of their negotiation power and international influence).

The Russian quest of becoming a great power is better explained through understanding its national identity and identity of the ruling elite than having just a desire to dominate other nations. Russia’s foreign policy priority, from the realist point of view, could be defined as: defending its statehood and national interests through exercising maximum control over neighbouring states, especially those who are traditionally under Moscow’s influence (ex-Soviet territory), but this perspective is overly-simplistic. In looking through the social constructivist lens we may find it easier to understand and why Russian foreign policy has deviated to the extremes for the last 20 years, and why Moscow seeks equal partnerships with the USA as well as recognition by other nations holding significant power (Tsygankov, 2006: Ch. 1). In establishing a national identity for itself, it is easier to present Russia to the world as a defined set of beliefs, traditions, people, strengths, and borders. This in turn removes

ambiguity of international perspectives of Russia and allows legitimacy for its vital interests (i.e. Secured borders, hegemony over post-Soviet territory).

At present, the Kremlin possesses all the necessary tools to control nearby nations. Those tools theoretically sound from both points of view: realism and social constructivism. These include Russian military presence and its role in the frozen conflicts all over the former Soviet space, a strong dependence of CIS members on the Russian economy and natural resources, a large bilateral network and use of regional institutions, and of course the historical and cultural ties which aid in strengthening bonds between the nations. For the last 12 years Russia hasn't given up its interest in holding power over nearby countries, but since 2006 it has significantly increased political activity towards consolidating its power in the region. Among Russia's successes, the following can be listed: Georgian and Ukrainian intentions for obtaining NATO membership is no longer an issue in the foreseeable short to medium time-frame, economic sanctions against Moldova have so far been effective, the onset of the practical phase of the Customs Union Agreement and support for the Euro-Asiatic Union, the successful application of pressure on the USA to withdraw its military from Central Asia, and multiple others.

Russian actions towards regaining political sway and their quest for international recognition can be marked through multiple indicators of cooperation at the international level. We have already covered the enhanced bilateral cooperation with key European powers such as Germany, Italy and France, as well as improved Sino-Russian relations. In addition, Russia remains a permanent member of the UN Security Council and plays an important role in various conflict mediations (for example in negotiations with Iran). Then of course there is the Russian membership in G8 and the Russian-NATO Security Council. Lastly, not to be overlooked is Russia's strategic nuclear capacity, one which is comparable only to the USA and may serve to strengthen international recognition of Russia's ambition of international recognition as a superpower. Among the unofficial signs of fulfilling

their objective is of course the enormous energy and effort invested by Russia and Putin himself into winning the rights to host the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and the football World Cup in 2018, which have been interpreted by Moscow as signs of international recognition.

In summary, it may be concluded that Russia's prime objective currently is, and has been since Primakov's time (1996), to establish itself as a centralized regional power. This is something that is not only openly declared by the state but it is vigorously pursued through continuous actions which are clearly documented in contemporary history. Recent "re-elections" of Putin confirm the assumption that this trend to continue in the future as Russia strengthens economically and steadily consolidates power in the surrounding regions, aiming to regain their international recognition as a global leader.

## CONCLUSIONS

Summing up this thesis, it is clear that Russian foreign policy today is oriented primarily towards its reinforcement as an independent pole in a newly emerging multi-polar world. It has become evident that in this process, forming partnerships with either the Eastern or Western world is no longer a priority as Russia focuses on other strategic avenues. The Russian quest in finding its political place in the world has been ongoing since at least 1992, when the Soviet empire collapsed and a "new Russia" was re-born (Thibault, Levesque 1997). Subsequently, Russian utopian goals of rapidly joining the "civilized world" and reaching the economic levels of Western countries vanished in less than a few years. Security dilemmas and the survival of Russian statehood forced the Kremlin to re-assess its foreign policy in a way that well fits with the roots of Waltz's neorealism: balance of power policies and consolidation of state power. This significant turn in Russian policy began under Primakov between 1996 and 1999, and continues today under President Putin. Decade of Russian ascent fuelled by financial windfalls derived from high oil prices, growing European dependence on Russian gas, and a shortfall of cooperation and integration with the Western world led Moscow to seek alternative strategic partnerships and to rely more on its own inner strengths.

A strategic alliance between Russia and Western countries today remains a less probable option, due to two main reasons. First, there are conflicting visions over the future of post-Soviet territory. Russia sees itself as an exclusive hegemon in this region with historical "rights" over the land and people. Conversely, the United States and European powers do not recognize these "rights", and ultimately they see these countries as independent from Russian influence and more integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and the EU. For Russia this is non-negotiable, since it goes against to Moscow's national interests related to state security. The second reason is of course NATO's enlargement policy, which is seen by the Kremlin

as a direct threat to its national security. The August 2008 events in South Ossetia best illustrate Russia's position on the issue.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that confrontation is unavoidable, or that cooperation is not possible. Russia sends clear signals that it no longer wants to play a secondary role in world politics and seeks international recognition. Russia wants a cooperation based on mutual benefits and also insist that its own national interests must be respected. Today Russian-West relations remain mostly at the level of short term political goals or economic benefit.

A Sino-Russian alliance fits perfectly into the frame of an alternative partnership, especially as counter-balancing power against the USA and other Western countries. Problematic issues such as US hegemony, NATO enlargement, and keeping USA out of Central Asia effectively work through strengthening the role of SCO in the region and developing relations with China. Relations most likely will continue on a positive line. Beyond this, China and Russia retain many points of friction in their national interests, including competition over the control of Central Asia, different visions of the role of SCO, and obviously some issues related to cultural differences as well. The concerns of a growing Chinese superpower adjacent to the Russian border, posing a potential security threat to Moscow, are not to be overlooked. The formation of an alliance and good bilateral relations could help to alleviate some fears that each country may have of one another with regards to national security. Nonetheless, these issues will act as impediments in developing their relations into a long term and robust alliance.

The Russian course of foreign policy is oriented towards becoming an independent pole capable of conducting independent political course at regional and even global levels. It remains the most rational option for the Kremlin and has already brought the most productive results. In exerting itself as regional hegemon with the political tools to control neighbouring ex-Soviet states, Russia is able to fulfill its

primary security interests: secure borders and inhibiting further NATO enlargement in the East.

This third option also fits “naturally” with Russian Foreign policy in terms of having all the necessary fundamentals in place, such as: working regional institutions, cultural and historical proximity to their neighbours, and enormous bilateral relations with former communist nations. In addition, the Russian “last-resort” regional tools of influence such as military presence in several states; the direct dependence of many nations on the Russian economy and Russian oil and gas, and of course there is overwhelming Russian military forces which demonstrate a better readiness compared to the 1990s.

A closer look at Russian foreign policy today demonstrates that the Kremlin’s efforts to consolidate its power and international position brought relative success. Russia has been leading integration projects on post-Soviet space, using above mentioned resources and regional institutions such as CIS, CSTO and the European-Asiatic Union (EurAsU). The Russian path to becoming a great power lies first in being a leader of post-Soviet space. Moscow sees its ability to control its former Soviet sisters as a guarantor of its geopolitical security in the region.

Throughout this thesis we have seen that both theoretical schools – realism (neorealism) and social constructivism – lead us to similar conclusions and complement one another when Russian foreign policy needs to be explained in more details. While neorealism demonstrates the impact of the external elements (variables) of the international system on the Kremlin's policy; social constructivism introduces other aspects such as identity and historic continuity, which have equal influence on the same policy, and is capable of filling the gaps where neorealism falls short.

This thesis also makes the assumption that current Russian foreign policy will persist for some time, mostly due to the fact that political course of Putin has already

been shown as effective in achieving political objectives. And as well due to the elimination of any capable opposition to Putin's rule in present.

However, Putin's stability does not necessarily mean that Russia will continue its growth and increase its international power. Many Russian scholars, even those supporting the present regime (Primakov, 2011), sadly remark that the main threat for Russia comes from within. This is similar to the major internal problem of the Soviet Empire. The present economy is entirely dependent on oil and gas revenues which are extremely vulnerable to economic crises such as those observed in 1998 and 2008. The “easy money” earned from high oil prices is not invested in new technology and other crucial infrastructure for a successful modern economy, but rather fall into the personal accounts of those close to the Kremlin. Corruption and bureaucracy are at the same level today in Russia as they were before and after the collapse of the USSR. The following is a quote from the director of Troyka dialogue company – R. Vardanean – on Russian business today:

“We have enormous bureaucracy and weak public institutions. The role of Public institutions fell to secondary positions, while the role of personal relations is definitely the most important today. This is not only for business, but in every area of Russian society.” (quoted by Primakov 2011: 100).

The list of Russian internal problems does not limit itself to the above. It includes also demographic issues, life quality of population, etc., etc.

Nevertheless with today's accumulated resources, established relations, working effective regional institutions led by Moscow, and proven realist tactics will keep Russia on the path of developing itself into “one of the globe's pole”<sup>89</sup> (regional hegemon). All other alternatives of mutually beneficial co-operation with major global powers remain highly affected by the security dilemmas, and this in turn forces Moscow to keep these relations at a pragmatic level.

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<sup>89</sup> Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. July, 2008

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