

## Russian Diplomacy: Challenging the West

By Charles E. Ziegler

### INTRODUCTION

According to classical realism, diplomacy is the means by which states defend their interests and achieve their objectives short of war, using a mixture of persuasion, compromise, and the threat of force. In the quarter-century since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian diplomacy has evolved from a passive, Western-orientation toward a muscular, multilateral and assertive posture. In the immediate post-perestroika years Russian diplomacy reflected the nascent democratic character of the new Russia, and the search for a new post-Soviet identity. Since Vladimir Putin ascended to the presidency, Russian diplomacy has become highly effective at several diplomatic issues. These include: Promoting and representing Russian national interests; defending key principles of sovereignty; non-interference in internal affairs; and respect for Russia as a great power; consolidating the former Soviet space as a privileged sphere of Russian influence; and addressing Russia's vital security concerns in the Eurasian region, including concerns with The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) expansion eastward.

### RUSSIAN POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY

In Russia's political system the President is instrumental in setting the main contours of Russian foreign policy. According to Article 80 of the Russian Federation Constitution, the President is the head of state and represents the country in international relations. Since assuming the presidency in 2000, Vladimir Putin has centralized policy-making in his office. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and various high-level officials of the Ministry coordinate and implement the details of foreign policy, but policy is closely aligned with the President, who sets foreign policy guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

Russian diplomacy under Putin reflects his personal approach to the

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world. For example, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Putin offered Russian support to President George W. Bush and Russian diplomacy followed his lead. Six years later, convinced that Bush had been weakened by the Iraq adventure and angered by U.S. support for color revolutions, Putin delivered his 2007 Munich speech condemning the U.S. for unilateralism and the hyper-use of force.<sup>2</sup> Russian diplomacy subsequently reflected this more aggressive approach. It also reflects the unpredictability of Russian foreign policy, which is subject to the personal whims of Mr. Putin.

As with most chief executives, the Russian president frequently engages in summit diplomacy. High-profile meetings enhance the leader's image abroad, and confirm Russia's great power status for domestic audiences. By inviting Boris Yeltsin to the G-7 meetings in 1994, the leading industrial states were signaling their willingness to include Russia in this elite club. Conversely, after Russia flouted international norms by annexing Crimea and supporting separatists in southeastern Ukraine, President Putin was excluded from G-8 summits. To minimize this slight, Russian media have played up Putin's participation in G-20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRICS (referring the countries of Brazil, Russian, Indonesia, China and South Africa) forums, together with bilateral summits and hosting such events as a meeting of the Association of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders at Sochi in 2016, and the 2018 World Cup.

As Russia transitioned from centrally planned state socialism toward a capitalist market economy, foreign policy adjusted to prioritize economic diplomacy as a tool to promote development and modernization.<sup>3</sup> Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Department of Economic Cooperation coordinates trade and investment activities and promotes Russia's integration in the global economy through such mechanisms as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Russian energy diplomacy is often conducted at the very highest level, as in negotiations over the Nordstream natural gas pipeline between Putin and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and those of the Power of Siberia gas pipeline finalized by Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in early 2014.

Maintaining a prominent presence on the world stage enhances the legitimacy of Russian leaders, who can point to their diplomatic successes as evidence that Russia is a respected major player in global affairs. Soviet leaders valued détente so highly because the United States in effect acknowledged parity with the Soviet Union, recognizing its status as a co-equal superpower. Similarly, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has praised Russia's "special role in European and global history," and approvingly quotes Henry Kissinger

that “Russia should be perceived as an essential element of any new global equilibrium...”<sup>4</sup>

## **DIPLOMACY AND MILITARY POWER**

In foreign policy, military capabilities are closely linked to diplomatic influence. Russia’s military weakness in the 1990s resulted from the collapse of the economy and the inability to build effective political institutions. Under these conditions, foreign policy tended to be more accommodating.<sup>5</sup> One example is the development of pacific diplomacy between NATO and Russia in the immediate post-Communist period, to the point that the possibility of using force in the relationship became unthinkable.<sup>6</sup> However, the dismissive attitude toward Russia expressed by NATO officials nurtured resentment and a determination to reassert Russia’s interests more vigorously once the power balance had been restored.

As Russia modernized its military under Putin, its diplomatic approaches have become more assertive and confident. Russian diplomacy is very much realist in orientation, power-oriented and premised on defending the country’s national interests. In addition, there is a clear hierarchy whereby more powerful states are accorded respect, while smaller and less powerful countries are frequently dismissed as inconsequential. Respect and status are very important for Russia — top leaders consistently assert that Russia must be treated as an equal great power by other states. Much of the resentment of NATO’s expansion eastward derives not so much from an existential security threat posed by the admission of new member states, but because NATO did not take Russian interests seriously in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

Since NATO’s assault on Serbia in 1999, Russian leaders have been fixated on the principle that state sovereignty should be inviolable. Following the West’s support for Kosovo’s declaration of independence in 2008 against the expressed wishes of Serbia, Russia politicized its approach to diplomatic recognition. Immediately after the brief Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, Dmitri Medvedev’s government extended diplomatic recognition to the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, citing a parallel to Kosovo’s status. Russia has refused to recognize Kosovo and upon annexing Crimea in March 2014, asserted that in this case, self-determination trumped sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> During earlier negotiations on Kosovo’s status, Putin dismissed the American claim that Kosovo was a unique situation, positing instead a universal model that equated it with the Georgian territories.<sup>9</sup> If Europe and the United States applied a certain model of self-determination in the Balkans, the reasoning went, then Russia was fully justified in applying the

same logic to the former Soviet space.

## **EQUALITY AND RESPECT**

The need for full equality and respect in foreign affairs is a key goal of Russian diplomacy. Foreign Minister Lavrov describes “normal” diplomatic relations as characterized by respect — he criticized the Barack Obama administration for being obsessed with American exceptionalism and global leadership, and for a tendency to impose values by force rather than example.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Putin has decisively rejected a unipolar world with only one sovereign, where countries like Russia are constantly being lectured about democracy and where the U.S. imposes its policies on other nations.<sup>11</sup>

If equality and respect are major Russian diplomatic goals, then reciprocity is a basic diplomatic strategy. As Lavrov observed in an interview, “You always reciprocate. Positively, negatively, but this is something which you cannot change. It was not invented by us. It is the law of international relations. Reciprocity is the key.”<sup>12</sup> Reciprocity was evident when, in 2017, Russia and the United States engaged in tit-for-tat sanctions and diplomatic expulsions. In July, the U.S. Congress passed legislation imposing sanctions on Russia for interfering in the 2016 elections. Putin responded by ordering the American diplomatic mission in Russia reduced by 755 personnel, and Washington, in turn, reciprocated by closing Russia’s San Francisco consulate, a key center for espionage operations in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, Russian diplomacy defends principles of inviolable state sovereignty; promotes recognition of Russia as a great power with a Eurasian sphere of influence; demands respect in international affairs; seeks to restrain U.S., NATO, and EU advances; and asserts Russia’s right to participate fully in major global forums and institutions. Russian diplomatic methods include both cooperation and coercion, and reciprocity is a key strategy in preserving Russian honor. Finally, Russian diplomacy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was forced to adjust to conditions of economic crisis, limited military capabilities, and a unipolar world dominated by the United States. As chaotic democratization under Yeltsin gave way to consolidated authoritarianism under Putin, Russian diplomacy became more centralized, secretive, and assertive.

## **FROM SOVIET DIPLOMACY TO DIPLOMACY OF THE 1990S**

Following a short period of revolutionary idealism, where Bolshevik leaders rejected traditional bourgeois diplomacy and sought to undermine the

bourgeois international order, Soviet diplomacy reverted to a more typical European style of conducting foreign affairs.<sup>14</sup> Soviet diplomacy was soon tasked with promoting the country's national interests, rather than the cause of proletarian internationalism, although foreign policy behavior was always conceptualized through the ideological prism of Marxism-Leninism.

The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a reputation of professionalism, with diplomats well-schooled in foreign languages and history, and tough negotiators. In 1934, the Diplomatic Academy of the USSR was founded under the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to train Soviet diplomats. Toward the end of World War II, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) was established to educate students for careers in foreign affairs. Both institutions survived into the post-communist era and continued to train foreign service professionals. The USSR had diplomatic legations in virtually every country in the world and this policy of great-power engagement has continued in the post-communist era. Diplomacy was a vital tool in the Cold War struggle with the United States.

Much of this Soviet foreign policy bureaucracy would be carried over into the post-communist period — with Cold War thinking and a residual Marxist-Leninist worldview evident among older diplomats. The foreign ministry also inherited a centralized, top-down form of decision making characterized by a high level of formality and secrecy.<sup>15</sup> In the Soviet period, all major foreign policies were formulated by the Communist Party's Politburo, and decisions of the Party leadership were above criticism. Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy sought to de-ideologize Soviet foreign policy, to open it up to more critical scrutiny and to admit foreign policy failures, as in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. In today's Russia, the President and his closest advisors dominate foreign policy decision-making, much like the Politburo in Soviet times, and certain issues are no longer open to critical discussion.

Diplomacy in the new post-communist Russia sought to compensate for the country's isolation, its lack of economic clout, and diminished military capabilities. In a world order dominated by the United States, promoting multipolarity became a means of limiting U.S. power. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (1992-1996) struggled mightily to integrate Russia into the Western world, but in large part failed. One of his successors, Igor Ivanov (Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2004), dismissed Kozyrev's approach to the Post-Cold War order as "a romantic vision."<sup>16</sup> While Ivanov is more highly respected than Kozyrev, it was Evgeniy Primakov's efforts at restoring the balance of power during his tenure as Foreign Minister (1996-98) that earned him a reputation as Russia's consummate diplomat. Primakov was

professional, experienced, a realist and a pragmatist dedicated to advancing Russia's interests abroad by strengthening alliances with the non-western powers.<sup>17</sup>

A key priority of Russian diplomacy from the beginning was to provide the conditions for Russia's economic development and economic reform through integration into the global economy.<sup>18</sup> During the 1990s, the Russian economy suffered from hyperinflation, unemployment, and the stress of transitioning toward a market economy. Russia's economic diplomacy was tasked with encouraging foreign investment, making foreign markets more accessible to Russian exports, developing economic ties with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN members, and preserving economic links to the former Soviet republics. Participation in the WTO was a top priority — Russia eventually acquired WTO membership, but only after 18 years of arduous negotiations. As the economy improved, Russian diplomacy prioritized the re-integration of the post-Soviet space through the Customs Union, and later the Eurasian Economic Union.

Russia's diplomats faced the daunting challenging of reorienting their country's foreign policy in the midst of political transition, major economic reforms, and virtual political anarchy. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was charged with establishing diplomatic ties to the 14 new states on Russia's border, while contending with the Defense Ministry freelancing foreign policy in the Caucasus, Moldova, and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> A central problem was the question of Russia's national and foreign policy identity, which in the earliest years was oriented toward joining the Western world. But Moscow's perspective quickly evolved in a different direction. By the mid-1990s many Russian elites became disillusioned with the West, believing that Russian weakness in the 1990s led the West to take advantage of Russia, to humiliate it while ignoring Russian interests.

Soviet diplomacy was premised on the ideas of Marxist-Leninism. Russia inherited much of this legacy, including personnel, institutions, and experiences. The Marxist-Leninist ideology that had shaped Soviet foreign policy was abandoned, but a democratic ideology never really took hold. In the more liberal political atmosphere of the 1990s, new foreign policy actors emerged — the state Duma, independent media, business groups, regional officials, and public opinion — effectively decentralizing the conduct of foreign policy for a time.<sup>20</sup> However, under Putin's leadership, power to shape foreign policy gravitated back toward the presidency — no other institution has as significant a role in Russian diplomacy. The State Duma has a Committee on International Affairs, for example, but it lacks the policy-making or oversight authority to constrain either the president's



office or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>21</sup>

The new Post-Communist Russian diplomatic corps retained much of the Soviet foreign policy structure and personnel.<sup>22</sup> However, like many other government bureaucracies, the new Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs experienced a significant decline in budget and personnel following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some thirty-two embassies and consulates were closed and many talented younger diplomats — especially those with good language skills — left for more lucrative employment in the private business sector. Women found professional advancement in the diplomatic service highly limited.<sup>23</sup> Careers in the Foreign Ministry proved unattractive to younger specialists not because of low salaries, but rather due to the perception that power was concentrated in the ruling elite, and a belief that the Foreign Ministry lacked autonomy in policy-making.<sup>24</sup> This concentration of power stemmed from Vladimir Putin's determination to rebuild the "power vertical" in Russian politics, to address the weakness of a decentralized, nearly feudalistic polity.

This weakness was evident on the international stage. Many conservatives and nationalists in Russia decried the country's subservient position in relations with the West, blaming weakness in Russian diplomacy on Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.<sup>25</sup> His successor, Evgeniy Primakov, was a committed communist who personified the turn away from Kozyrev's Western orientation toward greater multilateralism in foreign policy. Primakov's strategy of creating the best possible conditions for a severely weakened Russia to pursue internal reforms, while avoiding isolation and preserving an international balance of power favorable to Russia's interests, was modeled on the diplomatic precedent set by Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov, who served as foreign minister (1856-1882) to Tsar Alexander II in the aftermath of the Crimean War.<sup>26</sup> Using Gorchakov as his model, Primakov sought to restore Russia's global influence in the 1990s, balancing the United States by strengthening Russia's ties with China and India.

The current Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov draws on both tsarist and Soviet traditions. He has continued to pursue a Primakov-style multipolar diplomacy, while constraining the exercise of U.S. power through the United Nations and other international institutions. Like Primakov, Lavrov reveres Gorchakov for restoring Russian influence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century solely through diplomacy, without resort to force. And like his Soviet counterpart Andrei Gromyko, Lavrov personifies staunch Russian opposition to American policies, earning the same nickname often applied to the stone-faced Gromyko — "Mr. Nyet."<sup>27</sup> Reflecting Putin's confrontational approach to the West, Mr. Lavrov and lower-ranking MFA personnel have pursued an

aggressive, even crude style of personal diplomacy.<sup>28</sup>

## VLADIMIR PUTIN AND RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY

In the early years of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia largely continued the cooperative diplomacy toward the West pursued by Yeltsin's administration, albeit leavened with an emphasis on multipolarity. Putin demonstratively supported the US in its war on terror following the September 11, 2001 attacks, overruling his generals to approve American military transit bases in Central Asia. However, with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the succession of color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan (2003-2005), Russian policy shifted toward confrontation.

The most prominent backlash to American unilateralism was Putin's 2007 speech to the Munich Security Forum, which took Western leaders by surprise. By that time Russia was developing the economic and military capabilities to back up its diplomatic maneuvering to gain acceptance as an equal partner. But the effectiveness of Russia's material capabilities cannot rest solely on energy resources and military might. Russian leaders realized that to maintain Russia's status as a great power the country would also need to develop soft power. Former Foreign Minister Ivanov advocated pursuing a "smart" foreign policy — one that was more flexible and backed by expert advice — with better inter-agency coordination; incorporated civil society institutions; and public-private partnerships. Ideas, Ivanov stressed, could confer a decisive advantage in a globalizing world. These non-material dimensions of foreign policy had been underestimated or neglected by the traditional diplomacy of the past.<sup>29</sup> The concept of "network diplomacy" exemplifies this new strategy.

Foreign Minister Lavrov first advanced the concept of "network diplomacy" in 2006, though the concept may be traced back to the system of flexible alliances advocated by Count Gorchakov in the nineteenth century. The idea is purely pragmatic, to move beyond the bloc politics of the Cold War and engage any combination of states based on coincident interests. Network diplomacy, Lavrov claimed, is aimed at solving common problems and is not directed against any particular state or organization. One major configuration Lavrov specified was the Russia EU-U.S. partnership. This triangle was not directed against China, but rather, could cooperate with China on issues of mutual concern such as North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Similarly, Lavrov asserted, a network like BRICS was not directed against the interests of the United States or the European Union.<sup>30</sup> Following the annexation of Crimea and deterioration of relations



with the West, Russia's network diplomacy focused more on the SCO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Russia-China-India triangle, groupings that excluded Western powers.

For Russia, network diplomacy aligns with the primary goal of shifting the global order away from American dominance and toward a more balanced, multipolar system. The SCO and BRICS process are examples of diplomatic successes because they include non-Western powers, China, and India, and so constitute the realization of Primakov's Eurasian vision. These organizations, together with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and CSTO, form the new ideal of network diplomacy. Lavrov has identified the Iran Nuclear Agreement, the deal to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons, and terrorism as issues where collective action is needed.<sup>31</sup>

These diplomatic initiatives may be considered a form of global governance, but it is governance on Russia's terms. Russian support for the UN, for example, can be viewed as a form of network diplomacy and support for global governance. However, since Russia has veto power in the UN Security Council, and can work with shifting coalitions of like-minded states in the UN General Assembly to realize foreign policy goals, this global institution provides Moscow with an effective means of restraining American power.

Personal ties are also vital to Russian diplomatic efforts. In the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union personal diplomacy at the highest levels augured well for bilateral relations between Russia and the United States. Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin personally met eighteen times over the eight years that Clinton was in office, and developed a close friendship. A second regular line of diplomatic communications was the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission, proposed by Andrei Kozyrev and headed by U.S. Vice President Al Gore and Russia's Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin. The commission dealt with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionality provisions (a sore spot with Chernomyrdin), energy development, joint space exploration, and Russia's nuclear deal with Iran. Through these high-level channels, the principals negotiated a number of major agreements including securing Ukraine's nuclear weapons, withdrawing Russian troops from the Baltic states, and institutionalizing Russia's relationship to NATO.<sup>32</sup>

As Russian diplomacy, like Russian politics, was recentralized under Vladimir Putin, his penchant for secrecy and lack of any significant institutional constraints made foreign policy more unpredictable. Putin established close personal relations with some leaders, most notably former

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Schröder had criticized the American invasion of Iraq, while Berlusconi admired Putin's macho authoritarian style of leadership. With other world leaders, Putin had tense relations, including with President Barack Obama who, early in his first term, chided Putin for "having one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new."<sup>33</sup> And with Schröder's successor, Angela Merkel, who was famously intimidated by Putin's black Labrador. Putin's extensive experience as the leader of Russia and his intelligence training give him an edge in personal diplomacy. One senior US intelligence officer remarked on how Putin's KGB training helps him discern vulnerabilities in others and exploit them to his advantage during negotiations, exploited Chancellor Merkel's fear of dogs being one such instance.<sup>34</sup>

Russian diplomacy in the early years of the Yeltsin administration was fairly idealistic, but under Putin it became far more pragmatic in advancing Russian interests. American-style moralism which resists engaging with certain international actors (rogue states, for example), is absent from Russian diplomatic practice. Indeed, Putin sought to reestablish close ties with states that had been effectively abandoned following the breakup of the USSR, and he made a point of courting leaders hostile to Washington. These included Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Syria's Bashar al-Assad, and North Korea's Kim Jong-un. In each of these cases, anti-Americanism dovetails with converging interests, whether arms sales to Latin America, restoration of Russian influence in the Middle East, or developing rail and gas links on the Korean peninsula.<sup>35</sup> Classical diplomacy attaches great importance to developing long-term personal relationships based on understanding of each other's national interests. But even the closest personal relationships cannot surmount competing national interests, which often lead great powers to engage in more forceful diplomacy.

### **PUTIN'S COERCIVE DIPLOMACY**

Coercive diplomacy relies on the threat of force rather than persuasion, it can include economic, trade, and visa sanctions, in addition to a willingness to use military force in at least a limited capacity. Russia's weakness and its determination to limit American influence along its periphery has led Moscow to move quickly from coercive diplomacy to a demonstration of military power, as in Ukraine and Georgia. In 2015, Russia utilized coercive diplomacy when it imposed a range of sanctions on Turkey following the downing of a Russian fighter jet over Syria.<sup>36</sup> Russia has used similar

forms of coercive diplomacy, including sanctions and energy supplies, against Estonia, Poland, Kyrgyzstan and other states near its borders. These actions are designed primarily to limit U.S. power in Russia and throughout former Soviet space, to oppose infringements on Russian sovereignty, and to protect its perceived sphere of interests.

Russia's coercive diplomacy seeks to create a new multilateral balance of power in the regional, if not the global, order. The goal is to force the United States to accept certain changes in the status quo favorable to Russia — namely the frozen conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and limits on Kiev's authority in southeastern Ukraine. Russia's coercive diplomacy has been applied along the country's periphery, and beyond that to Syria, but not much further. Conventional military power is sufficient to allow Moscow to exercise a regional form of coercive diplomacy, but despite its ambitious aspirations, at present Russia has neither the capability nor the inclination to extend its reach globally.

Diplomacy is effective only if it is backed up by the prospect of credible verbal or non-verbal signaling, substantial economic power (needed for imposing sanctions or providing incentives), and a willingness and ability to use military force. Russia has modernized its military forces since the Georgian war, giving it sufficient capabilities to back up coercive diplomacy regionally.<sup>37</sup> Diplomacy alone was not sufficient to ensure that Georgia and Ukraine remained outside NATO, a key goal for the Kremlin. The George W. Bush administration had pushed membership for both states at the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, and while France and Germany were opposed, the Bucharest Summit Declaration expressed support for their eventual membership.<sup>38</sup> Lavrov asserted NATO membership for either country was a critical threat to Russian national security and blamed the events in Ukraine on NATO's 2008 declaration.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Syria exemplifies the new Russian strategy of coercive diplomacy backed by a demonstration of military capabilities, while calling for the destruction of terrorists and an eventual negotiated settlement.

Generally, more powerful states are better positioned to make use of coercive diplomacy. Russia uses coercive diplomacy not only against weaker states such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, but is increasingly using intimidation against stronger entities like the U.S., EU, and NATO. Diplomacy, especially coercive diplomacy, is an essential dimension of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy which incorporates a range of measures, many of them non-kinetic, to disrupt and weaken a potential opponent. These include cyber-attacks, trolling, disinformation, and similar methods that are especially effective against open democratic systems.<sup>40</sup>

Russia uses secretive instruments of coercive diplomacy in tandem with public diplomacy which relies on a country's soft power, or cultural attractiveness. As communications technologies have advanced, public diplomacy — the practice of influencing public opinion among publics in foreign nations using governmental and non-governmental organizations — has moved into prominence as a form of soft power.<sup>4142</sup> Russia's government utilizes a network of organizations to advance Russian interests abroad including RT (formerly Russian Television), Sputnik, Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for the CIS Region, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), Russkii Mir (Russian World), and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Kremlin skillfully uses modern forms of public diplomacy to complement Russia's successful traditional diplomacy.

### **REAFFIRMING HISTORY**

Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a proud tradition dating to September 1802 when it was formally established under Tsar Alexander I. Russian diplomats have rediscovered Tsarist imperial practices and routinely praise Russia's contribution to European statecraft. Foreign Minister Lavrov has heralded Russia's central contribution to the defense of Europe and preservation of civilization, while noting the continuity of Russian history and diplomatic traditions. Russia's great historical mission, the Foreign Minister claimed, was to serve as a bridge between East and West. The Russian Revolution and Communist rule resulted in tremendous violence, Lavrov acknowledged, but on the positive side, the Soviet state played a vital role in defeating fascism and promoting decolonization and the right of self-determination. Russia's diplomatic experience provided "the basis for moving vigorously forward and asserting our rightful role as one of the leading centers of the modern world, and as a source of values for development, security and stability."<sup>43</sup>

Historical continuity may be discerned in Russia's current promotion of stability and opposition to revolutionary movements or popular protests that threaten authoritarian government which recalls the Holy Alliance of conservative monarchies sponsored by Alexander I (1801-1825). Popular uprisings near Russia's borders threaten Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, much as French revolutionary ideas threatened Europe's monarchies in the nineteenth century. The Kremlin has enlisted Russia's Orthodox Church, led by Patriarch Kirill, to promote Russia's image as guardian of conservative Christian values, and to legitimize the regime's actions in

Ukraine and Syria.<sup>44</sup> This search for a new unifying Russian national idea based on religion recalls the symphonia tradition of close collaboration between church and state of the pre-Petrine era.<sup>45</sup>

The historical messianism of Moscow as the Third Rome, Soviet efforts to spread Communism internationally, and the Kremlin's current paternalistic approach toward compatriots in the former republics exemplify this relationship. Close linkages between foreign and domestic politics are evident in the dominance of President Putin, together with a few close associates, as chief decision makers in foreign affairs, and the degree to which national interests actually reflect elite group interests.<sup>46</sup>

Russian diplomacy also reflects political culture, most notably the pride in national greatness, recognition as an influential major power, and the importance of preserving honor in international relations, aspects of Russian foreign policy that have endured for centuries.<sup>47</sup> To honor Russia's diplomatic service, in 2002, President Putin decreed a Diplomatic Worker's Day, marking the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russia's Foreign Ministry.<sup>48</sup> In his congratulatory remarks to Foreign Ministry personnel marking the 2017 holiday, Putin said, "Russia's diplomacy has a long and glorious history and our diplomats have always remained true to their professional duties and served the homeland with honour."<sup>49</sup> Russian diplomacy pragmatically expresses Russian national interests, as realism would suggest, but it also reflects the quest for international respect and defends a distinct Russian national identity, dimensions neglected by a purely realist approach.

Russian diplomacy is in a process of transition away from the traditional high diplomacy of the Soviet era and the diplomacy of weakness of the 1990s, toward a multifaceted and complex diplomacy, balancing effective traditional mechanisms with newer, more nimble forms of diplomacy. It builds on pre-revolutionary and Soviet traditions, and is tightly controlled by President Putin, who is assisted by a small group of foreign policy elites. Russia's professional diplomatic corps has played an important role in restoring the country to a position of prominence in world affairs, though a tendency to resort to coercive diplomacy and intimidation has heightened tensions with the West and contributed to Russia's isolation. Russian diplomacy has been more successful with the non-Western world, through an extensive network of multilateral institutions that either exclude or constrain American and European actions.

The skill and professionalism of Russia's diplomatic corps has served the country well, enabling the Kremlin to exercise a larger global influence than its economic or military capabilities would suggest. Nonetheless, in the absence of effective long-term domestic reform, economic and demo-

graphic factors will constrain Russia's foreign policy options. Diplomacy can only partially compensate for these structural weaknesses. Moreover, Russia's increasing reliance on coercive diplomacy has often proved counter-productive, alienating friends and strengthening opposition to the Kremlin's aggressive tactics.

### NOTES

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<sup>5</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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<sup>8</sup> Vitaly Churkin, Statement on the UN General Assembly Resolution on Crimea, GA/11493, 27 March 2014, at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>.

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<sup>13</sup> Zach Dorfman, "The Secret History of the Russian Consulate in San Francisco," *Foreign Policy*, 14 December 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/14/the-secret-history-of-the-russian-consulate-in-san-francisco-putin-trump-spies-moscow/>.

<sup>14</sup> Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900-39* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*, pp. 134-138.

<sup>16</sup> Igor Ivanov, "What Diplomacy Does Russia Need in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?" *Russia in Global*



*Affairs*, 29 December 2011, at <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/What-Diplomacy-Does-Russia-Need-in-the-21st-Century-15420>.

<sup>17</sup> See the commemorative speech by Foreign Minister Lavrov to the Gorchakov Fund, 1 December 2016, at <http://gorchakovfund.ru/en/news/19893/>.

<sup>18</sup> Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Bookings Institution Press, 2002), pp. 141-149).

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Ambassador Kenneth Yalowitz for this insight.

<sup>20</sup> Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication, Konstantin Khudoley, 17 July 2017. Many observers consider the Russian Duma to be a rubber stamp parliament. For example, only one of the 450 members of the Duma voted against annexing Crimea, and he was subject to harassment by the authorities. See Andrei Kolesnikov and Boris Makarenko, "Another Rubber Stamp Duma?" Carnegie Moscow Center, 6 September 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/2016/09/06/another-rubber-stamp-duma-pub-64431>; and Adam Taylor, "Meet the one Russian lawmaker who voted against making Crimea part of Russia," *Washington Post*, 20 March 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/03/20/meet-the-one-russian-lawmaker-who-voted-against-making-crimea-part-of-russia/?utm\\_term=.e6b9c82a23c1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/03/20/meet-the-one-russian-lawmaker-who-voted-against-making-crimea-part-of-russia/?utm_term=.e6b9c82a23c1).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Zonova, "Russian Post-Soviet Diplomacy."

<sup>24</sup> Biberman, "The Politics of Diplomatic Service Reforms."

<sup>25</sup> "Yeltsin Told to Wash Political Linen in Private," *New York Times*, 25 October 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/26/world/yeltsin-told-to-wash-political-linen-in-private.html>

<sup>26</sup> Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Susan B. Glasser, "Minister No: Sergei Lavrov and the blunt logic of Russian power." *Foreign Policy*, 29 April 2013, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/minister-no/>.

<sup>28</sup> Olga Kyasnyak, "Russia Diplomatic Culture and the Image of Diplomats," USC Center of Public Diplomacy, 3 August 2017, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/russian-diplomatic-culture-and-image-diplomats>.

<sup>29</sup> Ivanov, "What Diplomacy Does Russia Need in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?"

<sup>30</sup> Evgeniy Umerenkov, "Ministr inostrannykh del Rossii Sergey Lavrov: 'Setevaia diplomataia' seichas vostrebovana kak nikogda." *Izvestiia*, 28 December 2006, at <http://izvestia.ru/news/320459>.

<sup>31</sup> Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective."

<sup>32</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 5-9, 84-86.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Blomfield, "Vladimir Putin rejects Barack Obama's claim he has one foot in the past." *The Telegraph*, 3 July 2009, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/5734243/Vladimir-Putin-rejects-Barack-Obamas-claim-he-has-one-foot-in-the-past.html>; Alison Smale and Andrew Higgins, "Putin and Merkel: A Rivalry of History, Distrust, and Power." *New York Times*, 12 March 2017, at [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/world/europe/vladimir-putin-angela-merkel-russia-germany.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/world/europe/vladimir-putin-angela-merkel-russia-germany.html?_r=0). For an extended discussion of Putin's relationship with Angela Merkel, see Joyce Marie Mushaben, *Becoming Madam Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic*, (Cambridge:

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- <sup>43</sup> Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective."
- <sup>44</sup> Ola Cichowlas, "Patriarch Kirill: From Ambitious Reformer to State Hardliner." *The Moscow Times*, 14 April 2017, at <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/patriarch-kirill-from-ambitious-reformer-to-state-hardliner-57725>.
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- <sup>46</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House, 2015), pp. 3-37.
- <sup>47</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*.
- <sup>48</sup> The precise date of the holiday was also meant to commemorate the *Posolsky Prikaz* (roughly, Foreign Office) set up under Ivan IV in 1549.
- <sup>49</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53849>.