

RUSSIA IN THE NEW MULTIPOLAR WORLD: AIMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Dr. Sanjay Deshpande
Director
Centre for Central Eurasian Studies,
University of Mumbai, India

Since the late 1990s , the concept of multipolarity has gained prominence around the globe. Russia and China, in particular, have repeatedly agreed on this ill-defined term and subsequently have included it or alluded to it in nearly all of their joint declarations, statements, and treaties dating from the mid-1990s to the present. At a time when American hegemony is declining and speculation abounds as to which among the world's burgeoning nations will rise to power, it is important to examine the renewed Sino-Russian relationship and one of its foundational pillars - the promotion of multipolarity.

The bipolar international system of 1945 was over after the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviet breakup appeared to be one of the constitutive factors for the emerging new world order. Whereas one of the two superpowers crumbled, the USA, endured and it took the preeminent position in the international system. The dissolution of the Soviet Union gave birth to new independent states with Russia amongst them. Many other actors ranging from the Central European countries to China and North Korea faced a problem of accommodating the new systemic realities and reconsidering their foreign policies. The system of various alliances between states and inter-governmental organizations was likewise deeply affected by the change of the international system in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War.

Not surprisingly, systemic shifts of early 1990s made it necessary for all international players to gain a position in the new international system that would signify their roles and ambitions in world politics for years to come. US has entered the new international system as an unchallenged leader and took the status of the pole state in a unipolar system. The predominant position of the US

was not challenged within the first years after the end of the Cold War. Other major powers, such as Japan and the European Union, accepted the status quo and became subordinate within the US-centered unipolar system. China, another would-be great power showed no explicit revisionist intentions. As for the major intergovernmental organizations, the role of UN decreased and so did the value of UN membership. At the same time, the US-lead NATO started expanding its power eastwards, which undoubtedly made the status of a NATO country appealing for the states seeking both security guarantees from the US and the role of a US ally. Likewise, other US-led or —western-centered‖ organizations and clubs, such as the IMF, GATT/WTO and G7 entered the unipolar world order as international institutions in the new international setting. Eventually, in Europe the changes of 1989–91 signified a widening gap

between those states that openly decided to join the western institutions of EU and NATO and those that remained outside e.g. Russia and Belarus.

The brief summary provided above describes the structural factors behind Russian foreign policy in the early 1990s. Like all international actors, Russia faced a challenge of solving the structural dilemma of how to deal with the new world order. The general trend for Russia was that its political leadership defined a country's status in the world as that of a —great power‖, despite this being inconsistent with the structural settings of the unipolar system. Since 1993 Russia has been claiming this status which it believes fits its geographical vastness, strategic interests and nuclear capabilities. However, the aspirations for great power status were nothing but an ambitious blueprint, as they represented an enormous misperception of what status could be attainable in the new post-cold war international order. The inconsistency became visible at three levels: the global, the regional and the institutional.

At the global level, Russia didn't recognize the unipolarity as the organizing principle of the new world order. Instead, the vision of —multipolar world‖ became prevalent in the Russian diplomatic parlance, especially after

Yevgeni Primakov took the helm of Russia's foreign policy in 1996. According to the Primakov doctrine, the end of the Cold War was the exit to multipolarity with both US and Soviet (Russian) power diminishing and giving way to many other powerful actors like China or united Germany.

In the multipolar world Russia is seen as, first and foremost, one of the 'poles' with a status equal to the US, EU, China and Japan. Although neither in fact nor in theory could Russia put itself on a par with these actors due to its economic decline, in the multipolar world Russia's great power status was taken as a given due to its permanent seat in the UN Security Council and vast nuclear capabilities. In the bipolar world these two elements used to be a crucial part of the deterrence model in which the US and the Soviet Union were the two superpowers. References to the country's seat in the UNSC and its nuclear capabilities would become a permanent feature of Russia's foreign policy practice.

Although the posture of multipolarity presumed the absence of any dividing lines or the spheres-of-interest logic, Russia claimed to be a regional hegemonic power. This doctrine would justify a certain zone of influence and responsibility beyond Russia's borders. This zone named —The Near Abroad— mainly covered the former Soviet Republics; however, the case of NATO enlargement showed that Russia was extremely sensitive over the idea of Central European countries as well as the Baltic States joining NATO for the first ten years after the Cold War. The main challenge for Russia's status as a pole in the multipolar world was that the international system of 1990s was more prone to be unipolar than multipolar. Russia therefore, in order to get recognition of its great power status, would have to remake the international structure. To do this Russian diplomacy was assigned a double task – 1) to pursue the country's foreign policy interests, to establish crucially important cooperation, and ensure rapprochement

with the major Western actors; and 2) to try to regain the great power status by transforming the system to the doctrinal pattern of —multipolarity.¶

Multipolarity emerged as a solution to Russia's structural problem of positioning itself in the world.⁹ It relied on capabilities that Russia inherited from the USSR, e.g. the permanent seat in the UNSC, membership of the OSCE, and not least, the country's own nuclear capabilities, however the doctrine failed to provide for Russia's genuine integration into the new international system, because it implied balancing the growing power of the new global actors, e.g. the US, NATO and the EU. This approach negatively affected the coherence of Russia's foreign policy, as reacquisition of great power status as an ultimate goal inevitably raised tension and suspicions in the West. Russia's political, economic, and diplomatic transformations began in late 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Russia and other constituent republics. Over the past 30 years, Russia's foreign policy has been occasionally adjusted in response to changes in domestic and international situations and has gradually established its own characteristics: independence, all-sidedness, and the image of a great power. Russia's foreign policy, while safeguarding its own national interests, has had a significant impact on both global politics and regional situations. On the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is of great academic value and practical significance to explore in depth the evolution of Russian foreign policy during the 30 years and its internal and external motivations, probe into its continuity, and analyze its impact on the international landscape. Eurasia in the Multipolar World Order: In this Multipolar World Order, the West and East will contend across the supercontinent, primarily in the Indo-Pacific (South and East Asia), Central Asia, South Caucasus, Central and Eastern Europe, and even the Middle East. This struggle will be manifested in hot wars or proxy wars in fragile regions. Ukraine and Syria are already arenas of conflict. International norms and laws are being interpreted in different ways. To justify their actions in different parts

of Eurasia, the great powers will appeal to principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination. But the rules and legalities will play a secondary role, with economic, political and military capabilities of states playing the decisive role. This tough competition between the rival great powers asserting their spheres of influence will entail weaponized sanctions to secure technologies and exclude the opponent from access to markets, controls over vaccine distribution, restrictions on financial activities, and battles for influence in international organizations. This will only mean continued instability across the continent – a "new Cold War", as some have called it.

Market access for companies of different states will be limited depending on the spheres of influence of the poles. Cyberspace will be another battlefield where great and middle powers will compete. Small and middle states may have little or no room to choose or maneuver. They will have to or be forced to choose one of the poles or centers, given their practical economic and/or security needs. Their independence will be diminished. In the Multipolar World Order 2.0, the centers will limit or even cut their economic links with rivals or perceived adversaries over geopolitical or even ideological differences, as has already happened between the West and Russia. The continuation of these trends will only lead to new conflicts. The war in Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, has become the top security concern of the Eurasian continent. The post-Cold War unipolar moment is long over. To be sure, Biden has tried – with some success – to use the conflict to rally Western allies and other partners around the world to apply sanctions on Russia (in addition to those that were already in place in response to Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014). After the invasion of Ukraine, 141 members of the United Nations voted for a measure demanding that Russia withdraw unconditionally. Only four countries – Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Eritrea and Syria – supported Moscow and rejected the resolution, with 47 abstaining or missing the vote. Multipolarity in Foreign Policy under Putin: Since the collapse of the

Soviet Union, influenced by a series of factors, including dramatic changes in the international landscape after the Cold War, the volatility of the international situation, changes in domestic political and economic development, and the diplomatic philosophy of Russian leaders, Russia's foreign policy has undergone a process of evolution from exploration to establishment. From 1991 to 1995, Russia has been committed to a Pro-Western Diplomacy. The halt of the Cold War put an end to the military, political, and ideological confrontation between Russia and the West, and Moscow not only inherited Gorbachev's Pro-Western Diplomacy, but also strove to develop closer relationship with the West. From 1996 to 2000, Russia has been committed to the Multipolar Diplomacy, the main goal of which was to restore Russia's status as a great power and promote a multipolar world. Opposing NATO's eastward expansion and seeking to minimize its adverse effects. Promoting the establishment of the CIS Free Trade Area, building a regional collective security system and leading the establishment of a customs union (later reorganized as the Eurasian Economic Community) and the Russia-Belarus Community (later upgraded to the Russia-Belarus Union State). Establishing a strategic partnership with China in 1996 and with India in 2000 to counterbalance the U.S. The main reasons for implementing the Multipolar Diplomacy include: NATO's eastward expansion posed a direct threat to Russia's security; the U.S. attempted to create a unipolar world

of hegemony and forced Russia to accept this international system, the West was wary of Russia for its —imperial ambitions‡; the rise of Russian nationalist sentiment, etc. The Multipolar Diplomacy, to a certain extent, demonstrated Russia's status as a great power and made Russian diplomacy more comprehensive. From 2001 to 2004, Russia was committed to the foreign policy of Great Power Pragmatism, the core of which was to create a favorable external environment for its economic and social development and to restore its great power status. The 9/11 attacks provided an opportunity for the Putin

government to end the cold relations with the West since the Kosovo War and to pursue the foreign policy of Great Power Pragmatism. From 2005 to 2008, Russia was committed to the foreign policy of Neo-Slavism. Responding to U.S. and European interference in Russia's internal affairs as well as —color revolutions‡ in the CIS region, President Putin embarked on a democratic path suited to Russian conditions domestically and diplomatically pursued a policy of cooperating with the U.S. but firmly countering it in areas of core interests to Russia. From 2009 to 2013, Russia was committed to the Stability and Cooperation Diplomacy, the main goals of which include: maintaining Russia's great power status and Russian-American strategic stability; keeping stable relations with the West; safeguarding stability in the CIS region and domestic socio-political stability; advancing the foreign policy of cooperation and avoiding conflicts with other countries. Since 2014, Russia has been committed to a Great Power Diplomacy, which was prompted by the Ukraine Crisis in February 2014 and the consequent confrontation between Moscow and the West. The main reasons for the Putin administration to implement the Great Power Diplomacy include: the West's attempts to pull Ukraine into its geostrategic orbit, which crossed Moscow's red line; the intensification of geopolitical and military competition between Russia and the West; the deep-rooted Russian great power mentality. As a result of this foreign policy, Russia had to strengthen its relations with Asia-Pacific countries, but the Russia-Ukraine conflict has slowed down its modernization. Over the past three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, influenced by domestic and international situations and other factors, Russia's foreign policy has gone through the stages of Pro-Western Diplomacy, Multipolar Diplomacy, Great Power Pragmatism, Neo-Slavism, Stability and Cooperation Diplomacy, and Great Power Diplomacy. Russia's foreign policy has changed in response to the situation, but continuity is seen in those changes and is manifested in its pursuit of great power status, the priority given to national security, the chase for international

power, the utilization of international mechanisms, and the focus on economic diplomacy. Russia has already developed an independent foreign policy based on national interests, which has played an important role in maintaining national sovereignty and security and promoting

economic and social development, and has had a significant impact on the international situation as well. Now Russia has rebuilt its relations with the outside world, but such relations are not yet mature or even stable, which is prominently reflected in Russia's relations with the West, with the CIS and other regions or countries.

Russia's policy, therefore, is to remain tactically flexible, prepared for every eventuality, but also to be more strategic than ever in building a world order that is stable, peaceful, and comfortable for Russia. As the US and Europe are not ready to engage in order-building with Russia and other major non-Western actors, instead adopting an oppositional posture, and—primarily due to internal political reasons—because they are highly unlikely to so engage in the next decade, a new international order's emergence is more likely to occur in the 2030s or 2040s than in the 2020s, after the inevitable rotation of elites in the US and the EU.

Ukraine war: Is a new multipolar world emerging?

Russia-Ukraine conflict is undoubtedly one of the biggest geopolitical conflicts of the 21st century. What would be a regional issue in our analysis, turned into a global event with economic and geopolitical impacts that will last for decades to come. The uncritical analysis of the subject is the main obstacle to a real geopolitical comprehension of the ongoing process. Our goal is to make some considerations to fill these gaps.

Russian demands about its geopolitical security have continuously been disregarded by either Washington or Brussels over the past three decades. Europeans and North Americans did their best to expand the European Union

and NATO to Eastern Europe despite Moscow consistently expressing its dissatisfaction with such an advance.

In fact, Russia has always represented a *geopolitical concern* to Washington due to its military and technological capacity inherited from the USSR. The —ideall Russia for the West only occurred under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) when the country made the transition to capitalism in a sudden and dramatic process, going through one of its most severe economic and social crises.

Western perspective has a divergent viewpoint. Maintaining NATO created in the Cold War scenario makes no sense. However, it makes sense when we think of the billions of dollars in sale of war material produced largely by the US to its European partners and the multi-million commissions involved. It is to keep Europe under Washington's political and military domain. On the economic side, the expansion of the European Union over Eastern Europe followed the same logic: —By increasing the number of member states, the aim is to address the challenges faced by a economic union under problems.

US had the perception that it could take advantage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to weaken Vladimir Putin's leadership, promote an —upgradell in the criticized existence of NATO and facilitate a possible —regime changeℓ through economic strangulation. They underestimated the

neutral stance of China, India, Brazil and several countries on the African continent. It also provided the ground for the de-dollarization of the world economy due to the economic sanctions against the Russia, uniting the objectives of several countries that already questioned the supremacy of the dollar as the dominant commercial transaction currency. The sanctions on Russia have directly impacted Europe, while the US benefitted economically and Europeans suffer as much as Moscow from their effects.

Russia and Multilateral Organizations:

Moscow believes the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and to a lesser extent the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) afford it opportunities to shore up its clout amid shifting global power dynamics, push back against Western influence in Eurasia, manage relations in a more competitive landscape, highlight the importance of the United Nations as the legitimate arbiter of international laws and norms and counter what it perceives as repeated Western efforts to skirt those norms, thwart Western efforts to isolate Russia diplomatically and through sanctions, project Russian power and influence, and bolster its international standing.

The influence of these institutions, however, should not be overstated. For Russia, their importance is more symbolic than substantive. With China's increasing economic and political power in global affairs, they also allow Russia to manage its relationship with a rising China, particularly in Russia's own backyard.

For Russia, the importance of these organizations is more symbolic than substantive. They help the Kremlin to highlight, both at home and abroad, that Moscow retains international standing, that it has the diplomatic means to counter the expansion of Western influence around its periphery and U.S. and European efforts to isolate Russia, and that Russia is a global, not just a Eurasian or regional, power. Engaging in these international organizations and groups also helps Moscow push back at Western efforts to isolate Russia diplomatically following a long series of transgressions. Russia may be isolated from the Euro-Atlantic community, but these organizations help show that Moscow is not isolated from the rest of the world.

In the face of China's growing prominence in economic and political terms, there are few indications that these organizations are helping Russia manage its relationship with a rising China. That is particularly the case in Russia's own backyard, where the disparity between the two countries'

economic influence is increasingly evident. While Russia has long held grand hopes of advancing its larger security and geopolitical agenda through international organizations, these efforts have been stymied by the objections and conflicting interests of the member states—some of whom do not share Moscow's agenda of transforming the EAEU, SCO, or BRICS into an anti-Western club. This includes China, India, and many countries of Central Asia.

But these successes come at a price. These organizations were created to advance cooperation among their members in dealing with regional problems and challenges that are also of concern to Moscow. Russia's behavior toward multilateral institutions is driven primarily by how they advance Russian national interests rather than broader organizational purposes and priorities. This attitude has been one important factor that has undermined the capacity of these groups to achieve their objectives. As a result, regional problems are festering, and Russia is neither serving its own interests nor those of its neighbors or other member states.

Conclusion:

The establishment of a new world order will take time, and in the meantime serious conflicts and crises could occur. The current state of US-Russia relations is just a beginning in this regard. In the medium term, the priority for major powers is to prevent a new large-scale war, which is becoming highly likely. In this regard, Russia, again, intends to act as a key security provider through its foreign and defence policies. Russia's pivot to Asia will continue and the Greater Eurasia comprehensive partnership concept will gradually be substantiated and thus will become a zone of stability and a powerful unit within the global order.

Russia will continue to deepen partnerships with China and India and to enhance cooperative relations with US allies and partners like Japan, South Korea, and, when possible, Western European countries. Neither major European allies nor Asian allies of the US support further escalation of the

Russia-West and US-Russia confrontation. Maintaining these relationships seems the best way to forward the confrontation's conclusion on terms compatible with the current state of the world.

It's expected that this clash between NATO and Russia will bring about a permanent reordering in the power dynamics of geopolitical forces in the 21st century. The so-called —American Century‖ is being finalized by the rise of new and future powers such as China, whose global role is gaining strength. Beijing's performance in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict demonstrates that its action is guided by long-term projects: collaboration in the weakening of the North American power to determine the —punishment‖ of its enemies through economic means, consolidating BRICS as a —global influencer‖, the decrease of the dollar as an international currency and the support for a multipolar spectrum as the basis of the international system in the current century.

The world is witnessing the steady rise of a new multipolar world order and most countries are ready to assert their sovereignty and defend their national interests, traditions, culture." A multipolar world order will ultimately contribute to "steady and sustainable global development," and help solve pressing social, economic, technological and environmental challenges.