

The BRICS and Coexistence

An alternative vision of world order

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The BRICs and coexistence : an alternative vision of world order/edited by Cedric de Coning, Thomas Mandrup and Liselotte Odgaard.

pages cm. – (Routledge global institutions ; 90)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

I. BRIC countries–Foreign relations. 2. World politics–1989–I. Coning, Cedric de, author, editor of compilation. II. Mandrup, Thomas, author, editor of compilation. III. Odgaard, Liselotte, author, editor of compilation.

D887.B75 2014

327.1–dc23

2014009246

ISBN: 978-1-138-78775-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-76617-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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3 Russia, BRICS, and peaceful coexistence

Between idealism and instrumentalism

Flemming Splidsboel Hansen and Alexander Sergunin

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- Russia and peaceful coexistence
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Russia's foreign policy is a vexing question both in the media and expert community. Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the resumption of strategic bomber patrols in the High North and the "five-day war" with Georgia in August 2008, Western experts have often described Russia's various foreign policies as expansionist, aggressive and even jingoistic or a return to "gunboat diplomacy."¹ According to some Western analysts, because of its economic weakness and technological backwardness Russia tends to make an emphasis on military-coercive instruments to protect its national interests in the post-Soviet space and be assertive in its relations with the West.²

On the other hand, there are authors (mostly Russian) who prefer to depict Russia's foreign policy in a complimentary way—as "non-aggressive," "peaceful," "purely defensive," oriented to "protection of its legitimate interests," etc.³ According to them, Moscow does not pursue aggressive foreign policies. On the contrary, Russia wants to solve all international disputes by peaceful means, with the help of international law and international organizations.

The Russian and international literature offers quite a few works that draw on these various approaches and attempt to balance otherwise competing perspectives.⁴ The discussion of Russia and the BRICS is part of this debate. Does Russia pursue peaceful coexistence? If yes, does it do so for instrumental purposes or is it driven by a belief in the appropriateness of the concept? Finally, if Russia and the other BRICS

states succeed in changing the international order, what will emerge instead?

The chapter consists of five main parts. The first part outlines Russia's relations with the BRICS, and the second part traces the origins and describes the contemporary understanding in Russia of the concept of peaceful coexistence. Next, part three offers an analysis of various foreign and security policy doctrines—background, contents and implications—after which part four discusses peaceful coexistence as an element of Russian foreign policy and looks at the use of soft power as a specific policy tool in this process. The final part presents our findings and offers perspectives on the future development of Russia's relations with the BRICS and the promotion of peaceful coexistence.

Russia and the BRICS

Russia occasionally played the BRIC card with great enthusiasm even before the cooperation had acquired any solid shape. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in Russian President Vladimir Putin's now-famous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference. The speech, remembered mostly for its virulently anti-United States tone, marked a kind of coming of age of Russian foreign policy; this clearly was what many in the Russian political establishment and public had wanted to say for years but had not felt strong enough to do so.⁵

Putin started by explaining how in his view:

the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world. And this is not only because (individual leadership) in today's—and precisely in today's—world (will lack the necessary) military, political and economic resources. What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because (at its base) it does not have and cannot have the moral foundations for modern civilization ...⁶

The most fundamental problem of the post-Cold War international order, so Putin went on, is the “almost uncontained hyper use of force—military force—in international relations, [a] force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts”; he added that “as a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement also becomes impossible.”⁷

Following his assault on the US-led order, Putin then painted a more optimistic picture of a future world of greater peace and equity. This

world would essentially come about as a result of changes in the distribution of power among the leading states in the system. Pointing to economic capabilities, Putin explained how the combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of China and India already surpasses that of the United States, and how the combined GDP of Brazil, Russia, India and China already surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. The economic potential of the BRIC, so he concluded, will doubtlessly be converted into increasing political power and thus help strengthen multipolarity. According to Putin, this multipolar order will see greater openness, transparency and predictability as well as increasing non-use of military power.⁸

There is little doubt that this early example of Kremlin enthusiasm for the BRIC to a large extent stemmed from the almost immediate recognizability of the acronym. The reception of it globally indicated that it would easily fill a political void felt among various actors; while some were anxious to see in the BRIC the epitome of a long-awaited anti-hegemonic movement, on whose behalf Putin to some extent would claim to be speaking in Munich, others were anxious finally to be able to name—and to position themselves in relation to—the challenge to the existing order. It had the contours of the wave of the future; for Putin, the only thing better than to ride it would be to ride *and* command it, and if he shared the thinking of the Russian political elite in general, he most likely felt that this role would almost naturally be assigned to Russia within the group.⁹

A retrospective look at the discussion of the BRIC in Russia in this early phase reveals a certain duality, however. On the one hand it was held up—as in Putin's speech—as an almost irresistible political and even *moral* force, the certain continued growth of which signaled the introduction of a new and better world order; on the other hand there was a remarkable absence of public discussion of the BRIC in Russia, and it was only after the 2007 Munich Security Conference that even a very limited media breakthrough for the organization could be observed.¹⁰ A review of the media coverage leaves one with the impression that while there were high hopes that the BRIC would fulfill its potential and help shape the future world order, there was also widespread skepticism as to the feasibility of the project.

Studies have shown that in this early phase Russian politicians were ahead of the academic expert community in their positive assessment of the BRIC. The latter group initially held more “skeptics” than “enthusiasts,” but the balance between these two tipped in 2008 as researchers increasingly started taking a more positive view of the grouping. Skepticism remained high in the academic community, however, and it was fuelled, for instance, by concerns about what was seen as the

developing world status of Brazil, India and China, the low level of innovation in these states, and the challenges of establishing economic cooperation and then later translating this into political cooperation.¹¹

The media comments surrounding the first ever BRIC ministerial meeting—a meeting of foreign ministers held in the Russian city of Ekaterinburg in May 2008—illustrate this. One newspaper referred to a debate within the academic expert community, asking whether “the economic similarities of ‘the emerging markets’ will lead to a strengthening of their political solidarity?” The answer to this, so the paper was pleased to report following the Ekaterinburg summit, was “yes.”¹² A certain modicum of agreement had been observed by the newspaper and this was seen to bode well for the future, even if preciously little concrete was achieved politically. BRIC, so one commentator concluded, “steps out of the shadows.”¹³

The first phase of that future was arrived at only two months later. Held on the margins of the July 2008 G8¹⁴+5 summit on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, the first ever (informal) BRIC summit produced an agreement on a “proper” free-standing meeting of heads of state the following year. A member of the G8 and thus a party to the main event at Hokkaido, Russia quickly seized the initiative and lobbied for the right to host the coming summit, a suggestion which the other BRIC states accepted later in the fall of 2008.¹⁵

Within days of the Hokkaido meeting, Dmitry Medvedev, then just two months into his presidency, released his version of a new foreign policy doctrine for the Russian Federation. The doctrine made a positive, albeit very brief, reference to the BRIC, with which Russia pledged to “make itself more fully engaged.”¹⁶ The document neither echoed the aggressive tone of Putin’s 2007 Munich speech, nor did it express the same level of confidence in the BRIC. While Putin had not produced anything of significance between the Munich speech and the release of the 2008 foreign policy doctrine, BRIC also had not done anything to disqualify itself as an available tool for Moscow in the conflict over the international order. We later learned that even as president, Medvedev would not be spared public criticism from Putin, then his prime minister, and their mildly diverging views on the BRIC in this embryonic phase may simply have reflected differences in assessment: how much change was needed in the international system? Would the BRIC be an adequate and effective vehicle through which to push for change?

These speculations notwithstanding, Medvedev in June 2009 welcomed his colleagues from Brazil, India and China to Ekaterinburg,

chosen once again as the scene of a BRIC event. In a grandiose gesture, an excited Medvedev suggested that all future summit meetings should be held in a purpose-built BRIC [sic!] building in the city. This offer, easily read as a Russian attempt to appropriate the cooperation by claiming more than one-quarter ownership and by putting itself in the lead, was rejected by the other member states, however. They insisted instead on the system of rotating summit venues, which has since guided the planning.

The Ekaterinburg summit was held together with a summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Established as the Shanghai Five in 1996, the SCO includes as full members Russia and China and the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, while India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan all hold observer status. By 2008, then, the SCO had already enjoyed a head start over the BRIC of more than a decade, giving it ample time to develop and implement policies of cooperation, and making it a household acronym with the Russian public; the letters BRIC, on the other hand, had to be spelled out for everyone to understand.

The SCO had used this head start to develop and implement political and even military cooperation—that is, some of the more sensitive issue areas.¹⁷ Where the BRIC were being celebrated cautiously for their potential for turning economic cooperation into political cooperation, the SCO had been introduced against a background of shared political aims and economic cooperation was being developed subsequent to this.¹⁸ In this track record, however modest it may seem, we find what seems to be an early preference for the SCO; full members Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan do not carry much weight internationally, but they have assisted in the institutionalization of the SCO and have thus helped to protect Russian security interests in the Central Asian theatre.

It is important to add, however, that the 2008 foreign policy doctrine (and its 2013 successor document, more on which below) was in fact quite brief about both the BRIC and the SCO, neither of which was oversold to the public. When reading the doctrine, one is left with a feeling that the Kremlin wanted to express future hopes for the BRIC and the SCO without indicating naivety or a change in its general orientation; while the skepticism surrounding the BRIC was related to the issues mentioned above, observers noted a concern in Russia that the lowest common denominator of the SCO would be quite low.¹⁹ Thus, the primary focus instead quite clearly was on the well-trying Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the “umbrella

organization" in the post-Soviet space, of which Russia is the all-dominant and undisputed leader, and in which we find a much denser network of cooperation.²⁰

Mentioned only once, under the sub-heading "the emergence of a new world order," the BRIC were singled out with—but notably also after—the G8 and the so-called Troika (Russia, India and China) as a forum in which Russia would "make itself more fully engaged."²⁰ This pledge could be interpreted not only as a promise for the future but also as a mild admission that Russia may have thought relatively little of these forums and therefore also had been less than fully committed to them. The doctrine indicated the Russian priorities when noting that:

Russia's attitude towards subregional entities and other bodies to which Russia is not party in the CIS area is determined by their assessed real contribution into ensuring good neighborly relations and stability, their eagerness to take into account Russia's legitimate interests in practice and to duly respect existing cooperation mechanisms, such as the CIS, [the Common Security Treaty Organization, the CSTO], [the Eurasian Economic Community, EurAsEC] and [the SCO].²²

Clearly, nothing in Russia's (sub)regional policy would be allowed to damage its relations with any of these organizations, but the SCO would also not be allowed to damage work within the CIS in general and the CSTO and EurAsEC more specifically. Cooperation with China and India as well as with Mongolia, Pakistan and Iran is important, but in the doctrine all states took a back seat to Russia's CIS allies.

The decision to include South Africa in the group was met with lukewarm enthusiasm in Moscow. Russia has a relatively modest level of involvement in Africa and the continent is low on the list of its priorities. The 2008 foreign policy doctrine put Africa second from the bottom in a detailed listing of regional priorities (only Latin America was lower), while the 2013 doctrine placed it at the very end of the list.²³ As an illustration of this thinking, during his presidency (2008–12), Medvedev visited only four African states (Egypt, Algeria, Namibia and Angola), while Putin in 2012–14 had visited only South Africa, making this latter trip to attend the March 2013 BRICS summit in Durban.²⁴ Prior to this, Putin had visited South Africa once before, in September 2006, on what was the first ever visit by a Russian president to the country.

Feelings of reservation were expressed in the Russian media, which were generally quick to point out that the inclusion of South Africa was by Chinese invitation and that the country is an international light-weight compared to the original members. More importantly still, it was suggested that South Africa does not share the policy preferences of the four other states and that it may therefore weaken attempts to influence international hot spots and to change the world order.²⁵ It was, so the reader would understand, with some skepticism that Russia had accepted the Chinese suggestion to bring in South Africa.

The development of the BRICS and the institutionalization of the cooperation initiated at the Ekaterinburg summit have given the organization a more prominent standing in Russian foreign policy thinking, but it is still not a wholehearted embrace. In the 2013 foreign policy doctrine the BRICS again are mentioned only once in their own right and again under the sub-heading "the emergence of a new world order."²⁶ This time, however, they appear before the G8, the SCO and the Troika, now termed RIC (Russia, India and China), indicating added importance. However, significantly, it is after the G20, reconfigured at the November 2008 meeting in Washington, DC, to offer a venue for heads of state to come together to discuss economic and financial affairs and, occasionally, political issues.²⁷

The SCO in the 2013 doctrine is pointed to as an important actor within the Asia-Pacific region. "Special emphasis," so the doctrine notes, "is placed on enhancing the role in regional and global affairs of the SCO whose constructive influence on the situation in the region as a whole has significantly increased."²⁸ In the years 2008–13, that is, the time span between the publication of the two doctrines, the SCO had added Afghanistan (2012) to its circle of observer states and Belarus and Sri Lanka (both 2009), as well as Turkey (2012), to a new category of dialogue partners. While these enlargement rounds—and their confidence-building aspects and those of the activities in the SCO in general—represent a noteworthy achievement, the organization seems to have made little concrete progress beyond this. The phrasing in the 2013 doctrine should therefore be seen mainly as a statement of political intentions and future commitment.

As before, however, the main focus is on the CIS. It is listed as the main regional priority and it is clear that it is a Russian ambition to develop to the fullest "the great capacity [of the CIS] for integration in various spheres."²⁹ This integration may even include an attempt to transfer decision making to the supranational level; Putin has announced the establishment by 2015 of a new Eurasian Economic

Union (EEU) within the CIS space and, in order to be successful, the EEU will most likely require an element of supranational enforcement.³⁰ Little in the record of the CIS suggests that this will happen, but it does give us a clear indication of where Russia intends to bring the CIS and how the organization stands in relation to others: it remains unrivalled by other organizations and it is, also more than any organization, seen as a forum for practical political, economic and military deliverables.

Looking at the listing in the doctrines of these various organizations, it may be argued that whereas the CIS and even the SCO primarily have a regional focus and an agenda of day-to-day work to influence the lives of their respective member populations, the BRICS have a global focus and a more abstract agenda of norm-setting; the BRICS, as we see from the doctrines, are regarded as actors in the process of shaping the “emergent world order.” In this way they help define the framework within which organizations such as the CIS and the SCO may operate.

While both these latter organizations have a strong normative actor-ness, defined here as conscious actions to shape the understanding of appropriate behavior (in the international system), the BRICS have done so even more expressly. As witnessed by the various contributions to this volume, the agenda of change, including the adoption of (some of) the elements of peaceful coexistence, is central to the BRICS. This gives it a slightly different character than that of the CIS and the SCO. Flexing the normative muscle (“unilateralism is unacceptable,” or “the principle of sovereignty must be upheld at all times”) is relatively easily done—and much easier than, for instance, establishing enforceable trade regimes—but progress is also likely to be slower and more difficult to measure.

What all of this suggests is that within a Russian context we should view BRICS on the one side and the CIS and the SCO on the other side as having partly competitive, partly complementary roles. They draw resources from some of the same pools (for instance a prospective BRICS development bank vs. a prospective SCO development bank), but they also have somewhat different agendas. The more abstract the BRICS agenda, the less this will collide with Russia’s ambitions for the CIS and the SCO. The peaceful coexistence agenda then is relatively uncontroversial from a Russian perspective.

Looking at the 2008 and 2013 foreign policy concepts, it may be concluded that the BRICS have been elevated to a more prominent position in Russian foreign policy thinking. As the grouping has managed to cement the institutionalization begun in 2008–09, the Kremlin expresses greater confidence in the ability of the BRICS to serve as a medium for change. Still greater praise is bestowed on the

BRICS and the celebration of the grouping—by politicians, scholars and commentators—has intensified.

However, behind the somewhat self-congratulatory tone criticism is still being voiced. It is usually quite indirect and it may be speculated that it is often intended for other BRICS audiences to “read between the lines” to receive an updated Russian assessment of the cooperation. To illustrate, at a recent BRICS conference at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), a scholar from the host institution was specifically asked by the organizers to summarize the pros and cons of the BRICS. As far as the latter were concerned, he presented a rather lengthy catalogue of alleged ills, arguing *inter alia* that the member states:

do not have a shared history [and] belong to different civilizations, they are not tied together by common long-term interests but are only united through the criteria of rapid economic growth; the differences in levels of economic, social and scientific and educational development of the BRICS states are too great; conflict exists between them ... The coming together of the BRICS states has a [merely] symbolic political character. The disagreements and the different directions of the states interfere with the attempts to achieve unity inside the grouping. The group of BRICS states holds no perspective.³¹

Even more indirect than this example is the argumentation occasionally voiced to justify Russia’s membership of the BRICS. The justification is addressed to those who claim that Russia is the odd one out—that its growth is too slow and that it does not exhibit the same type of developing world dynamism as that found in the other member states; as a typical rebuff to this, Russian commentators will often point out that Russia is leading, indeed by some distance, in income per capita and on the human development index, and that while Russia (together with China) has *global* ambitions, India, Brazil and South Africa are *regional* actors with *regional* ambitions only.³² When it is suggested that Russia is not qualified to be in the BRICS, the retort then will often be that the country is actually *overqualified* as well as *the* natural leader within the grouping, and this spat gives us a glimpse into a world of greater tension than otherwise seen in the “family portraits” taken at the summit meetings.³³

All of this does not change the fact, however, that the current view of the BRICS in Russia, as was just mentioned, is predominantly and increasingly positive.

Russia and peaceful coexistence

The concept of “peaceful coexistence” (or *mirnoe sosushestvovanie*) has a strong pedigree in Russia. In fact, it emerged already shortly following the 1917 October Revolution as Soviet leaders started debating whether war between the new communist state and the capitalist world was inevitable or whether the two could in some way coexist peacefully. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the October Revolution, hinted at the latter when in 1920 he presented his idea of “peaceful cohabitation” (*mirnoe sozhitelstvo*).³⁴ Lenin instructed the Soviet delegation travelling to the April 1922 International Economic Conference in Genoa to argue in favor of peaceful cohabitation, thereby showing the non-aggressive intentions of the new Soviet state otherwise widely distrusted for its revolutionary slogans. The Soviet delegation to Genoa, so a later study summed it up, presented three key propositions for a world of “peaceful cohabitation”:

- 1 It is the recognition of the difference in property systems in capitalist and socialist countries which lies at the heart of the coexistence question ...
- 2 The principal objective of foreign policy and diplomacy in East-West relations is the settlement of all questions at issue without recourse to force, *i.e.* by negotiation.
- 3 War is *not* inevitable.³⁵

In the 1950s the term entered its contemporary usage.³⁶ Introduced publically by then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev at the twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, the Soviet peaceful coexistence drew both on its original post-1917 heritage and on the more recent Indian idea of *Pancha Chila*, or “Five Principles,” which formed the basis of the 1954 Indian-Chinese peace treaty. *Pancha Chila* included “coexistence, respect for the territorial and integral sovereignty of others, nonaggression, noninterference in the internal affairs of others and the recognition of the equality of others.”³⁷

Peaceful coexistence was subsequently made—officially at least—the guiding principle of Soviet foreign policy. Written into the 1977 Soviet Constitution, it became—again officially at least—inviolable and non-negotiable. According to the constitution (art. 28), Soviet foreign policy was aimed at “... consistently implementing the principle of peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems.”³⁸ This was further elaborated on (art. 29) to denote:

Sovereign equality; mutual renunciation of the use or threat of force; inviolability of frontiers; territorial integrity of states; peaceful settlement of disputes; non-intervention in internal affairs; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; the equal rights of peoples and their right to decide their own destiny; cooperation among states; and fulfillment in good faith of obligations arising from the generally recognized principles and rules of international law, and from the international treaties signed by the [Soviet Union].³⁹

Despite—or rather, as a consequence of—its central position in Soviet foreign policy thinking, peaceful coexistence is largely absent from the contemporary lexicon of political life in Russia.⁴⁰ Even if the principles may still exist, the term itself is viewed mainly as an historical phenomenon; it carries such strong Marxist-Leninist connotations that any Russian audience will almost automatically associate it with a different use in a different time. Writers may even use this association to create certain impressions—as when the prominent foreign policy commentator Sergey Karaganov asked whether Russia and the United States would be “going back to peaceful coexistence?” thereby making a slightly ironic suggestion about the nature of the Russian-US relationship and about the post-Cold War international system.⁴¹

The term, however, is still understood of course. So when representatives of other states—for instance from the BRICS—make reference to peaceful coexistence, they tap into a strong collective consciousness in Russia about at least its general principles as these were put forward before the end of the Cold War.⁴²

Russian foreign policy doctrines: evolving concepts

Even a cursory look at the foreign policy debate in Russia today makes it clear that the country is not happy with the existing order and would like, as a minimum, to avoid Western pressure and interference and, in a more maximalist version, to gain increased access to the scarce commodity that is international decision making. We believe that these are goals shared by the other four BRICS members and thus by the grouping as a whole.

Russian foreign policy thinking, as expressed also in the country's various doctrines, has evolved considerably since the early 1990s, and in the following we briefly outline the main contours of this evolution.

In early 1993, then Russian President Boris Yeltsin approved a new foreign policy doctrine, the first of its kind for post-Soviet Russia.⁴³

Despite numerous inconsistencies and shortcomings, this document clearly described Russian national interests and foreign policy priorities. Its basic premise was that Russia's foreign policy must meet fundamental national interests, primarily the need to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the country, strengthen its security in every respect, revive Russia as a free and democratic country, and provide favorable conditions for the formation of an efficient market economy. The document suggested a greater emphasis on the economic aspect of foreign policy in order to mobilize international support for Russian economic reforms and for integrating the national economy into world economic relations in competitive forms.

According to this doctrine, Russia was to exercise its responsibility as a great power to maintain global and regional stability, contribute to conflict prevention, and promote democratic principles such as the rule of law and human and minority rights protection. The document emphasized Russia's commitment to political and diplomatic methods and negotiation rather than to the use of military force, the admissibility of the limited use of force in strict accordance with international law to ensure national and international security and stability.

The aims of the military strategy were outlined as follows: a) transformation of the international relations system from a bipolar and bloc-based model into one of cooperation; b) alignment of the military potential with new patterns of challenges and threats; and c) a military reform that should take into consideration the economic and social potential of the country. The doctrine did not see any serious threats to Russia's security, except for the developing world which had initially been characterized as the main source of threats to regional and global security. However, in the document's sections dealing with regional issues, the developing countries were depicted also as an important potential resource for Russia's successful global strategy. In general, the document can be characterized as liberal and pro-Western in its spirit. This did not come as a surprise as the doctrine was prepared by the team of the so-called "Atlanticists"—a group of Russian liberal-minded and pro-Western politicians and experts (led by the then Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev).

In December 1997 Yeltsin then signed the first Russian National Security Doctrine. The paper described the global situation and Russia's place in the world. Similar to the foreign policy doctrine of 1993, the paper saw the rise of a multipolar world as the most important characteristic of contemporary world dynamics. According to the doctrine, Russia should find its own niche in this complex world structure

and even become one of its poles. Even though the document still mentioned, *en passant*, the need for Russia to retain its status as a world power, it also acknowledged that Russia's capacity to influence the solution of cardinal issues of international life had been greatly diminished.

The document singled out both positive and negative factors affecting the country's position in the world system. Interestingly, the paper pointed to the changing nature of world power in the post-Cold War period. While military force was said to remain a significant factor in international relations, economic, political, scientific-technological, ecological and informational factors were seen to be playing a growing role.⁴⁴ The document noted that some prerequisites had been created for the demilitarization of international relations, strengthening the role of law in conflict resolution, and that the danger of direct aggression against Russia had diminished.

It was noted that Russia shared security interests with many states in areas such as nuclear non-proliferation, conflict resolution, the fight against international terrorism, environmental problems and so on. At that point, the paper arrived at the important conclusion that Russia's national security might be ensured by non-military means. At the same time, a number of international and, especially, domestic processes undermined Russia's international positions. As regards the former, some (as yet unnamed) states were criticized for their alleged unwillingness to accept a multipolar world model. In some regions, traditions of bloc politics were still strong and attempts to isolate Russia could be identified (the document referred to the enlargement of NATO and to developments in the Asia-Pacific region).

The national security doctrine saw no immediate danger of large-scale external aggression; the greatest threat to Russia's security was now said to be an internal one as the country struggled with myriad debilitating domestic problems. The document identified these as stemming from the "internal political, economic, social, ecological, information, and spiritual spheres."⁴⁵ This was a distinct departure from previous doctrines which were based on the assumption that the main threats to Russia's security were posed by external factors.

Late in Yeltsin's last term and early in Putin's first, three major factors changed Russia's threat perceptions: the financial collapse of 1998, NATO's military intervention in Kosovo (1999), and the second Chechen war (which also started in 1999).

In 2000, under a newly inaugurated Putin, a series of new security-related documents was adopted: a national security doctrine, a military doctrine, a foreign policy doctrine and a brand new information

security doctrine. The 2000 national security doctrine was the most significant document for understanding Russia's new approaches to its security policies. There was a difference between the 1997 and 2000 doctrines. The most important aspect of the 2000 doctrine was that it elevated the importance and expanded the types of external threats to Russian security. The doctrine no longer stated that external threats arising from deliberate actions or aggression did not exist. It provided a substantial list of external threats, including the weakening of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations; weakening Russian political, economic, and military influence in the world; the consolidation of military-political blocs and alliances (particularly further eastward expansion of NATO), including the possibility of the construction of foreign military bases or deployment of forces close to Russian borders; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and weakening of the CIS, and escalation of conflicts on CIS members' borders, as well as territorial claims against Russia.⁴⁶

The 2000 doctrine emphasized repeatedly that the natural tendency of international relations after the Cold War was toward the development of a multi-polar world, in which relations should be based upon international law, with a proper role for Russia. It argued that, contrary to this tendency, the United States and its allies had sought, under the guise of multilateralism, to establish a unipolar world outside international law. The document warned that NATO's policy transition to the use of military force outside its alliance territory without UN Security Council approval was a major threat to world stability, and that these trends could create the potential for a new era of arms races among the world's great powers. The 2000 doctrine linked the internal threat of terrorism and separatism (clearly with Chechnya in mind) to external threats, and it argued that international terrorism involves efforts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia, with a possibility of direct military aggression. However, importantly, in dealing with these threats the document called for international cooperation.⁴⁷

As noted earlier, a new version of the Russian foreign policy doctrine was then adopted by Medvedev a few days *after* the G8 (and BRICs) summit at Hokkaido but also, quite significantly, a month *before* the August 2008 military clash with Georgia.⁴⁸ In line with the liberal International Relations (IR) paradigm, the new doctrine ascertained that there was no clear border between internal and external means to ensure national security. For this reason, Russia's international course should be subordinated to more general—primarily

domestic—needs, such as help in completing socioeconomic reforms and making Russia a competitive actor in the globalizing world. According to the doctrine, Russia's global priorities included, *inter alia*, a new world order based on principles of equality, mutual respect, mutually beneficial cooperation and international law, and with the UN (supported by the G8, RIC and BRICs and others) as its centerpiece; the supremacy of international law, which should be, on the one hand, protected from any efforts to undermine its principles and, on the other hand, further developed within the framework of the UN, the CIS and the Council of Europe (CoE); the attainment of international security, which was interpreted in a broad sense, including not only hard (arms control, non-proliferation of WMD, conflict resolution, etc.), but also soft security problems (international terrorism and transnational organized crime, environmental problems, etc.).

In February 2013 Putin then released the current Russian foreign policy doctrine.⁴⁹ It differs from the 2008 version in its conceptual assumptions. As far as the existing world order is concerned, the document states that the international environment is still seen to be “decentralizing” as Western influence declines and to be in transition to a “polycentric world” that is both “turbulent” and increasingly competitive. However, while the 2008 doctrine noted the steady overcoming of the legacy of the Cold War and “the end of the ideological era,” the 2013 doctrine makes no reference at all to the Cold War. Instead it places greater emphasis on the world's “civilizational diversity,” competition over values and the negative impact of a “re-ideologization” of international affairs.

Some Western experts argue that the new Russian doctrine, although acknowledging some of the international problems such as the continuing “crisis” in Afghanistan, does not provide an adequate framework for dealing with them. Others question the feasibility of some of Russia's aims, not least the attempts to build up its role in the BRICS grouping and to develop the EEU into a sustainable entity.⁵⁰

Many Western experts note the prospects for continued tensions in Russia's relations with the West, referring not just to the well-known disagreements such as Syria and Iran, but also to the fundamental dissonance between Western and Russian interpretations of doctrines that use the same words but are defined differently. Russia's stance on “universal democratic values,” for instance, is seen as irrelevant by those who criticize Moscow's human rights record and Putin's campaign against foreign funding of Russian NGOs.

Similarly, the understanding of concepts such as, for example, “soft power” or “indivisibility of security,” is different in Russia than in the

West.⁵¹ Putin's interpretation of the soft power concept will be analyzed in the following section. As for the "indivisibility of security," in the West this concept is understood as a comprehensive notion of security in three dimensions (economic, political-military and human), recognizing that regional security is embedded in the wider global environment and that security within states is as important as security among states. For the Kremlin, however, the "indivisibility of security"—as demonstrated by the 2009 Russian draft of a European Security Treaty—is the connection between politically and legally binding security agreements. As argued by some Western experts, this gap will continue to lie at the heart of disagreements about Euro-Atlantic security.

However, the 2013 doctrine is quite optimistic about a future world order. The document acknowledges threats and challenges to Russia's security, but it also emphasizes opportunities and the need for the country to be active. As the doctrine notes, Russia "will work to anticipate and lead events." As part of this, it emphasizes the importance of soft power, famously defined as the ability "to shape the preferences of others."⁵²

Coexistence and soft power policy

A state may strive for a higher status in the international hierarchy of decision making through the employment of various tools. We are particularly interested, though, in the use by Russia of its soft power. Our argument is that Russia is striving to build up its soft power vis-à-vis the other BRICS member states, while also using the grouping to increase its soft power appeal in the eyes of the rest of the international community, riding into the world on the back of the BRICS, so to speak.

Russian politicians, scholars and commentators are generally quite eager to bring to the attention of both domestic and international audiences the normative power dimension of BRICS. To illustrate, in the aftermath of the September 2013 G20 summit in St Petersburg, Putin announced, as he has done on numerous prior occasions, that "BRICS is the world's biggest market and accounts for 40 [percent] of the world's population—2.9 billion people," thereby indicating that whenever the BRICS speak, the world really should listen.⁵³ The Kremlin-controlled TV station Russia Today took this a step further even when explaining that at the G20 summit the states supporting military action against Syria represent a "mere" 924 million people, while the BRICS, supported by Argentina and Indonesia, together account for a full 3.2 billion people.⁵⁴ How, so the implied rhetorical question seems to go, can so many people be wrong?

However, in the Russian debate on the BRICS, soft power is also often referred to—and as we see it more so than in the other member states.⁵⁵ The past decade has seen the development of a very strong interest in both the development and employment of soft power in Russia and this has also spilled over into Russia's view on and relations with the BRICS. It is seen as part of a three-stage rocket launch: soft power helps to build up normative power, which in turn helps to shape the future world order in Russia's (and the BRICS') image.

The use by Russia of its soft power is probably more instrumental than what we usually associate with the term. It is clearly not a wish to be attractive simply to be attractive; it is to be attractive in order to achieve something quite specific, and the term thus acquires a political-technocratic flavor.

It is now widely argued that in the post-Cold War period key international players prefer to exercise soft rather than hard power. According to those subscribing to the soft power concept, the economic, socio-cultural, institutional and legal instruments are now much more effective than military power or direct political pressure. For many states, hard power has become an exceptional tool and a last resort in their foreign relations rather than a day-to-day practice. Hard power is now mainly applicable to and against those international actors who violate international law or directly threaten national, regional or global security.

As the concept of soft power has been still better understood by members of the Russian public, it has also become increasingly attractive to the country's leadership. In the 2011–12 electoral cycle in Russia, the soft power theme was a popular refrain in the debates, including the oft-cited "programmatic" articles by Putin. Following his re-election to the presidency in 2012, Putin called on Russian foreign policy makers to start thinking about how to utilize non-traditional foreign policy instruments, including the soft power ones. The need for soft power capabilities was mentioned both in the draft and the final version of the current foreign policy doctrine (December 2012 and February 2013, respectively).

This development has several explanations, including most basically a painful realization that the stated objectives of the previous foreign policy doctrines had been met only partially at best.⁵⁶ According to Konstantin Kosachev, director of Rossotrudnichestvo (Russia's governmental agency responsible for maintaining relations with the CIS and compatriots abroad), Russia has managed to preserve its hard power parity with other key international actors, but it is still lagging behind them in terms of soft power.⁵⁷ What this indicates is that Russia

has failed even to shape the CIS—its most immediate neighboring space—as it had intended.

Moving beyond the regional level, soft power is of no less importance to Russia as it strives to influence the order of the global level. The cooperation within the BRICS offers Russia an opportunity to define and to project a new international role for itself which should be different from its traditional image of a great (hard) power. The concept of soft power looks promising for the Kremlin because—in contrast with Europe—it can suggest “for sale” on the BRICS “market” not only raw materials but also industrial products and high technologies (both military and civilian), as well as the Russian high education and culture. Supported by the BRICS, Moscow hopes to ascertain its global authority by other means and in its new capacity: not as a militarist and expansionist country, but as a soft power attractive to international partners economically, politically and culturally.

A key component of soft power, the political values of a state may serve to attract other actors when these values are “universal” in nature and when their actual political expressions promote “values and interests that others share.”⁵⁸ An attractive domestic model can be another potential value-based soft power resource. As follows from the Russian foreign policy documents, Moscow has an ambition not only to promote universal values but also to export the Russian traditions of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance and multiculturalism.⁵⁹

An attractive foreign policy is a valuable asset for the soft power strategy for any state as well. Russia is eager, both within BRICS and in a wider global setting, to present itself as a responsible and peaceful actor concerned not only about its own national interests but also about regional and global security. Russian diplomatic initiatives (for example Medvedev’s 2009 proposal for a comprehensive European Security Treaty) are regularly launched with the aim of developing this positive image. While the actual term is not being employed, the essence of these initiatives, including the foreign policy doctrines as laid out above, may be boiled down to peaceful coexistence.

Despite their general *rapprochement* with Russia over the last decade or two, the BRICS countries are quite suspicious of Moscow’s soft power policies in the world. Both the policy-oriented and research literatures are replete with critical assessments of the Russian soft power strategies in the region. According to one Western assessment, “unlike the traditional definition of soft power, Russia’s soft power does not display emphasis on legitimacy and moral authority ... It serves to divide rather than unite and to arouse apprehension rather than provide comfort.”⁶⁰ The list of complaints includes “creation,

maintenance and support of Kremlin-friendly networks of influence in the cultural, economic and political sectors,” dissemination of the biased information, local agenda-setting through the Russia state-controlled media, making the compatriots loyal to Kremlin, etc. Some analysts believe that in many cases Russia’s main objective is to enhance its own sphere of influence. According to other accounts, “the Kremlin is seeking to exploit the Western concept of ‘soft power’ ... reframing it as a euphemism for coercive policy and economic arm-twisting.”⁶¹

Regarding the attractiveness of the Russian political values, as many foreign experts maintain, Russia has problems with harmonizing its traditional and internationally recognized democratic values and standards. On the one hand, Kosachev assumes that “freedom, democracy, rule of law, social stability and respect for human rights have become ‘a consumer basket’ of the modern world,” but on the other, he insists that “there are differences in their [that is, values] individual manifestation due to national, historical and other specifics.”⁶¹ In other words, Moscow finds it difficult to persuade others that it shares universal values and is ready to disseminate them throughout the world. Equally, Russia is unable to make its domestic socioeconomic and political model attractive and sell it to other nations. Even Kosachev admits that Russia cannot export its specific model, since “it has not developed any such model yet.”⁶³

Moscow is also short of efficient foreign policy tools in the soft power domain. None of Russia’s large-scale foreign policy initiatives (including its proposal for a European Security Treaty) has gained solid support (not even among the other BRICS states). A notable exception, though a very concrete action which may only influence the world order quite indirectly, was delivered by Russia’s successful mediation efforts in the Syrian crisis in 2013. Notably, these efforts included the flexing of the collective BRICS normative power muscle at the St Petersburg G20 summit; by supporting Putin’s initiative, the other BRICS states also supported Russia’s soft power ambitions.

However, to continue the analysis of Russia’s soft power shortcomings, it should be noted that Moscow’s instruments in this field are predominantly “statist,” that is, government-based and controlled. The NGO potential and resources are basically not in demand. The NGOs “officially” allowed to participate in soft power activities in reality are semi-governmental and they are perceived by the “target audiences,” especially in the post-Soviet countries, as such.⁶⁴

To sum up, the Russian interpretation of soft power is rather pragmatic and interest-centric. For example, the current foreign policy doctrine defines soft power as a “complex set of instruments to achieve foreign

policy aims by means of the civil society, information-communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies that are different from classical diplomacy.”⁶⁵ It remains to be seen whether this will be adequate to support Russia’s ambitions for the future global order—and those of the BRICS.

Conclusions

Overall the Russian policies towards and within the BRICS represent a combination of ideational and material motives. On the one hand, the BRICS grouping is important for the Kremlin in terms of status seeking: it believes that by joining forces with other major states it will be easier for Russia to return and maintain its status as a great power, to shape the future world order and to make the West (particularly the United States) abide by the rules of that order. On the other hand, Moscow values its economic and strategic partnerships with the BRICS states which, if only because of size, are important for Russia’s well-being and for counter-balancing the West in the global geopolitical game.

At the same time, the Russian attitude to the BRICS demonstrates a certain duality. It is being celebrated as the wave of the future of global politics—as the coming of a more just, equitable and peaceful world—but skepticism is also being expressed, if mostly indirectly only. As suggested, it gives reason to speculate that a gap may exist between what is being *pronounced* and what is being *thought* by Russian politicians. If true, this would not be unusual, of course (it may perhaps even be observed in one or more of the other BRICS states), but it would tell us something important about the way in which Russia approaches the BRICS and how it regards cooperation within the grouping in relation to that of alternative forums, for instance the CIS and the SCO. Having said that, we want again to make the point that the BRICS for Russia seem to represent mainly a vehicle for *global normative transformation*, while the other two organizations are *regional* in scope and more *practical* in their outlook.

On a more general and theoretical note, we have found that the *power transition theory* designed by and associated now mainly with A.F.K. Organski does not hold much explanatory power as regards Russia’s present-day international behavior.⁶⁶ Russia is neither a status quo state aiming to keep the main international system rules intact, nor a revisionist one that aspires radically to change those rules. Rather, Russia (similar probably to the other BRICS states) is a reformist state which differs from the two ideal types of international actors

by its motivation and methods. Such a state is unsatisfied with the existing rules of the “game,” but it does not want to change them radically. Rather, it aims to reform these rules to adapt them to new global realities and to make them more fitting for all the members of the world community. It prefers to act on the basis of existing rules and norms rather than to challenge them. All changes (reforms) should be made gradually, through negotiations and to the benefit of all the parties involved. We may distinguish between more or less assertive reformist actors, but even most assertive ones can hardly be seen as revisionist states.

The “peaceful coexistence” concept fits nicely into the reformist powers’ political philosophy even if it may not be part of their active vocabulary (as is the case with Russia). It can be applicable to explaining foreign policy behavior of many newly emerging powers, including Russia. The Kremlin believes that countries with different socioeconomic and political systems can coexist peacefully. The emerging powers agree to play by existing rules but want to make them more just and adequate to the changing realities. They do not accept that one or more dominant state(s) simply impose(s) rules on the rest of the world; instead, they favor a multipolar world model (the concept now dominant in Russian foreign policy discourse).

In line with the “peaceful coexistence” and reformist political philosophy, Moscow has opted for non-coercive, soft power foreign policy methods. The Russian soft power arsenal includes a variety of instruments ranging from efforts to make cooperation with Russia economically attractive to cultural and education/research incentives. An impressive institutional mechanism has been created to this end. It should be noted, however, that despite financial support and other efforts invested in the soft power strategy, its performance and efficiency are far from ideal.

Contrary to Russian expectations, Moscow’s soft power diplomacy has failed to contribute to the improvement of its bilateral relations with the neighboring countries. Rather, these countries are quite suspicious about some of the Kremlin’s methods (for instance, its efforts to make the local Russian-speaking communities pro-Kremlin lobbies), and tend to interpret the Russian soft power strategy as a neoimperialist instrument. The Russian soft power strategy also lacks the non-governmental actors’ participation, transparency and public control, and often suffers from low competence and corruption.

However, the very fact that Moscow has decided to redesign its foreign policy in a way to support and further develop international norms, rules and institutions, and has preferred non-coercive, soft

power methods, deserves both attention and encouragement. If other BRICS countries follow the same pattern this may be an important contribution to the rise of a really new—more secure and just—world order in the foreseeable (but still distant) future.

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