

## The Domestic Roots of Russia's BRICS Engagement

### ABSTRACT:

Since the onset of the crisis in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, participation in the BRICS group has become a much more prominent feature of Russian foreign policy and a weapon in anti-Western rhetoric among the political elite. This new attention to BRICS, however, has roots in Russian domestic politics that trace far deeper than 2013. This paper will analyze how the reconceptualization of the ideas of sovereignty and national identity during Vladimir Putin's first two presidential terms laid the foundation for BRICS to be incorporated into Russian foreign policy after the onset of the Ukraine crisis. It will then bring that analysis forward to the present day to understand why participation in BRICS continues to serve the Russian ruling elite's domestic political agenda.

In 2001, the chief economist of Goldman Sachs identified Russia as one of the new “global BRICs” that would overtake the G7 and lead the world economy in the years to come.<sup>1</sup> The designation could not have come at a timelier moment for Russia. The country was beginning to recover from nearly a decade of economic instability that culminated in the August 1998 default. Being included in the list of likely future leaders of the global economy by one of the world's premier investment banks provided external validation that others had noticed Russia's revival.

As rewarding as the leadership found the recognition, however, there was no immediate move to bring BRIC together as a political group. The notion of the rise of the non-Western world appealed to existing strains within Russian foreign policy, particularly among the Eurasianists and Great Power Balancers who gained power in the latter years of the Yeltsin presidency.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jim O'Neill, “Building Better Global Economic BRICs” (Goldman Sachs, 2001), S.03, <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/build-better-brics.pdf>. The other countries were Brazil, China, and India. For more on the history of BRIC and BRICS, see Oliver Stuenkel, *BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (2015). The topic of this paper is BRICS as a political association, not the group originally defined by Goldman Sachs and the financial markets.

<sup>2</sup> There are a variety of ways of categorizing the different views that predominate within Russian foreign policy. Westernizers/Atlanticists are more inclined towards joining the West and Western institutions. Eurasianists and Great Power Balancers focus more on maintaining Russia's unique identity and reviving Russia's global status as a great power. For more, see: Andrew Kuchins and Igor Zevelev, “Russia's Contested National Identity and Foreign Policy,” in *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and*

Nevertheless, the focus, especially during Vladimir Putin's first presidential term, was on consolidating domestic economic growth and political stability. In addition, Putin's early political rhetoric lacked the bluster and wounded pride that marked many of the statements from the Yeltsin era.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, though it was evident from the outset that Putin would not pursue a strictly pro-Western foreign policy, neither did he immediately begin building alternative coalitions (rhetorical or otherwise).

Further, the BRIC appellation hit Russia at the core of its internal debate over national identity. Being a BRIC also meant being separate from Europe and the West, if the idea were taken to a political connotation. Debates over identity and civilizational association (European or specifically Russian) had hamstrung foreign policy under Yeltsin.<sup>4</sup> Putin, because of his ties to both the liberal Anatoly Sobchak and the more conservative security forces, was acceptable across the identity spectrum. He also had sufficient political acumen to understand that reviving the national identity debate would undermine his efforts to put Russia on a more stable path both domestically and internationally.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, though much of his early rhetoric placed Russia more in European than Eurasian civilization, civilizational discourse in general was a minor feature of his early speeches.

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*Russia*, ed. Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Margot Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking," in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, by Neil Malcom et al. (Oxford [England] New York: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs by Oxford University Press, 1996); Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Angela Stent, "Reluctant Europeans," in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, ed. Robert Legvold (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

This approach shifted over the course of Putin’s first two terms as president. As a result of changes in both the domestic and international environments, Putin’s political rhetoric became more strident and more anti-Western over his first eight years in office. This paper examines how that shift laid the groundwork for incorporating BRIC into Russian foreign policy when the group became a feature on the world stage during the 2008 global financial crisis. The aim is to trace the evolution of two concepts critical for understanding Russia’s relationship to BRIC: sovereignty and national identity. Identifying how the rhetorical framing of these ideas showcased an increasingly antagonistic view of the West helps explain the roots of the role BRICS plays in contemporary Russian policy.<sup>6</sup>

The paper proceeds as follows. After a brief discussion of source material, it traces the rhetorical framing of the idea of national sovereignty between 2000 and 2007. It then looks at the framing of national identity during the same period, including analysis of the narrative of World War II and the idea of the “Russian World.” The paper concludes with a brief analysis of why participation in BRICS continues to serve the Russian ruling elite's domestic political agenda.

## **A Note on Sources**

The main sources for this paper are the annual presidential speeches to the Federal Assembly, and the official foreign policy concepts and documents that have been adopted since 2000. The

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<sup>6</sup> BRIC did not become BRICS until 2011. I therefore use a roughly chronological approach to terminology: efforts that took place before 2011 are described as “BRIC efforts” whereas those after 2011 are “BRICS efforts.” The exception is in the generic term: in discussions that are not tied to place and time, but rather about the general impact of the idea or where chronology is not relevant to the argument, I use “BRICS” because it is the most inclusive description of the group.

analysis assumes that from 2000-2008 Vladimir Putin was the ultimate arbiter of Russian foreign policy strategy, and therefore his speeches can be taken as direct evidence of foreign policy planning. These speeches are not taken as direct evidence of coming policy choices. Instead, the argument is that the evolving outlook on display in the speeches reflected changing approaches to engagement in the international arena.

Analysis of the annual addresses, as opposed to just official Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) documents, also gives a more nuanced perspective on attitude evolution. Putin approved a foreign policy concept and a national security concept at the beginning of his first tenure as president. Though a new official foreign policy concept was not adopted until Dmitri Medvedev assumed the presidency in 2008, MID produced an internal review in 2007 that gives insight into major changes from the time of the adoption of the 2000 concepts. There are significant differences between the 2000 and 2007 documents, and the annual presidential addresses give a window into the source of those differences. Put another way, the 2000 and 2007 documents show a beginning and an end to a process; the annual speeches show the interim steps.

Finally, it is worth noting that Putin himself viewed these speeches as policy-setting events. In his 2006 address, he stated that, “today’s and previous addresses provide the basis for domestic and foreign policy for the next decade.”<sup>7</sup> If these speeches, as Putin argued, set the basis for policy, then they can be analyzed to illuminate how policy aims were articulated, and how that articulation changed over time.

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<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, May 10, 2006), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2006/05/105546.shtml>.

## Sovereignty and Independence

One of the persistent themes in official rhetoric about foreign policy in Russia is the degree of policy “independence” – the extent to which Russia is able to conduct the foreign policy it wishes, without concern for international influences or repercussions. The idea of policy independence is closely linked with the broader concept of national sovereignty. Sovereignty in the Russian lexicon means complete control over domestic affairs without external meddling or any devolution of control to supranational or international bodies.<sup>8</sup> Sovereignty, in turn, is tied to the overall goal of multipolarity, a world system wherein no single country has the power to bend other great powers to its will.

The tone in the National Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Concept that Putin approved in his first months in office bear out this point. The National Security Concept avows that, “Russia will help shape the ideology behind the rise of a multipolar world.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Foreign Policy Concept notes the importance of Russia’s balanced and multivector policy, and lists the creation of a new world order based on multipolarity as the top international priority.<sup>10</sup> However, while the fundamental assumption of sovereignty and independence was present from the beginning, the way the ideas were framed and presented changed from 2000 to 2008.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrey Makarychev and Viatcheslav Morozov, “Multilateralism, Multipolarity, and Beyond: A Menu of Russia’s Policy Strategies,” *Global Governance* 17, no. 3 (July 2011): 362,

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=65289476&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>9</sup> “National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 24, 2000, <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/36aba64ac09f737fc32575d9002bbf31!OpenDocument>.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” June 28, 2000, <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>.

During the 2000 Address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin declared unequivocally, “the independence of our foreign policy is not in doubt.”<sup>11</sup> The tone, however, was not confrontational. Instead, it reads almost as a required nod to a long-standing Russian policy in the midst of a speech much more consumed with overcoming Russian domestic struggles. This is not to argue that Putin did not believe in the importance of Russian foreign policy independence. Rather, his primary focus was on domestic issues. Similarly, in an article published shortly before he assumed office as acting president, Putin carefully framed Russia’s development within the context of a larger universal narrative and process.<sup>12</sup> Further, the absence of mention of foreign policy independence in the annual addresses from 2001, 2002, and 2003 suggest that in the early years, emphasis on sovereignty was lower on the priority list and less important for the domestic political audience.<sup>13</sup>

In part, this is because the early years of Putin’s tenure were devoted to stabilizing Russia both politically and economically. As Ben Judah argues, Putin and his first prime minister, Mikhail Kasyanov, “were waging a two-front war for legitimacy: one a battle for Chechnya and the other a struggle to push through economic reforms that had stalled in the late 1990s.”<sup>14</sup> The problem was not only one of discreet issues, such as tax reform and instability in the Caucasus. Instead, part of Putin’s task was to restore faith in the government after the erratic final years of his

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<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Speech, Moscow, Russia, July 8, 2000), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/07/28782.shtml>.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” December 30, 1999, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Putin.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, April 3, 2001), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2001/04/28514.shtml>; Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, April 18, 2002), <http://2002.kremlin.ru/events/510.html>; Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, May 16, 2003), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2003/05/44623.shtml>.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (Yale University Press, 2013), 39.

predecessor. This was also important for foreign policy: Putin had to stabilize the situation so that foreign policy became more consistent and less apt to fall victim to party politics.<sup>15</sup> In practice, this involved bringing domestic constituencies in line by building a broad base of support and gaining the support of both the elite and the general public.<sup>16</sup> Part of gaining that confidence was stabilizing the economy, returning the country to a balanced budget and showing that Putin was a leader who followed through on his commitments.<sup>17</sup>

By 2004, this had been accomplished. Between 2000 and 2003 (inclusive), Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 6.8% per year.<sup>18</sup> In addition, in 2004 Russia went through a stable election cycle, with Putin elected to another four-year term. The 2004 elections were less competitive than previous presidential elections.<sup>19</sup> However, this is evidence of less democracy, not less stability; in Putin's mind, these may be two sides of the same coin. By these metrics and many others, Russia was a dramatically more stable country in 2004 than it had been when Putin inherited control four years prior. Putin touted these accomplishments in his 2004 address to the Federal Assembly. How he did so, however, matters, and is an indication that 2004 was a turning point in how Putin discussed the twin concepts of independence and sovereignty.

During the 2004 address, Putin announced that in the previous year, "for the first time in a long period Russia became a politically and economically stable country in financial relations and in

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<sup>15</sup> Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, 19–20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Judah, *Fragile Empire*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Database October 2014, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/02/weodata/index.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Colton, "Putin and the Attenuation of Russian Democracy," in *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, ed. Dale R. Herspring, 3rd ed (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 39.

international affairs.”<sup>20</sup> Had he simply left it at that, it would be reasonable to interpret the declaration as simply acknowledgment of the improvement in the national economy and increased domestic political stability. However, Putin combined his praise for Russia’s newly stable situation with a warning that Russia’s resurgence would engender discontent in other corners of the world. He stated:

Far from everyone in the world wishes to deal with an independent, strong, and self-assured Russia. Now in the global competitive fight, which actively uses political, economic and information pressure, the strengthening of our statehood [*gosudarstvennosti*] is sometimes consciously construed as authoritarianism.<sup>21</sup>

The warning that Russia’s resurgence would provoke negative reactions in other countries shows the beginning of the return of the “fortress Russia” mentality.<sup>22</sup> It also points to a link between a Russia that pursues an independent policy and one that is alone in its fight for its place in the global order.

There are two other important pieces here. The first is the reference to *gosudarstvennost*. Jeffery Mankoff translates this as “etatism” (statism), and defines it as:

The idea that the state should play a leading role in the economic and political life of the country, and that the national interests in foreign policy should be defined in reference to the well-being of the state itself.<sup>23</sup>

The centrality of the wellbeing of the state, rather than the emphasis on the wellbeing of the citizens of that state, marks one of the key differences in how Russia defines sovereignty from

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<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federannomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, May 26, 2004), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2004/05/71501.shtml>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> On Russian feelings of insecurity and hostility vis-à-vis the outside world, see Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press with Chatham House, 2015), 19–20.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 63.



how it is defined in the West. While this was not a new idea to Russian discourse in 2004, it is significant that it is this specific definition, rather than the more generic “sovereignty” (used earlier in the quotation) that Putin brings in as he is reviving his discussion about Russia’s political independence.

The second element of note is linked to the idea of sovereignty, and especially control over domestic affairs. In his reference that some countries equate the strengthening of the Russian state with authoritarianism, Putin underscores the fact that some of the discomfort other countries may have with Russia’s rise was about the Russian domestic order rather than its increased assertiveness in foreign policy. Much of the BRICS argument with the current global order hinges on disagreement with the perceived interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. It is therefore worth highlighting the reemergence of this argument in Russian political discourse in the year before the BRIC countries held their first informal meeting.<sup>24</sup>

Although improved domestic conditions and increased national confidence comprise part of the basis for this newly assertive tone, it is also a product of changes in Russia’s international relationships. By 2004, what had begun as good relations between Putin and then-U.S. President George W. Bush, bolstered by close cooperation following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had deteriorated considerably. The decline began in May 2002, when Bush made clear that the United States would withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and

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<sup>24</sup> BRICS leaders first met at the level of Deputy Foreign Minister in 2005. See: Yurii Valerianovich Andreev, “BRICS: Cherez sotrudnichesvo – k bezopasnosti?,” *Puti k miry i bezopasnosti* 45, no. 2 (2013): 127, [http://new.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/puty\\_miru/2013/13026\\_andreev.pdf](http://new.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/puty_miru/2013/13026_andreev.pdf).

begin pursuing missile defense initiatives.<sup>25</sup> Other than calling the decision a “mistake,” Putin reacted coolly to the announcement.<sup>26</sup> He averred that an American missile defense program would not threaten the Russian deterrent, and cooperation on issues of mutual interest continued.<sup>27</sup> Although the specific issue of missile defense would not become the main irritant in the relationship until later, the U.S. abrogation of the ABM Treaty marked the end of the “honeymoon in U.S.-Russian relations” that followed 9/11.<sup>28</sup>

In 2004, the primary causes of strain in U.S.-Russian relations were the Iraq war, the recent spate of color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, and Russia’s domestic politics. In 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq without authorization from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Russia joined with France and Germany to condemn the invasion.<sup>29</sup> The initial U.S. reaction was summed up as “punish France, ignore Germany, forgive Russia,” attributed to then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.<sup>30</sup> That attitude did not last long. The repercussions of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and in particular the Bush “Freedom Agenda” and its implications for democratization efforts in former Soviet republics, further soured already troubled U.S.-Russian relations.

Russia’s domestic situation compounded the problem. The core of the disagreement between the United States and Russia over both the invasion of Iraq as well as the broader “Freedom

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<sup>25</sup> Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 68–69.

<sup>26</sup> Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> John Tagliabue, “France, Germany and Russia Vow to Stop Use of Force Against Iraq,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2003, sec. International Style / Europe, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/europe/05CND-PARI.html>.

<sup>30</sup> “France Will Be Punished,” *The Telegraph*, June 1, 2003, sec. Comment, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/3592078/France-will-be-punished.html>.

Agenda” was the problem of interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states in contravention of international law. The Freedom Agenda became central to American foreign policy at the same time that tainted presidential elections and the seizure of the Yukos oil company signaled Russian’s domestic trajectory away from democracy and liberal economic reform.<sup>31</sup> This disagreement is the root of Putin’s statement about increasing state capacity being “consciously construed as authoritarianism.” Putin is arguing that by the precepts of the Freedom Agenda, intentionally misconstruing a strong independent Russia as authoritarian would give the United States pretense to work towards regime change in Russia itself, and not just on its borders.<sup>32</sup>

The strain in relations with the United States affected how Putin described Russia’s international partnerships in the 2004 address. In listing important international partners, Putin equates the importance of Russia’s relations with the United States with that of its relations with China and India.<sup>33</sup> This is not a serious equation. Putin did actively pursue partnerships with countries and organizations in the Asia Pacific from the beginning of his term.<sup>34</sup> However, Russia did not begin really designing a coherent policy towards Asia until after the 2008 financial crisis, and even now the relationship remains quite shallow.<sup>35</sup> However, the emphasis on relations with China and India was a signal of the renewed attention to Primakov’s Strategic Triangle (RIC –

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<sup>31</sup> The Freedom Agenda was not formally articulated until after 2004, but its roots were evident much earlier, and it was the de facto American foreign policy well before its codification.

<sup>32</sup> 2004 was also the year of the “big bang” enlargement, when 10 former Warsaw Pact members, including the three Baltic states (which had been republics of the USSR) joined NATO and the EU. This brought NATO directly to Russian borders.

<sup>33</sup> Putin, “Poslanie k Federannomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”

<sup>34</sup> Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Gabuev, interview by Rachel S. Salzman, Personal Interview, December 5, 2014, Moscow, Russia.; Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, xxi.

Russia-India-China) in Russian strategy after lying fallow since its inception in 1997.<sup>36</sup> Further, it indicated the beginning of the rhetorical deployment of Russia's relations with these countries as an alternative to its relationship with its Western partners.

The shift in rhetorical framing of sovereignty and independence between 2000 and 2006 was overall fairly mild. 2007, however, marked a seismic change in the development of these concepts, and concurrently of the incorporation of BRIC into Russian foreign policy strategy and discourse. Two documents exemplify this change: publicly, Putin's speech at the annual Munich Security Conference signaled his administration's change in perspective.<sup>37</sup> Internal to the government, the 2007 Survey of Russian Foreign Policy, the first major review of foreign policy since Putin assumed office in 2000, laid out the extent of the changes and their implications for foreign policy objectives.<sup>38</sup>

In truth, Putin's Munich speech was something of a coming out party for views that had been in development for some time. In a 2006 speech to members of the United Russia Party, then-First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov said that the former members of the Eastern Bloc who joined the European Union were simply trading one type of diminished sovereignty for another, an overt denigration of Western integration.<sup>39</sup> In the same speech, Surkov declared that sovereignty was the "political synonym of [Russian]

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<sup>36</sup> Putin, "Poslanie k Federannomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii."

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2007, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy" (Moscow, Russia, March 2007), [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/89a30b3a6b65b4f2c32572d700292f74?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/89a30b3a6b65b4f2c32572d700292f74?OpenDocument).

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Bruce Parrott, "Russia: European or Not?," in *Europe Today: A Twenty-First Century Introduction*, ed. Ronald Tiersky and Erik Jones, 4th ed (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 212–213.

competitiveness.”<sup>40</sup> By 2007, four years after the invasion of Iraq and three years after the Yukos affair, Putin’s dissatisfaction with U.S. foreign policy, and the West more broadly, was already well documented. That dissatisfaction was also being stoked anew by the announcement about planned U.S. missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic.<sup>41</sup>

The Munich speech is therefore not distinctive because of its general content. Instead, its import derives from the following three elements: its tone, its specificity, and its foreshadowing of future policies. On tone, this was no gentle chiding of the keepers of the global status quo; it was a forceful and even vitriolic recrimination against nearly two decades of (perceived) ill treatment. Putin condemned what he saw as the hypocrisies of the United States with regard to democracy, arguing “Russia – we – are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves.”<sup>42</sup> Here Putin conflates democracy at the domestic level – the U.S. concern – with democracy in international relations – the Russian concern. The implicit message, however, is unequivocal: the United States expects other countries to operate by one set of standards, while it remains unbound those same standards.

Putin then made that message explicit. He said:

One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Pervyi zamestitel glavy kremlevskoi administratsii Vladislav Surkov: Syvernitet - eto politicheskii sinonim nashei konkurentspособnosti,” *Komsomolskaia pravda*, March 7, 2006, sec. Politika - Rossii, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/23669/50644/>; Fyodor Lukranov argues that by the end of Putin's second presidential term, the idea of "competition" had taken on an ideological caste, with particular reference to competition against Western ideational control in the international system. See Lukyanov, “Putin’s Russia,” 133–136.

<sup>41</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Is Proposing European Shield for Iran Missiles,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2006, sec. International / Middle East, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/22/world/middleeast/22missiles.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Putin, “Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

This was not a new criticism, but it was more forceful than its previous iterations. If Western policymakers had before been able to brush Russian concerns aside, Munich made clear that further inattention was no longer an option.

Second, the speech represented the first formal announcement of Russia's "nonalignment" and search for new partners and a new system. At the conclusion of his remarks, Putin stated:

Russia is a country with a history that spans more than one thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy

We are not going to change this tradition today. At the same time, we are well aware of how the world has changed and we have a realistic sense of our own opportunities and potential. And of course we would like to interact with responsible and independent partners with whom we could work together in constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all.<sup>44</sup>

There are two important elements here: the stress on Russia as an independent actor on the international stage, and the call to build a new world order that does not privilege the interests of certain members of the international community over those of others. The former is a public declaration that Russia is a country out to protect its own interests and does not consider itself bound by the preferences of the Euro-Atlantic community. The latter is a verbatim foreshadowing of the overall goal that would soon be incorporated in every BRICS summit declaration.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

This foreshadowing of BRICS concerns is the third symbolism in the Munich speech. During the speech, after highlighting the impressive growth rates of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, Putin declared that “[t]here is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity.”<sup>45</sup> The quick connection between the economic rise of the BRICs and the assumption of their future political prowess is evidence that, less than five months after the first meeting of the BRIC foreign ministers at the 2006 UNGA, Putin was already thinking about how BRIC could be mobilized as a political force.

These public pronouncements are reinforced by the findings and recommendations in the 2007 Survey on Russian Foreign Policy, an internal document produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The survey hails the “newly acquired policy independence of Russia,” and argues that the time is ripe for Russia to take a more active role as a subject rather than an object of international affairs.<sup>46</sup> As the introduction to the nearly seventy-page document explains:

Russia is firmly entering the mainstream of international life, and therefore the supertask [*sverkhzadacha*] of the Survey is intellectually and psychologically to get accustomed to this new position for us. The qualitatively new situation in international relations creates favorable opportunities for our intellectual leadership in a number of areas of world politics. In other words, it is about Russia’s active participation not only in carrying out the international agenda, but also in shaping it.<sup>47</sup>

The “qualitatively new situation” to which the document refers is the effects of globalization.

The survey opens with the following observation:

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Obzor vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, March 27, 2007), [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/378188](http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/378188).

Substantial changes have taken place on the world scene in recent years. The growing processes of globalization, despite their contradictory consequences, lead to a more even distribution of resources of influence and economic growth, thus laying the objective basis for a multipolar construct of international relations.<sup>48</sup>

The rest of the document details a plan for how best to capitalize on those developments to increase Russian weight in the international system. BRIC is explicitly part of that plan. Though the group is only mentioned once, in the section on economic diplomacy, the Survey recommends that Russia “continue developing cooperation in [the BRIC] format.”<sup>49</sup> More significantly, it also recommends that cooperation move beyond economics and onto other issues of mutual concern, including counter-terrorism.<sup>50</sup> This is an indication that in 2007 the Russian foreign policy apparatus already saw in BRIC a political platform. The overriding message of the 2007 Survey is of a coming change in the international order. It is also of a resurgent Russia, one with the capacity to influence this change, and to do so from an independent foreign policy position.

## **Russia’s Evolving National Identity and the Rise of “Civilizationalism” in Foreign Policy Discourse**

The preceding section explored the development of the concepts of sovereignty and independence in Russian foreign policy discourse. This section considers the evolution of the rhetorical framing of Russian national identity during Putin’s first two terms in office, with particular emphasis on two issues: the question of Russia’s developmental path, and how that

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<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



question morphs into the related but broader idea of a “dialogue of civilizations.” The discussion builds on previous discussions of Russian national identity, but brings the focus to how Russia’s identity was publicly formulated in official speeches and documents during Putin first two terms in office.

As in the preceding section, the analysis draws on the annual presidential addresses and official policy concepts to demonstrate both gradual evolution and watershed moments. Two main questions animate the exploration. First, the extent to which Russia’s European identity is stressed over a unique Russian identity. Second, and related, is the broader question of how the idea of “civilization” is framed, particularly whether it is singular or multiple, and how it is connected to economic and political development.

In “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” Putin made clear his views on Russia’s place in the world and its future development. He argued:

Russia is completing the first, transition stage of economic and political reforms. Despite problems and mistakes, it has entered the highway by which the whole of humanity is traveling. Only this way offers the possibility of dynamic economic growth and higher living standards, as the world experience convincingly shows. There is no alternative to it.<sup>51</sup>

To underscore the message of joining the universal path to development, Putin stated that Communism “was a road to a blind alley, which is far away from the mainstream of civilization.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, much of the first section of the Millennium Manifesto details the negative legacies the Soviet economic structure bequeathed to Russia, including the emphasis on natural

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<sup>51</sup> Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

resources and the lack of competition.<sup>53</sup> In his analysis of the current situation in Russia, Putin declared: “today we are reaping the bitter fruit, both material and mental, of the past decades.”<sup>54</sup> The desire to leave behind the previous model of development and its crippling effects on Russia’s global competitiveness are clear.

Putin is not arguing that all countries and peoples are the same. He writes about the specificities of Russian national identity, and how those specificities fit with more universal values. He speaks of the dangers of simply applying foreign models whole cloth.<sup>55</sup> The emphasis on a strong and stable state as a prerequisite for Russian success that would become sharper over the course of his first term in office also comes through clearly in the Millennium Manifesto. He also decries all extreme reform models, including those pursued in the early 1990s.<sup>56</sup> However, Putin’s argument is primarily that the principles of a model must fit the realities on the ground. He is not arguing that having a distinct national identity implies being a member of a distinct civilization requiring an entirely different development path.

Second, and equally significant, is the abandonment of the longstanding tradition of Russia as the vanguard of a countermovement in the global marketplace of ideas. This marks a decisive turn from (late) tsarist and Soviet iterations of Russian foreign policy, where leadership of a global counterculture – whether Moscow as the “Third Rome” or, as in the previous example, Communism – was a bedrock principle. Russia (like the United States) has a long history of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

believing it has a global mission.<sup>57</sup> Putin's call to join the path of the rest of civilization and his disavowal of Communism and all it represented developmentally thus marked a major change.

This is not to argue that Russia professed no global ambition during Putin's early years in office. As noted above, the 2000 National Security Concept underlines the importance of promoting a multipolar world with Russia as "one of its influential centres."<sup>58</sup> The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, like all of its successors, identifies the formation of a new world order as the top Russian priority in "resolving global problems."<sup>59</sup> The difference is that in the earlier documents, Russia's conflicts with Western policies are framed in political rather than civilizational or identity terms.

The annual addresses to the Federal Assembly from 2000-2003 support this interpretation. In these speeches, Putin expressed frustration with humanitarian intervention and NATO expansion, but he also repeatedly stressed that relations with the European Union and the United States were Russia's top foreign policy priorities after relations with the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Throughout this period, the refrain was of Russia reclaiming its rightful place as a European great power and a member of the top echelon of developed nations.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> On the Russian tradition, see Sergei Magaril, "The Mythology of the 'Third Rome' in Russian Educated Society," *Russian Politics & Law* 50, no. 5 (October 9, 2012): 21, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=83403923&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>58</sup> "National Security Concept of the Russian Federation."

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation."

<sup>60</sup> Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," July 8, 2000; Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," April 3, 2001; Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," April 18, 2002; Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," May 16, 2003.

This approach is best exemplified in the 2003 Address, where Putin touted the achievement of the full membership in the Group of Eight (G8) as the best indication of Russia's international integration. He declared:

Above everything else, in June of last year Russia was invited to become a full member of the club of eight most developed states in the world. In it, together with our partners, we are working on providing for our national interests and in resolving general problems that stand before modern civilization.<sup>61</sup>

Here is a clear statement of both international priorities and, less directly, Russian identity.

Russia is identified as a country of the Global North, a developed country cooperating with its rightful partners, the other most developed countries. Further, Putin speaks of the idea of confronting common problems of “modern civilization.” Although elsewhere in the speech Putin speaks of Russia as “unique community,” and there is the reference to protecting Russian national interests, there is no indication of the existence of a multiplicity of civilizations or alternative paths of national development.

As with the discourse about sovereignty and independence, the approach to identity began shifting noticeably in 2004. However, the change was not immediately apparent as an adjustment in the framing of national identity. Instead, the change is visible in two smaller rhetorical stresses and innovations that began appearing in the annual addresses after 2004. The first is the renewed emphasis on World War II (the Great Patriotic War) as a cornerstone of contemporary Russian national identity. The second is the revival of the idea of responsibility for ethnic Russians living beyond Russia's borders.

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<sup>61</sup> Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” May 16, 2003.

*The Narrative of the Great Patriotic War*

It is hard to overstate the impact of the Second World War on the Soviet Union. The USSR suffered the greatest losses among the combatant powers during the war, and also made the greatest contribution to the Allied victory.<sup>62</sup> The number of Soviet casualties was five times that of German casualties.<sup>63</sup> Despite these unimaginable losses, or perhaps because of the collective experience of surviving and ultimately defeating the enemy, “the war strengthened Communist rule, especially by creating a sense of besieged national unity and providing the government with a source of legitimacy as defender of the homeland.”<sup>64</sup> It is the idea of the war as a source of unity in a hostile world that became most important when Putin began reviving the memory of war in 2005.

During his 2005 address (the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory), Putin argued that, “Victory was possible not just through the strength of weapons, but through the strength of all the peoples [*narodov*] united at the time in the union state.”<sup>65</sup> The important element here is the emphasis on the spiritual aspect of victory, reinforced later in the speech with the statement that “the soldiers of the Great Patriotic War should by rights be called soldiers of freedom [*po pravu nazyvaiut soldatami svobody*].”<sup>66</sup> Such a characterization explicitly ignores both the atrocities of the Soviet army on its march to Berlin (and earlier, such as the Katyn massacre), as well as the brutal regime these soldiers served and suffered under. Glossing over these more uncomfortable sides

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<sup>62</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Ecco, 2009), 135.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia since 1855 - Volume 2*, Eighth edition (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 544.

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii” (Moscow, Russia, April 25, 2005), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/04/87049.shtml>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Soviet war experience, Putin's arguments are consciously linked with statements about contemporary Russia's freedom, as a sovereign nation, to define its own path to and variant of democracy.<sup>67</sup> Veneration of the Victory, and pageantry on May 9 (*den Pobedy*, Victory Day), have become critical elements in the Putin government's efforts to construct a modern Russian national identity.

As noted above, the Soviet experience during the war was indelibly extreme. It is only logical that it would be incorporated into later constructions of the national sense of self. The problem is that the veneration has taken on an exclusionary character. Highlighting the singular achievement of the Soviet Union in defeating the Nazis and saving Europe – and linking that singularity to modern Russian identity – creates a separation between Russia and the rest of Europe. It also recalls the Brezhnev policy of lionizing the role of the Communist Party in the World War II victory as part of its own regime legitimization strategy following Nikita Khrushchev's ouster.<sup>68</sup> More problematically, the emphasis on the Soviet achievements during World War II without mention of Soviet crimes, and especially the seizure of the Baltic states and the atrocities committed in Poland, drive a wedge between Russia and its closest European neighbors.

This leads to the broader problem of the lionization of the memory of the Great Patriotic War: the man who led the country at the time. Analysis of Putin's appeal to the (selective) memory of World War II would be incomplete without discussion of Stalin and Stalinism. As Robert Legvold writes of Stalin:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 255.

Never before or since has a Russian ruler so ravaged existing political, economic, and social structure. Not a single institution, from the family to the inner sanctum of power...escaped wholesale transmutation. More than that, of course, the collectivization of agriculture, the forced-draft industrialization, and the purge of the party and the military thoroughly rescripted the very underpinnings of society.<sup>69</sup>

Stalin and the system he created were responsible for millions of civilian deaths across the Soviet Union, as a result of direct execution, state-sponsored famine, and slave labor in the GULAG system. Further, his faith that Hitler would honor the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 left the USSR unprepared for war and likely increased the number of Soviet casualties among both soldiers and civilians.

Yet despite these crimes, Stalin has a complicated place in post-Soviet historical narratives. According to a poll commissioned by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and conducted by the Levada Center in 2012:

Almost half of Russians surveyed believe “Stalin was a wise leader who brought the Soviet Union to might and prosperity. But over half of the Russians surveyed believe that Stalin’s acts of repression constituted “a political crime that cannot be justified.” And about two thirds agree that “for all Stalin’s mistakes and misdeeds, the most important thing is that under his leadership the Soviet people won the Great Patriotic War.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Legvold, “Russian Foreign Policy During Periods of Great State Transformation,” in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, ed. Robert Legvold (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 85.

<sup>70</sup> Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov, and Lasha Bakradze, *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*, ed. Thomas De Waal (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 16; Though the poll was conducted outside the timeframe addressed in this chapter, there is no reason to think that it would have yielded significantly different results in 2005, since the big change in veneration of WWI came with Putin's accession. See David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 105..

As the survey results show, it is precisely Stalin's links to World War II that makes his legacy so complicated. If Stalin's crimes are fully acknowledged, then this taints his biggest achievement: the Soviet victory in World War II.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, while his image has been erased from public life and street signs, he remains "a hidden hero," whose presence continues to influence both Russian politics and the relationship between state and society.<sup>72</sup>

Putin's approach to Stalin during his first two terms in office reflected the ambiguity of Stalin's place in the Russian consciousness. The strong state Putin established, with its dependence on the security ministries, is a Soviet vision of the state, and Stalin is closely associated with that model.<sup>73</sup> Putin oversaw a system where school textbooks were changed to extoll Stalin as "an efficient manager" while simultaneously including *Gulag Archipelago* on the reading list.<sup>74</sup> In October 2007, Putin visited one of places where mass executions took place during the Great Terror and was apparently moved and shocked by the experience.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, his regime has also prevented the establishment of an official memorial center for Stalin's victims, and Memorial, the Russian organization devoted to rehabilitating Stalin's victims, is under frequent threat of closure.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the approach from 2000-2008 was one of a careful balance. Putin acknowledged some level of wrongdoing on the part of Stalin and his system, but he did not allow criticism to progress to a point that it threatened the narrative of the Great Patriotic War,

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<sup>71</sup> Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, 22.

<sup>72</sup> Lipman, Gudkov, and Bakradze, *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 18. See note 189 in the first chapter for debate over how analogous the Stalin model is to the current system.

<sup>74</sup> Judah, *Fragile Empire*, 112.

<sup>75</sup> Lipman, Gudkov, and Bakradze, *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 20; Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, 22.



especially when that narrative became more important to Putin's construction of national identity.<sup>77</sup>

*The "Russian World" and Civilizational Discourse*

The other shift that happened with Putin's second term in office was the revival of the idea of the broader Russian community beyond Russia's geographical borders. Mentions of Russia's responsibility to protect compatriots abroad are long-standing features of official Russian policy documents, but after 2004 the tone began to change. Indeed, the famous line of the collapse of the USSR as the "biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century [*krupneishei geopoliticheskoi katastrofa veka*]," which appeared in Putin's 2005 Annual Address, is nested within a paragraph about Russians finding themselves on the wrong side of the border.<sup>78</sup>

The emphasis on the existence of a "Russian world," to be strengthened through the promulgation of Russian language and culture, is in some ways simply an example of Russia experimenting with deploying soft power. It has also been interpreted as a renewal of historical Russian imperialism. Both of these interpretations have merit. In this analysis, however, what is important is the reintroduction of idea that Russians are a distinct and unique civilization.

Though not fully articulated in the annual speeches until later, these quiet nods to the idea laid the groundwork for the major innovations on this topic introduced in the 2007 foreign policy survey.

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<sup>77</sup> Leon Rabinovich Aron, *Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987-1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 299.

<sup>78</sup> Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," April 25, 2005.

As with the discourse on independence and national sovereignty, 2007 marked a turning point in the discourse on civilization. The section on multilateral diplomacy of the 2007 survey prepared by the MFA includes an entire subsection entitled “Dialogue Among Civilizations.” The subsection opens with a statement about the dangers of globalization erasing “national distinctiveness,” and goes on to argue:

The promotion of the dialogue among civilizations in these circumstances is becoming one of the most important elements of our foreign policy strategy. There are grounds to make this theme the thread running through our international contacts and secure it as the “big idea” of Russian diplomacy for the foreseeable future. This is already becoming an effective means for asserting the intellectual leadership of Russia in world politics, upholding our foreign policy independence and advancing national interests in particular situations and questions of international life.<sup>79</sup>

This paragraph points to two major deviations from the Millennium article that Putin endorsed seven years prior. First is the idea of multiple civilizations, as opposed to, as in the Millennium Address, joining the path that all of civilization joins. This is particularly notable because the notion of a dialogue of civilizations is standard language in BRICS statements and declarations.

The second deviation is more striking, and, from the perspective of how BRICS fits into Russian foreign policy, more important. Here is the reintroduction of the search for the next “great idea” that will reinstate Russia as the leader of a global counterculture. This is quite different from the assertion in the Millennium article that the Bolshevik experiment was an “historic futility.”<sup>80</sup> It also suggests that part of the goal in bringing BRIC together was to create a forum where Russia could offer “big ideas.”<sup>81</sup> The phrase “intellectual leadership” is especially significant, as it is the

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<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>80</sup> Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium.”

<sup>81</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, interview by Rachel S. Salzman, Personal Interview, December 13, 2014, Moscow, Russia.

same phrase the leader of National Committee on BRICS Research (NKI BRIKS) uses to describe Russia's role in the group.<sup>82</sup>

The 2007 Survey also explicitly identifies the aim of establishing Russia, and Russians, as a distinct civilization. In the subsection "Protecting the interests of Compatriots Abroad," which appears in a chapter on "the Humanitarian Direction of Foreign Policy," the report states:

For the new Russia, especially as tens of millions of our people [*desiatki millionov nashikh liudei*] as a result of the breakup of the USSR have found themselves outside of the country, defending compatriots' interests is a natural foreign policy priority, whose significance will only grow. There is a need for continuous all-round assistance to the strengthening of the compatriots' links with the historical Homeland and the creation of a "Russian world" as a unique element of human civilization.<sup>83</sup>

There are several notable ideas in this paragraph. First, the paragraph recalls the phraseology of the paragraph from the 2005 Annual Address about the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union as a great geopolitical catastrophe, suggesting that the message of that speech has been internalized into policy direction. Second, in recommending that resources be devoted to "creating" Russia and Russians as a distinct civilization, the Survey implicitly indicates that the proposal represents a shift in policy. The recommendation builds on previously adopted documents related to language and resettlement assistance programs for Russians living abroad, but this shows a unification of these disparate attempts into a higher-level, conceptual push towards public unification of Russia as a separate civilization.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Georgii Toloraya, interview by Rachel S. Salzman, Personal Interview, May 14, 2014, Moscow Russia. NKI BRIKS is an MFA-founded group in Russia devoted to working on BRICS issues.

<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Obzor vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii."

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Survey of Russian Foreign Policy."

## Restoring Balance to Putin's Rhetorical Balancing

It is important to remember that even as Putin's rhetoric on issues of sovereignty and civilization became more strident, it never progressed to the point of a wholesale rejection of the West in terms of either identity or policy during his first two presidential terms. Neither was it an uncomplicated process of separation. Even in speeches delineating Russia from its European neighbors, Putin also declared that the country was a "great European nation."<sup>85</sup> The 2007 foreign policy survey touts Russia's inclusion in the G8 as proof that the group is becoming more representative and no longer simply "an exclusive 'club of Western powers,'" while at the same time Russia balked at the idea of inviting the Outreach-5 (O5) countries to the 2006 G8 summit in St. Petersburg, the first hosted by Russia.<sup>86</sup> Russia was also initially opposed to the G20 financial group, worried that including other countries would minimize its own power, even though it was already excluded from the G7 finance minister meetings.<sup>87</sup>

There are several interrelated issues here. Partly, it is that regardless of the change in rhetoric, the political elite, including Putin, remained firmly Western oriented.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the overriding goal has always been maintaining Russia's preeminence in the world's most powerful (or most exclusive) clubs. Up until the beginning of the 2008 financial crisis, those clubs were almost entirely Western. The rhetoric, therefore, indicated possible changes in policy direction; it did

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<sup>85</sup> Putin, "Poslanie k Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," April 25, 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Anthony Payne, "The G8 in a Changing Global Economic Order," *International Affairs* 84, no. 3 (May 2008): 530, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00721.x. The O5 (Outreach 5) were a group of non-Western developing countries that sporadically invited to G8 Summits beginning in 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Pavel Baev, "Leading in the Concert of Great Powers : Lessons from Russia's G8 Chairmanship," in *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen (London New York: Routledge, 2009), 60. This is not the same G20 that materialized after the beginning of the 2008 global financial crisis.

<sup>88</sup> Gabuev, interview; Lukyanov, interview; Victoria Panova, interview by Rachel S. Salzman, Personal Interview, September 19, 2014, Moscow, Russia.

not represent a real sea change in the core political perspective. In that sense, the combative and separatist rhetoric that emerged over Putin's first two terms in office is better understood as a warning shot against Western countries to prevent them from encroaching on Russian national interests rather than an intention to leave the Western sphere entirely.

This leads to the second issue: balancing. BRIC was in no way capable of being an actual balance against the West between 2000 and 2007. Although the countries' growth and future potential were recognized very early in Putin's first term, meetings did not begin until 2005. Indeed, as the brief partnership with France and Germany in the wake of the onset of the Iraq War demonstrates, early balancing efforts were more about dividing the United States and Europe rather than forming new coalitions. Finally, public efforts to coordinate against Western influence before the onset of the crisis, notably Russia's nomination of an alternative candidate for the position of Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund in 2007, were unsuccessful.<sup>89</sup> The best Putin could do, therefore, was establish Russia's status as an independent actor rhetorically, deploying the BRIC moniker as a buttress where possible, while slowly building up the group behind the scenes.

Finally, there is the question of economics. While it is tempting to read Russia's BRIC engagement, and the idea of a "multi-vector" policy more broadly, as strictly anti-Western, this would be an oversimplification, especially in the early years. The one absolute constant in all of Putin's speeches in his first two terms, and a constant which held in the official concepts produced by the ministries, was that the primary foreign and domestic policy goal was economic

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<sup>89</sup> Peter Finn, "Russia Challenges West With Nomination to IMF," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2007, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/22/AR2007082202487.html>.

development. This necessitated both a diversification of the economy away from natural resources (which Putin did not achieve) and a diversification of economic partners (which he did). During his time as president, Russian trade with non-European partners did increase somewhat.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, although BRIC was and is more about politics than economics for Russia, it is worth remembering that it also served economic objectives.

Understanding the role BRIC would play in Russian foreign policy once the group debuted on the international scene, therefore, requires accepting several competing truths simultaneously. Rhetoric about Russia as its own civilization distinct from Europe and the country's right to define its own development path increased between 2000 and 2007; this was both cause and consequence of deteriorating relations with the West. At the same time, the preference for remaining in the top echelon of international clubs mandated continued prioritization of groups like the G8 over fledgling associations with other powers. Finally, economic logic offered a veneer for emphasizing relations beyond the West, and a changing distribution of economic power supported those efforts.

## **Conclusion**

BRIC burst forth onto the international stage during the acute phase of the 2008 global financial crisis. In the years since, it has successfully lobbied for changes to voting weights in the International Monetary Fund, held annual summits of its leaders, and opened both a development bank and a currency pool. Until the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine in February 2014, however,

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<sup>90</sup> See the IMF World Economic Outlook dataset from October 2015.

these accomplishments did not register in how Putin and the Russian leadership discussed the group. Instead, Russian elite political rhetoric focused on BRICS as an alternative the Western-led international system, and on the group as set of distinct civilizations, each of which had the utmost respect for national sovereignty. The onset of the Ukrainian crisis added more depth to the discussion, but it also sharpened the exclusionary nature of Russian discussion of BRICS.

Since most of the rest of the BRICS joined initially for political economic reasons, Russia's approach to the group is unique.<sup>91</sup> The approach, moreover, is not explicitly manifest from the early days of the BRICS concept. In part, this is because there is no official record of the first meetings of BRIC representatives. Major newspapers (Russian or otherwise) did not cover them, and it was not until the first leaders' meeting at the 2008 Hokkaido G8 that the Kremlin even published a press release about BRIC.<sup>92</sup> Neither was BRIC mentioned in any of the Annual Addresses during Putin's first two terms in office. In terms of documentary evidence, the very early years of BRIC in Russian political discourse are visible almost exclusively in how attendant concepts were framed.

However, there is evidence that BRIC was beginning to feature in Russian foreign policy planning before the 2008 financial crisis. This is evident in Putin's 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference, where he suggested that new economic centers would become the new global political leaders. BRIC also features in the 2007 Foreign Policy Survey. Though the group is mentioned only in the context of economic diplomacy, the report stresses the importance of

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<sup>91</sup> All of the BRICS to some extent stress BRICS as an alternative, but Russia is most vocal in its criticisms of the current system. Other than South Africa, whose 2011 inclusion in the group was controversial, Russia is the only country to frame its BRICS membership in primarily political terms.

<sup>92</sup> Kremlin, "The Leaders of the BRIC Countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) Met during the G8 Summit in Japan" (Tokyo, Hokkaido, Japan, July 9, 2008), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/news/2008/07/203929.shtml>.

continuing to develop it as a dialogue forum. By 2007, BRIC had penetrated into MID strategic planning as a useful vector for Russian foreign policy, beyond the use of each individual BRIC country as an economic partner.

What is most important, however, is the extent to which the evolution of rhetoric during Putin's first two terms in office created a space for BRIC to be incorporated into Russian foreign policy when the group became a feature of international politics. This is primarily a result of the twin phenomena of increasing frustration with the West and economic growth that made Russia a more self-assured actor on the international stage. By the time of the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, Putin had publicly redefined Russia's international orientation sufficiently to support a credible belief that the country was no longer interested in joining the Western-led international system, but would instead forge an alternative path. Six years later, when Russia found itself ostracized by the West for its actions in Ukraine, BRICS stood at the ready to become not only a rhetorical alternative but as a viable new vector for Russian foreign policy.



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