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Chapter 5

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A QUEST FOR GREAT POWER STATUS IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Mariya Omelicheva

This chapter depicts recent changes in Russia—from a somewhat dysfunctional state in the first decade after the end of the Soviet Union to a more stable and centralized government with a desire and the capabilities to reclaim its status as a great power in world politics. Grounded in historical context and geopolitical realities, current Russian foreign policy can be characterized in Realist terms with the state asserting its interests vis-à-vis other great powers. Mariya Omelicheva also argues, however, that a constructivist focus on Russia's struggle with its self-identity is important for explaining contemporary Russian foreign policy. Inside Russia, this struggle is largely concentrated in a centralized state apparatus, although elite debates over Russia's role in the world are influenced by the military, interest groups and to some extent the Russian public. This chapter concludes with an analysis of these forces in the Russian-Georgian conflict.

Despite its unique history, Omelicheva argues that Russia is a 'normal' country in the sense that the theories from Chapter 1 certainly apply in an explanation of Russian foreign policy. Like China (Chapter 6) and Brazil (Chapter 13), for example, Russia has perceived multilateral forums as a way to counter American hegemony. Russian concern with its image, identity, and how its behavior fits in with international norms can also be seen in the foreign policies of Germany (Chapter 4) and Turkey (Chapter 9). Like South Africa (Chapter 12), Russia has recently experienced a dramatic regime change and its institutional structure is still somewhat uncertain. And although public opinion is not

irrelevant to foreign policy, decision making is highly centralized, as in China (Chapter 6) and Iran (Chapter 10). As with other countries in this book, Russian foreign policy illustrates some of the complex relationships between internal and external factors.

[INSERT MAP OF RUSSIA HERE]

In the evening of August 8, 2008, the limelight of global attention was spotlighting the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in China. Quickly, however, another incident captured the center stage of international news. Russia poured its ground troops, hard artillery, and air force into the republic of Georgia in response to the earlier attempt of the Georgian military to retake its breakaway territory, South Ossetia, by force. The roots of the recent confrontation between South Ossetia and Georgia go back to the early 1990s, when South Ossetia and another breakaway territory, Abkhazia, gained *de facto* independence from the Georgian state. Russian peacekeepers were sent to safeguard the tenuous peace in the breakaway territories, and the conflicts remained “frozen” until 2004. That year, a newly elected president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, declared national unification as a top priority for his cabinet. Tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia escalated in the summer months of 2008 leading to a full-fledged war, which prompted Russia’s intervention on behalf of South Ossetia.¹ The 2008 Georgia-Russia war was consequential not only for Georgia, Russia, and the Georgian defiant territories, but also for the entire world. It was the first militarized dispute involving Russia since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the biggest crisis between the West and Moscow since the end of the Cold War.

During the 1990s, the world had become accustomed to viewing Russia as a dysfunctional, poor, and weak state. Russia was isolated from Western political, security, and economic forums and assailed with stinging criticisms from the West. Russia was left out of the critical conversations over EU enlargement, NATO expansion, and the creation of a Euro-Atlantic security space. By launching a five-day long war with Georgia, Russia sent to the world a clear message that it had fully recovered after the hardships of transition and had again become a formidable force. Not only did this war upset the status quo and the balance of power in Eurasia but also demonstrated Russia’s determination to reclaim its great power status and counter the unipolar global order established by the

United States.² The Russian Foreign Policy Concept signed into force a month before the Georgia-Russia war declared that Russia had entered a new epoch of its “substantial influence upon the development of a new architecture of international relations.”³ By recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite the loud protests from the West, Russia had assumed a new role of an architect in international affairs, following the example of the United States.

The impetus to understand and explain the foreign policy of the modern Russia comes at the juncture of several important developments in the world. The first, of course, is the resurgence of the Russian Federation, which is no longer insolvent and weak. The country has regained the necessary capabilities and posture for launching a military assault on a sovereign state, defying international condemnation. The second development encompasses ongoing changes in the structure of international relations as well as economic and political influences on the global order managed by the United States. If the West hopes to engage Russia in solving global problems, it must have a solid grasp of the Russian foreign policy interests and how they align with international priorities of Western states.⁴

The challenge for the community of scholars specializing in this field has been to not only pinpoint external and internal forces in Russia’s foreign policy but also to establish their relative significance in shaping Russian actions in the global realm. The latter efforts have been complicated by intense political battles and intellectual debates in Russian foreign affairs and an ongoing quest for a new identity for the Russian state. The study of Russian foreign affairs has also been affected by the uncertainty concerning Russia’s identity, the volatility of its institutional framework, and a degree of ambivalence in its foreign policy, particularly toward the Western states.

This chapter examines external and internal circumstances of Russian foreign relations, and sheds light on the most contentious questions and debates in the study of Russian foreign affairs. Is Russia a “normal” state that can be studied using the general theories of foreign policy discussed in Chapter 1, or is it a “special” case that operates according to a set of different and unique rules of engagement?⁵ If Russia’s behavior is not markedly different from foreign policies of other states, which theoretical approaches can account for changes and continuity in its foreign behavior? In light of the latest resurgence of the

Russian Federation, what can explain its renewed quest for regaining the great power position and instituting a multipolar structure in the international system? This chapter addresses these themes and questions. It begins with a brief historical overview of Russian foreign policy followed by two parts addressing external influences and domestic factors in Russian foreign policy actions. These international- and domestic-level perspectives are put into action to explain Russian foreign policy toward the former republics of the Soviet Union in general, and Georgia in particular, including the 2008 Georgia-Russia war.

Historical Context

It is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend present-day Russian foreign policy or make any forecasts about its future without some understanding of the past. There have been stark continuities in the foreign policy of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Cold War Russia, despite the important changes in the domestic environment that the country has undergone during this time. A historical vantage point can help to identify these enduring practices and distinguish them from more transient experiences in Russia's foreign policy behavior.

Viewed from a historical perspective, Russian foreign policy has exhibited a persistent pattern of expansion of state authority over the vast territories adjacent to the Russian heartland.⁶ Beginning with the early 14th century, Moscovy, a medieval Russian principality with Moscow at the center began pushing its boundaries deeper into Eurasia. Over the following centuries, this process created a multinational empire with immense territory, covering at its peak size over one-sixth of the Earth's land surface.⁷ To a certain extent, it was Russia's geopolitical realities that furthered its expansion. Russia was a continental empire occupying vast and open territory but had no natural barriers to protect its immense landmass. The prospects of an easy invasion contributed to an enduring feeling of insecurity, and expansionism was viewed as essential to survival of the Russian state. With the far-flung buffer zones, Russia's military could face its enemy away from the Russian core and prepare for a counter-offensive by trading time for

territory. Therefore, enlarging state territory and fortifying state borders was a strategic imperative which, overtime, has become Russia's foreign policy axiom.⁸

The annexation and conquest of culturally and ethnically diverse territories strongly affected Russia's identity, eliciting a sense of uncertainty about its national character and sense of belonging. It also contributed to the emergence of ambivalent attitudes toward the West and Europe, manifested in the famous domestic divide between two opposing groups of Russian philosophers, known as Westernizers and Slavophiles. Russia's expansionism and a desire to assert itself as a great power in Europe had been held back by an unsettling reality of being an industrially and technologically backward state. Therefore, Russian foreign and defense policies had to be adjusted to the economic weaknesses of the empire. Russia's leaders had to learn to take advantage of the vastness of the Russian territory, poor infrastructure, and severe climate for the country's military aims. Both Peter the Great and Alexander I exploited Russia's inhospitable weather and dearth of food supplies to starve the enemy's forces so that the sizable but inferior Russian army could defeat them.⁹

The epoch of Tsars in Russian history ended in 1917. In February, the last Russian monarch, Nicholas II, was deposed from the throne and a few months later, all state power was captured by the Bolsheviks. These events paved the way for the establishment of the Communist regime in Russia and the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It is undeniable that Soviet Russia was different from its Tsarist predecessor in some important ways. Still, the same geopolitical realities and imperial ideology provided important continuities in the foreign policy of the tsarist and Soviet regimes. The Soviet Union continued to pursue the strategy of territorial expansion, especially prior to the Second World War. It exercised direct control over the annexed territories and an indirect command in other states through its support of communist regimes.¹⁰ The Soviet leadership's sense of security was severely weakened by the extraordinary human and material losses that Russia endured during the First and Second World wars. This acute feeling of insecurity was only strengthened by high military tensions during the Cold War that pitted the USSR, heading the Soviet bloc of the Eastern and Central European countries, against the United States and NATO.

The Communist Party's platform committed the Soviet Union to a revolutionary ideology of global class struggle and support for the workers around the world in overthrowing capitalist regimes. Soviet leaders often disguised contradictions between the traditional super-power goals and revolutionary aims by cloaking Russia's strategic motives in the rhetoric of communism. Over time however, pragmatic *raison d'être* of the USSR superseded demands of Marxism-Leninism.¹¹ By the 1980s, the Soviet Union's subsidies to its allies in Eastern Europe became a heavy burden on the Soviet purse. Its idling economy struggled to provide sufficient backing for national independence movements in the Third World. The military industrial complex of the USSR was caught up in the arms race with its Cold War adversary, but unable to match the heavy military spending of the United States. The Soviet Union lagged behind the leading industrial nations in technological and scientific fields.

Mikhail Gorbachev, a new Soviet leader who came to power in 1985, understood the seriousness of the situation and consequences of competing demands on the stability and economic prosperity of the USSR. He launched historical political and economic reforms of the Soviet Union by introducing liberal ideas of global interdependence and cooperation between states into the Marxist-Leninist foundations of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Although, those ideas and policies were revolutionary for Gorbachev's epoch, they did not aim at radical transformation of the Soviet system and its replacement with capitalism. Gorbachev remained loyal to socialist values and wanted to rescue the Soviet Union's communist foundation using a novel idea of a reformed socialism. Gorbachev's policies, branded as "new thinking," paved the way for deeper cuts in the Soviet Union's military spending at home and withdrawal of its military aid abroad. He supported greater integration of the USSR's economy into the global market and agreed to asymmetrical reductions of Soviet conventional and nuclear forces.¹²

Gorbachev's reforms did not salvage the Soviet economy from depression and further economic downfall. His liberalizing policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) brought about greater transparency in the activities of the Soviet institutions and caused irreversible changes in the structure of the Soviet political and economic system that eventually led to the fall of Communism. The Soviet Union, whose unity and stability was already shaken by the loud secessionist calls, finally disintegrated

in 1991. Fifteen newly independent republics, including the Russian Federation, replaced the USSR. Russia became an official successor of the Soviet Union by assuming its legal obligations, membership in international organizations, and ownership of the nuclear arsenal.

The collapse of the Soviet Union accompanied by the loss of territory, division of the military and industrial property, and division of the infrastructure emasculated Russia. The result was that the country plunged into a profound identity crisis that noticeably affected its relations with Western and post-Soviet states. Boris Yeltsin, who became the first president of Russia, was initially a passionate supporter of pro-Western liberal orientation for Russia. He and the first Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, advocated for the rapid integration of Russia into the West.¹³ Quickly, however, the Russian government relinquished these ideas as Russian prospects for the integration with the West appeared dim. Russian leaders were disheartened with the minimal volume of assistance from Western institutions, and upset with what they viewed as the desertion of Russia by Western states. Left to its own devices to tackle domestic and international problems, Russia became determined to resurrect its great power position and regain its influence in the post-Soviet space. Since the mid-1990s, Russian foreign policy has developed into a more unilateralist and, at times anti-Western direction, reflecting the change in priorities of Russia's national interests. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia has vehemently opposed the institution of the unipolar global order managed from Washington and advocated for the virtues of multipolarity and multilateralism.¹⁴ In the 1990s, the deficit of domestic resources and Russia's dependence on Western aid inhibited the scope of Russian foreign policy, constraining its ability to pursue its goals in the former Soviet Union and farther abroad. With the growth of world energy prices that significantly increased Russian revenues, the country's foreign policy became more independent and increasingly more assertive.

What follows from this brief historical investigation is that Russian foreign policy has been affected, to a certain degree, by the size of the country and its geographical position. The lack of natural barriers in the vast and open Russian territory, combined with the economic, technological, and military weaknesses of the state resulted in an enduring fear of invasion and occupation. Russia has always been insecure about the openness and

indefensibility of its borders as well as the encirclement by what it has perceived as enemies or moderately hostile states. Over the long history of Russian foreign policy, the country's leadership employed a variety of strategies and used all available means to enhance the security of Russia. The Russian state formed and joined military alliances, conquered and controlled weaker states, built its military capabilities, and even supported the role of international institutions and ideas of multilateralism. The Russian aspiration of acting and being viewed as a great power nation had also endured through the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Cold war epochs. Today, the image of Russia as a great power state is shared among many Russian citizens and politicians who attest to their country's indisputable international role and interests that stretch across the world.

Although, Russia's foreign policy has seen enduring patterns such as a lasting interest in national security and a concern with Russia's global status, the interpretation and implementation of Russian goals has oscillated over time under the impact of international and domestic forces. It is to the analysis of these external and internal circumstances of Russian foreign policy that this chapter turns next.

External Factors

Although, there is a considerable debate about the relative weight of internal and external circumstances in shaping the direction of Russian foreign policy, nobody disputes the prominent impact of the international environment on foreign activities of the Russian state. For analytical purposes, all explanations that underscore the impact of external factors on Russian foreign affairs can be classified into two groups. One cluster of foreign policy explanations uses the "anarchy-as-a-state-of-nature" metaphor for describing world affairs. According to this metaphor, based on the realist perspective discussed in Chapter 1, the international arena is anarchic, which means that there is no central authority overriding sovereign states. In the absence of a central authority, all states are left to their own devices for protecting themselves. States pursue a wide range of national goals but interests in national security always prevail. Given the permanent scarcity of security, states find themselves in an incessant competition for power and influence *vis-à-vis* other states in order to maximize their chances for survival.

Cooperation, therefore, is very difficult under the conditions of international anarchy. What states can do to ensure their security depends on their relative power position in the international system which is determined by their military and economic strength, the availability of resources, and the number of power poles competing for influence in the international realm.¹⁵

In the realist conception, Russia's foreign policy, particularly its confrontation with the United States over the issues of nuclear non-proliferation, NATO expansion, and U.S. involvement in the domestic affairs of the former Soviet states are a reflection of mutually incompatible interests. For Russia, these actions of the United States and NATO diminish its influence and autonomy in the world politics, threaten security, and the very survival of the Russian state. Russian foreign policy pursues the goal of preserving the country's power position and offsetting the influence of other powerful states.

Evidence in support of Russia's *realpolitik* vision is not difficult to find in Russian foreign policy. After a short "honeymoon" period with the West in 1991–92, Russia turned into a vehement opponent of U.S. global hegemony. The Russian political and security elite developed a conviction that a multipolar world dominated by a handful of great powers, including Russia, was inherently more stable and considerably less threatening to Russian national interests. NATO's enlargement to the east was described using the rhetoric of "encroachment" of the Northern Alliance and United States on Russia's traditional spheres of influence. Western-sponsored projects advocating political pluralism and democratization in the post-Soviet states have been portrayed as clandestine attempts to encircle and suppress the Russian state.¹⁶ Moscow has protested what it deemed as Western intrusions into its "backyard" territory and called for the establishment of regional alliances to counterbalance hegemony of the United States. Russia's foreign policy has not always been openly and decisively anti-United States. Russian legal documents have presented the United States as both the key Russian partner and the main Russian rival. Vladimir Putin at the beginning of his first term as the Russian president was elated over the development of the U.S.-Russian partnership and cooperation with the United States in the war on terrorism. When the true partnership failed to materialize, the Kremlin became increasingly outspoken against the White House. The Bush administration's plans for a ballistic missile defense system in Europe

were taken as a testimony of Washington's intention to establish a unipolar world. In response to Moscow's opposition to the White House's foreign policy actions, Washington retorted with the condemnation of the Russian arms sales to Iran and the curtailment of political and civil freedoms in Russia.¹⁷

The oscillations in Russian foreign policy toward the United States fostered debates about the prevailing *realpolitik* strategy of the Russian Federation. Since the 1990s, Russia has eagerly promoted the ideas of multipolarity exemplified in the Russian support of the enhanced role of the United Nations and its Security Council in global affairs. Through multipolarity and multilateralism Russia sought to transcend the U.S. hegemony in the post-Cold War world. It has also attempted to balance U.S. power by using its nuclear leverage and building alliances with other states. There has even been evidence of the *bandwagoning* behavior in Russian foreign policy, particularly, during the early 1990s, when Moscow sought deeper integration with Western states, and later in Moscow's contributions to U.S.-led peacekeeping and military operations.¹⁸

Neither foreign policy strategy, however, has proven to be successful. Short of the UN Security Council's authorization, NATO commenced its Kosovo operation, while the United States unilaterally launched its military operation in Iraq. These contraventions of the global multipolar order showed the ineffectiveness of Russia's efforts to transcend U.S. hegemony through the weight of international organizations. The counterbalancing strategy has also been problematic. Despite the improved economic situation, Russia's conventional forces remain in woeful shape and its technological, industrial, and military sectors cannot compete with those of the United States. A full-fledged alliance of Russia with China has been out of question as both countries have strong disincentives for breaking their ties with the United States. The Russian leadership has lingering fears of Chinese hegemony, while the Chinese economy is interdependent with that of the United States. Bandwagoning with the United States has been muted in Russia's foreign policy for fears of damaging Russia's reputation with southern, eastern, and Middle East partners, and among Russia's large Muslim population.¹⁹

The failure of the traditional instruments of *realpolitik* combined with the growing popularity of the "soft" instruments of power, such as energy policies, gave rise to a new foreign policy strategy contained in the idea of Russia as an "Energy Super-State." First

enunciated by President Putin in 2005, this strategy relied on the strategic resources of the Russian Federation—gas, oil, and energy transportation networks—during the period of high energy prices, for pursuing political and economic goals. Energy is envisioned as an invaluable instrument for both enriching the country and elevating its international status and influence, especially in relations with European states and former republics of the Soviet Union. The new strategy worked well during the boom period of oil and gas and thanks to Russia's near-monopoly of gas supplies to certain countries in Europe. In recent years, analysts began cautioning about the imminent failure of the “Energy Super-State” strategy. The share of Russian gas in the European market and volume of profits from energy resources have been on decline due to a combination of factors, including the loss of reputation as a reliable partner after gas disputes with Ukraine, the global economic crisis, changes in technologies of gas production, and the rise in Central Asian gas prices.²⁰

Another cluster of foreign policy theories derived from the tenets of constructivism (see Chapter 1) relies on an alternative to the “anarchy-as-a-state-of-nature” logic. A metaphor of the “hall of mirrors” is used for portraying the world. According to this constructivist logic, states' identities, that is the systems of cognitive, emotional, and evaluative orientations toward the “self” and “other,” affect states' assessments of threats and opportunities and guide their international behavior. A state's identity, however, is the mirror reflection of how it is viewed by other international actors. Interactions with other states and international organizations and intersubjective meanings created through these interactions establish a meaningful context for defining the state's identity. In this way, the international environment, in which states operate exerts a decisive influence on their actions. Interactions in international relations are a game of recognition, and foreign policies are an outcome of perceptions and descriptions of the “other” and the “self.”²¹ Both constructivist and realist accounts are in agreement that Russian foreign policy has developed against the backdrop of Russia's relations with other states, particularly the United States. The difference, however, is in the emphasis that is placed on either material or social factors in explaining foreign policy. Realists underscore the importance of material factors, such as military and economic strength. Constructivists emphasize the impact of socialization, the weight of social recognition, and the self-image of states in

accounting for their foreign policy actions and relations with other states.²² According to the constructivist conception, Russia's foreign policy is shaped through interactions with other nations and affected by the Western states' treatment of Russia and by their references to Russia.²³

Throughout most of its history, Russia has sought acknowledgement from the West. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Russia longed to be a part of Europe. After the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet Russia needed legitimization by the West. In the 1940s, it looked for Western respect of its great power position, and sought recognition of its superpower status at the height of the Cold War.²⁴ The West played an important role as a symbolic referent for Russia's self-identification throughout the 1990s. The first Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved in 1993, clearly identified Russia with the West, which was represented as an embodiment of democratic and liberal ideas and as an association of material political entities, including the United States and other European states. Achieving the main characteristics of the West, i.e., becoming democratic, industrially developed, and prosperous, was listed among Russia's top priorities.²⁵

Although, in later foreign policy documents (particularly in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 and the current foreign policy doctrine approved in 2008) all allusions to the West were replaced with more general references to the "world community," "world economy" and "democratic society," suggesting that Russia cast aside the idea of the West as the most important referent but the influence of Western nations on Russian identity and interests has not disappeared. The idea of the West as an embodiment of certain norms, values, and institutions has been decoupled from its material constituents, such as NATO and the United States. The West as an epitome of progress, leadership, and modernity still figures strongly in the Russian "self." The individual representatives of the West—the United States, NATO, and states of the European Union—have been turned into the "frames of reference" against which Russia has been measuring its economic, military, political and technological resources and potential. The rhetoric of Russian politicians and Russia's official documents also conveys a sense of isolation and marginalization of the country by the West. This meaning can be inferred from the

repeated appeals to the importance of parity in international relations, couched in terms of equal partnership, mutual benefits, and strategic cooperation with the West.²⁶

The conflicting identity of the Russian Federation (Is Russia a Western state, or a unique civilization?), the lack of broad acceptance of its western image at home, and non-recognition of its western status by many states abroad has been used to explain Russia's partial compliance with international norms and regulations, particularly those concerning human rights and democratization. It has been argued that by integrating Russia into the West and Europe, and recognizing it as a Western state sharing the same values and aspirations as other states of the West and Europe, the western community could have contributed to the internalization of liberal democratic norms by Russia. When those norms become integral to a state identity, they begin shaping the course of the states' behavior. It is the lack of coherence in the view on Russia's identity at home, and denial to Russia of its Western and European status abroad that has led to Russia's inconsistent and superficial commitment to human rights norms and democratic standards.²⁷

Realist and constructivist approaches to Russian foreign policy are not the only theories that explain how the international environment impacts states' foreign policy behavior. Other perspectives informed by the tenets of Liberalism (discussed in Chapter 1) place Russian foreign policy within the context of global and regional economies shows the importance of growing economic interdependence of their economy with the economies of other states and the effects on their foreign policy. Foreign investments and international trade have boosted Russia's prosperity, improved the well-being of its people, and encouraged Russia's cooperation with other states, particularly the members of the European Union, former republics of the USSR, and China. Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 and the new National Security Strategy up to 2020 (hereinafter, the Strategy 2020) that was endorsed by the Russian president in 2009 define national security among the key objectives of Russian foreign policy, but also dedicate more attention to the economic dimension in Russia's interactions with other states, and stress the role of international institutions and treaties in managing the global order. Unlike the previous security doctrines, the Strategy 2020 utilizes a broader understanding of security. A quick glance over a few examples of the headings of the Strategy sections—

“Economic Growth,” “Research, Technology and Education,” “Healthcare,” “Culture,” and “Ecology”—suggests that Russia has adopted a more comprehensive understanding of national security, which is now linked to questions of economic growth and sustainable development.

Internal Factors

Neither geopolitical nor constructivist perspectives specify how decisions concerning a state’s foreign policy are made and how policy makers formulate their preferences. Various domestic oriented approaches to foreign policy offer explanations about the impact of manifold internal factors on foreign policy outcomes and decision making processes that lie beneath important decisions. As discussed in Chapter 1, cumulatively these perspectives assume that foreign policy making authority is dispersed within the state among government agencies, interest groups, and individual political leaders. A state’s foreign policy is also affected by the nature of its political regime and the structure of the bureaucracy running its state institutions.

The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation defines Russia as a democratic state, which guarantees political freedoms and holds regular, free, and fair elections. However, in practice Russia lacks many features of a truly democratic state. Its political regime is a “hybrid” type of democracy and authoritarianism that is variously called “developing democracy,” “soft authoritarianism,” and “hyper-presidentialism.” While it features many formal institutions and norms of the democratic political system, those institutions exist alongside informal, nonmeritocratic practices that are secluded from the public mechanisms of the accumulation and exercise of power. When the formal rules come into conflict with informal rules, which often serve particularistic interests of the ruling elite, the formal rules get compromised. Informal rules are used for guiding processes within the state’s political system and in its relations with other states.²⁸ The knowledge of both formal rules and informal institutions is therefore important for understanding policies of a hybrid state, like Russia.

According to the Russian legislation, the President and his administration, the Prime Minister and the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the military, and the

security and intelligence agencies are the key players in foreign policy. The actual role of these institutions in foreign policy making does not, however, match their formal authority as described in the constitution and other legal documents. Since the presidency of Vladimir Putin, political power in Russia has been highly centralized and concentrated in the office of the president, presidential administration, and executive branch at the expense of the Russian legislature and judiciary. Although, the presidential monopoly on foreign and domestic politics has deep historical roots in Russia, it has only strengthened in the early 21st century.²⁹ Constitutionally, the Russian prime minister is subordinate to the President in the realm of foreign policy. In effect, much of the foreign policy making authority has shifted from the Kremlin to the Cabinet of Ministers (Russian government) after Putin became Russia's Prime Minister.³⁰

Another institution that regained its influence in Russia's foreign policy under the leadership of Putin is security services, particularly, the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service. In recent years, these agencies' assessments and reports on the international and domestic situation have provided the informational framework for the Kremlin's foreign policy decisions. This has been done at the expense of the traditional foreign policy advisors from academic institutions and various consultants working for the committees of the Russian Parliament.

During the Cold War, Russia's military and defense establishments exercised considerable authority over the Soviet Union's foreign affairs. In the post-Cold War era, the military lost much of its political clout. The military's ideology, views on global affairs, and assessments of security threats as well as demands for resources allocation came into conflict with the preferences of Russia's civilian leadership. The loss of its military capabilities deprived the Russian defense establishments of much of their decision making power. The military's impact has been retained, to a certain degree, in the areas concerning Russia's relations with the former republics of the Soviet Union, particularly those experiencing internal turmoil (Georgia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan). The military has also played an active role in the development of a strategic partnership with the United States and NATO.³¹

As discussed in Chapter 1, competent and effective bureaucracy is essential for a state's foreign policy making. Public servants from the foreign policy institutions are tasked

with gathering and analyzing information, drafting proposals, and implementing foreign policy decisions. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been the most important foreign policy agency in this regard. Staffed with experienced diplomats and trained personnel, it has also been the most visible actor in the foreign affairs of Russia. Most decisions are channeled through this agency while its employees in Russia and on overseas appointments carry out the preponderance of day-to-day functions related to Russian foreign policy. Under the presidency and prime ministership of Vladimir Putin, the Foreign Ministry has often been dismissed as an institution with no real "teeth." Still, the Ministry continues serving as the main repository of knowledge and contacts in Russia's foreign affairs. It provides invaluable input on the critical issues of global and regional politics, thus affecting Russia's foreign policy conduct.³²

One of the challenges of studying foreign policy of any state, including Russia, lies in the complexity of its institutional structure, the multitude of political interests competing for influence in foreign affairs, and a certain degree of disarray and conflict characterizing political and policy environments of individual states (see Chapter 1). These descriptions all apply to Russia as well. Although, the Kremlin has been the main hub of foreign policy making authority in Russia, this authority has been neither unchallenged nor sacrosanct. Foreign policy networks in Russia represent a complex web of personal contacts, informal mechanisms, and nonformalized rules of interactions. A particular foreign policy decision is often the outcome of bureaucratic scuffles, struggles between political factions and interest groups, and clashes between individual representatives of the governing elite. This is further complicated by discrepancies between the official and actual allocation of authority in policy making in Russia and in the proliferation of special interest groups.

One of the most influential and unique interest groups in Russia is known by the name of "*siloviki*." Literally, *siloviki* (from Russian, "silovye struktury," "force structures") denotes active and retired employees of the military, security services, and law enforcement bodies. However, the composition of the group is not limited to those individuals who hail from the agencies that command uniformed personnel and have their own militarized formations. The *siloviki* group includes business persons and governmental bureaucrats, who have no connection to military or intelligence units. The

siloviki have no ties to a particular societal or economic sector, but exercise control and promote interests of multiple governmental and business agencies from different policy areas, including energy, customs, federal property, security, and finances. Therefore, the *siloviki* is a very diverse and hierarchically structured group that is held together by shared political goals, common interests, and policy agendas. The *siloviki*, for example, support a highly centralized state, which plays an active and decisive role in Russia's economy. They prioritize order and stability above everything else, including democratic processes and human rights, and entrust Russia's defense and security forces with the task of protecting its national security. In the realm of foreign policy, the *siloviki* stand firmly behind the return of Russia to its great power position in international relations. They view the United States and NATO with suspicion and hope to reinstate Russia's presence in the politics of the former republics of the Soviet Union.³³

Although, this *siloviki* group has been extremely influential in Russia's domestic politics and foreign affairs, there are other interest groups and policy actors that have exerted an impact on foreign policy of the Russian state. The Russian business elite are particularly noteworthy in this regard. After the collapse of the command system, the Russian government initiated economic privatization, which was largely hijacked by a small group of well-connected insiders. They were able to acquire the lion's share of the formerly state-owned property and became the richest business people in Russia, the so-called "oligarchs." When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, he swore to destroy Russia's oligarchs "as a class" and did, indeed, drive many business tycoons to exile or imprisoned them. Still, many others survived the president's attack and even joined the *siloviki* clan.

Foreign policy interests of the business elite are diverse and determined by the asset specificity and international competitiveness of the economic sectors they lead. Asset specificity refers to the efforts required to move assets from one industry into another economic sector. The more difficult the transfer of investments, the greater the vulnerability of the industry to market shifts. Business elites in highly asset-specific sectors are more likely to support conservative economic policies.

International competitiveness, on the other hand, influences the extent of support for protectionist policies. Those segments of the Russian economy that have high asset-

specificity and low international competitiveness, such as agriculture, light and heavy industry, and even defense, tend to be politically and economically the most conservative. As competitiveness increases, these sectors become more liberal. Russia's natural resources and financial sectors have been the most liberal economic sectors from the standpoint of foreign policy.³⁴

Within the natural resources sector, the oil and gas conglomerate has become the most obvious candidate for shaping the course of Russian foreign policy. The political weight of the oil and gas industry comes from its ability to supply Russia's coffers with much needed currency and assist the Kremlin in projecting Russia's power outside its borders, thanks to its near monopoly in gas supplies to some East European states and countries of the former Soviet Union. In the late 1990s, the Russian government realized that gas and oil could become powerful tools in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Therefore, a decision was made to bring the energy sector under the government's control. After coming to power, Putin immediately focused his attention on Gazprom, the Russian natural gas monopoly. It was created in 1989 from the Soviet Union's Ministry of Gas Industry and later privatized. In a series of business deals concluded during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Gazprom and its subsidiary enterprises transferred significant portions of their stock to various governmental entities. In this way, the Russian government gained full control over the company. The 2006 Federal Law "On Gas Export," granted Gazprom exclusive rights to export natural gas. The government also appointed its representatives to the governing boards of various strategic enterprises. The cross-fertilization and monopolization of the strategic natural resources sector by the government and corporations, such as Gazprom, Rosneft (petroleum), Transneft (oil pipelines), and others have resulted in the merger of wealth and power in Russia and the creation of the so-called "Kremlin, Inc." This elite consists of public officials and managers with extraordinary influence, some of whom have also joined the *siloviki* group.³⁵

The implications of this merger on Russian foreign policy cannot be underestimated. Acting as an arm of the state and relying on energy diplomacy to fulfill Russia's national interest may be detrimental to the corporations' efficiency when gauged from the economic standpoint. However, the reverse is also true. Russia's foreign policy can

become a vehicle for making personal profits at the expense of broader political and ideological goals. The latter conflict of personal and national interests transpired during the 2006 and 2007 energy crises when Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine and Belarus. The latter two states used to enjoy a “special relationship” with Russia which translated into much lower prices for natural gas purchased from Gazprom. When Moscow raised the gas price to the level of the world market prices, they interpreted it as Moscow’s political maneuver and refused to pay a significantly higher price. In both instances, securing higher prices for Russian gas was at odds with important foreign policy objectives of the Russian Federation and undermined its status as a responsible player in the global energy market. The existence of industrial monopolies supported by the Russian government shuts the Russian market to the emergence and flourishing of smaller private enterprises. A plan of national development that is based on the model of autocracy or oligopoly runs contrary to global economic trends and serves as an obstacle to Russia’s further integration into the global economy.³⁶

It is not just the structure of the government and the presence of various interest groups that influence a state’s foreign policy, but also individual characteristics of political leaders (see Chapter 1). The *de facto* responsibilities of Russian leaders is affected by their personal backgrounds and personalities’ traits. More extroverted and ambitious leaders have typically assumed more active roles in Russian foreign affairs. Scholars who have examined personal qualities of Stalin, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin, as well as other Soviet and post-Soviet politicians, have found strong links between internal personality needs shaped by the individuals’ backgrounds and their actions as Russian leaders.³⁷ For example, Dyson argues that Vladimir Putin’s central, philosophical belief in rule-bound normative behavior underlies his support for arms control treaties and his harsh reaction against those he sees as stepping outside the norms of conventional political life, such as the Chechen rebels.³⁸

Individual leaders are products of their environment. Therefore, placing their views and perspectives on foreign policy inside the broader context of national culture, identity, and ideology may be beneficial to understanding their foreign policy choices. As discussed in Chapter 1, a country’s core cultural values and national identities are important. The basic philosophical beliefs about the state’s self-image, perceptions about its friends and

adversaries, and assumptions about the flow of history and the nature of international relations provide the most influential ideas and concepts relevant to the state's foreign policy.³⁹ In Russia, there have been several distinct traditions or schools of foreign policy thinking, all based on different sets of core beliefs about the world and Russia's place in it. Westernizers consider Russia as part of the most progressive Western civilization, and therefore they believe that it should embrace universal democratic values and free market practices and build stronger ties with the West. Civilizationists or Eurasianists emphasize the uniqueness of Russian civilization. Russia's culture is different, and even superior, to the traditions and culture of the West according to Eurasianists. They deem that Russia's mission is to challenge the Western system of values, disseminate its own beliefs overseas, and unify the landmass of Eurasia under the leadership of the Russian state. Finally, Statists pay tribute to the greatness of Russia and its ability to provide for its own security and defense. They have been particularly keen to seek the recognition of Russia's great power status by the Western states. Strongly affected by the geopolitical views on the security of Russia, they see omnipresent external threats. The principles of democracy, human rights, and other values are subordinate to the imperatives of order, stability, and security of Russia. Anything can be sacrificed for the safety of state, according to Statists.⁴⁰ Russia's foreign policy, both historical and modern, has manifested struggles and frictions between these contending traditions providing competing narratives about the status of international relations, the nature of Russian identity, and Russia's place in the world. The first Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, was an enthusiastic Westernist. From the early 1990s, the Westernizers' ideas were challenged by communists and nationalists, whose views are affected by Eurasianists' ideas. Among those Eurasianists were Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of Russia's Communist Party, and Vladimir Zhirinovky, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia infamous for its strong nationalist stances. The modern day *siloviki* are united, as a group, around Statists' beliefs and worldviews. Certainly, Russian foreign policy has been the preserve of its political and economic elite. However, we cannot discount the constraining, albeit modest role of the Russian public in the country's foreign affairs.⁴¹ Similar to domestic audiences in other countries (see Chapter 1), the Russian public may be disinterested in a wide range of international

issues but they may also have strong preferences and opinions on the highly visible policy areas, such as the deployment of Russian military in overseas territories, NATO's expansion, and Russia's relations with the former republics of the USSR. The Russian public has been able to link their foreign policy preference to their support for political candidates, particularly, during presidential races. Therefore, the role of public opinion in Russia's foreign policy cannot be discounted completely. The Russian public plays a real, if limited, role in the foreign policy decision making of the Russian Federation.

Contemporary Russian Foreign Policy and the States of the Former Soviet Union

To illustrate the utility of various theoretical perspectives for explaining Russian foreign policy, this section provides an overview of Moscow's activities in the post-Soviet territory and examines Russian regional policy and bilateral relations with Georgia via the lens of realism, constructivism, and domestic-level approaches to foreign policy.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Moscow's foreign policy exhibited a strong pro-Western tilt, and Russia nearly vacated the former Soviet Union region. The interest in the former USSR grew stronger in 1993–94 when Russia reevaluated its foreign policy priorities and settled on the goal of regaining its economic and military footing in the neighboring states. The restoration of Russia's influence in the former Soviet space became a foreign policy motto for President Putin, who was particularly successful in reestablishing Russia's presence and influence in the Central Asian states. The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of Russia placed bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the successor states to the Soviet Union as a top priority of Russian foreign policy.

Why has it been so important to Russia to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet states? According to realism, discussed earlier in this chapter and also in Chapter 1, states' foreign policies are designed to respond to the threats arising from the international environment. The choices of foreign policy actions are also influenced by the relative military, political, and economic strength of individual states. For Russia, the main threat to its national security has emanated from the United States and NATO, and Moscow's relationships with other states, including republics of the former Soviet Union, have been

shaped by its relations with the West.⁴² In the mid- and late 1990s, the Kremlin sought to boost its political, economic, and military presence in the countries of the former Soviet Union in response to a perceived threat that Washington was supplanting Russia's centuries-old influence in these nations. Many states on the borders of the Russian Federation were part of the Russian Empire even before the institution of the Soviet Union. These territories served as "buffer" zones for Russia, which has become accustomed to viewing them as its traditional spheres of influence crucial to Russia's national interests.

Other states' rapprochements with these countries can only happen at the expense of Russia. Therefore, NATO's eastward expansion that incorporated the Baltic States into the Euro-Atlantic security zone, and risks associated with a possible North Atlantic membership of Georgia and Ukraine served as an impetus for Moscow's more resolute approach toward regional integration. Both NATO expansion and EU enlargement stimulated Russia's efforts at increasing the military, security, and economic consolidation of the former republics of the USSR around Moscow.⁴³ If in the 1990s, Russia's own economic, political, and military weaknesses got in the way of its neoimperial ambitions and the recent oil and gas boom provided Russia with an excellent opportunity for regaining its dominant position in the former Soviet states.

There are, of course, other security concerns affecting Russian foreign policy toward the post-Soviet countries. Ethnic and territorial conflicts in the bordering states, for example, have been a major foreign policy issue. Some borders between Russia and the former Soviet Union republics are still lacking sufficient protection, while many Russian neighbors are weak states. They have inadequate resources for maintaining internal stability and dealing with a range of domestic security threats. The limited capacity of these states to lessen negative externalities of their domestic and regional problems, including the spillover of conflicts and criminal activities, illegal immigration and terrorism, called for Russian engagement in the affairs of neighboring states.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly in this context, one of the *leitmotifs* of modern Russia's foreign policy in the region has been a renewed effort at security cooperation in the former Soviet Union and a focus on criminality and counterterrorism. Many of the post-Soviet states have also been

important to Russia as trade partners and as links in the Russian energy infrastructure containing elements of the network of pipelines located on the territory of those states. Consistent with liberalism (also discussed in the introductory chapter), states' foreign policies are driven by economic interests in furthering their economic wealth. Russia has championed various economic projects on the post-Soviet territory because cooperation with the former republics of the Soviet Union has been beneficial to the Russian state. Close economic ties of the successor states, common infrastructure, overlapping populations, the similarities of cultures, language, political institutions, and developmental practices, as well as shared economic, political, and social problems called for sustained multilateral cooperation on the post-Soviet space.⁴⁵

Another set of variables explaining Russian foreign policy in the region is informed by constructivism. The latter is concerned with the impact of a state's identity on its foreign policy. From the standpoint of constructivism, Russia's interest in the post-Soviet territory has been consistent with its national identity, or image of the "self." The loss of the territories, which for historical reasons had become viewed as part of Russia, caused significant rupture in its identity. Maintaining influence in the former Soviet states is important for the continuity of the identity of modern Russia, which presents itself as a descendant of Imperial Russia and "heir" of the USSR. An influential position of Russia in the post-Soviet territory is also consistent with Russia's understanding of its historical mission and current global role.

Russia's attempt to exert its predominance in the post-Soviet region has not been universally successful. Until recently, Russia has been able to hold sway on many issues in its relations with Belarus, Armenia, and Tajikistan, but other states, particularly Georgia and Ukraine, have shown resolve in escaping the power grip of Russia. Since the establishment of a protectorate over Georgian territories in 1783, Tsarist and Soviet Russia had exercised pervasive authority over cultural, economic, and political life in Georgia. Georgia became thoroughly integrated into the Soviet political and economic system and remained dependent on the Russian Federation for the provision of economic, political, and security assistance after declaring its independence in April of 1991. Although, nationalist and pro-Western sentiments ran high in Georgia in the 1990s, a deep economic crisis combined with bitter political conflicts plagued the country and

necessitated activation of Georgia's relations with Moscow and the Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Georgia acceded to Russia's demands to join the CIS and the majority of agreements signed within the CIS framework. It also signed a military cooperation agreement with Russia, which authorized the Russian government to maintain three military bases in Georgia, train Georgia's troops, and equip its army.

In the 1990s, Europe and the United States had shown little interest in Georgia. Several notable events caused a watershed moment in the relations of Georgia with the West. Soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the U.S. intelligence community supported Russian allegations about the presence of terrorist bases in Georgia's tumultuous Pankisi Gorge located on the border with Chechnya. As Russia threatened to use its troops to root out Chechen terrorists in Georgia, the Georgian government intensified its calls for assistance and partnership with the West. The Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia forced into resignation President Shevardnadze, whose terms of office were marked by electoral fraud and rampant corruption, and brought to power a Western-leaning coalition of forces. The government of the new Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has taken advantage of the American political and financial backing that significantly increased after 2001 which propelled Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations, deterred Russia's aggression, and withstood Moscow's political backlash.⁴⁶

As Georgia ventured to break away from Russia and anchor itself to the West, Russia exerted even more pressure on Georgia to keep it within its orbit of influence. Not only did Russia fear the loss to the West of its traditional influence over Georgia, but it was also concerned with the consequences of political changes in Georgia for the broader Caucasus, including the territories within Russia's own borders, and the impact of Georgia's partnership with the West on the Kremlin's monopoly over energy transportation routes to Europe.

In February 2008, all Western states supported Kosovo's declaration of independence, despite the loud protests from Moscow. Two months later, NATO declared that it will intensify cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine to facilitate their gradual integration and eventual membership in the Northern Alliance. This became the last straw for Moscow,

which has long viewed NATO's eastward expansion as an "act of bad faith." According to the Russian interpretation of U.S./Russia diplomatic history, in 1989 George W. Bush, Sr. vowed to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand "one inch to the east." Gorbachev, then, agreed to a united Germany's accession to NATO. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the Soviet Union and later Russia made significant political and military concessions to the West codified in a series of agreements and policy decisions. Today, Moscow feels that these agreements adversely affect Russia, and that the West took advantage of Russia's temporary weakness to acquire military and nuclear superiority it could not attain during the Cold War. Russia's security, jeopardized by NATO's military encirclement, had to be defended by force.⁴⁷

During the summer months of 2008, when the attention of the Bush administration was elsewhere, Russia was able to increase its military presence in Georgia's breakaway territories. Later that summer, under the pretext of defending South Ossetia against Georgia's aggression and protecting its own citizens and peacekeepers, Russia launched an attack on Georgian forces. This war was not merely a conflict between Georgia and Russia. It was a proxy-war between Russia and the West, particularly the United States and NATO. It was an attack on the Euro-Atlantic security system that Moscow began to view as exclusionary of Russia and anti-Russian because it encouraged and enabled post-Soviet states to rally with the West against Russian interests. Russia exploited the long-lasting conflict in South Ossetia to punish Georgia and to foil its future attempts at joining the Northern Alliance. It was also used to send an unequivocal message to other former republics of the Soviet Union to forewarn them from getting closer to the West or NATO.⁴⁸

Russia's strategy toward the post-Soviet region has been motivated by fear of U.S. global hegemony and interests and the need to maximize Russian power in the post-Soviet region. Russia's foreign policy toward the republics of the former Soviet Union has been consistent with the tenets of Realism. The fact that Russian politicians went to great pains to portray their military operation in Georgia as a legitimate use of force for humanitarian purposes and against Georgia's "aggression" targeting South Ossetia suggests that Russia, too, is concerned about its international reputation and bound, albeit to a very

limited extent, by international norms. This view on foreign policy is consistent with constructivism.⁴⁹

The Russian military attack on Georgia received widespread support from the Russian population. Political forces from different sides of the Russian political spectrum backed the Russian president's decision to use military force. Russian mass media played an important role in disseminating and popularizing the Kremlin's account of the Georgia-Russia war and, in this way, the Russian government was able to shape public opinion in Russia over the issue. In addition, the governing elite interested in consolidating their power and improving public standing utilized the war as an instrument for accomplishing their domestic aims. These domestic-level explanations afford better understanding of political decisions surrounding the Georgia-Russia war.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the communist system in Europe and the breakup of the USSR, Russia has undergone unthinkable political and economic changes that revolutionized the character and substance of its foreign policy. Russia's farewell to its communist past was manifested in a decisive effort to reform the central planning system into a liberal democratic order and fully integrate into the community of Western states. These aspirations, however, quickly dissipated as the Russian leadership came to realize that their country was essentially left to its own devices in dealing with its domestic and international problems. Having experienced the bankruptcy of its economic system, political instability, and humiliation over the alleged defeat in the Cold War, Russia has become determined to recover its great power position and institute a multipolar world.⁵⁰ Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin and his successor, Dmitri Medvedev, Russia's international standing has improved considerably. Today's Russia is significantly different from the Russia of yesterday. It is more centralized and politically stable. It is less democratic, but economically much better off. It is also increasingly belligerent, unilateralist, and assertive in its international relations. The need to comprehend and explain Russian foreign policy comes from its actual and potential role in the management of regional and global affairs. To be able to anticipate, if not affect, Russia's

foreign policy, it is imperative to understand the basis of the Kremlin's foreign policy choices and learn how the Russian leadership responds to incentives and disincentives offered from abroad. The resurgence of Russia in international relations explains the mounting interest in this growing field of study.

Still considered clandestine territory restricted to the Russian elite, the study of Russian foreign policy can serve as a forum for intense political battles and is full of many challenges.⁵¹ Despite its suspiciousness, obsession with security, a degree of secretiveness, and the seemingly irrational behavior of its policy-makers, Russia is not a unique and special case. It is a "normal" country that has always pursued a set of clear goals and acted in accordance with predictable and comprehensible logic. Therefore, Russian foreign policy can be analyzed using a conventional tool set of realist, liberal, and constructivist approaches and theories about the role of ideology, understanding beliefs of political leadership, and studying its organizational and bureaucratic politics, and other perspectives. Similar to other states of the world, Russia has exhibited enduring patterns and fluctuations in its foreign policy conduct. There has been a degree of dynamism but also consistency in Russian approaches to the outside world. The size of the country and realities of the geopolitical situation affected the self-image of Russia causing the enduring fears of invasion, and, ultimately, affecting its attitudes and policies toward the outside world. But even the relatively static features of Russian foreign affairs have been modernized and adjusted to the changing requirements and conditions that exist both inside of Russia and in the outside world. Russia's foreign policy is a function of Russian capabilities—different historical periods reveal its economic and political weaknesses and strengths, certainties and insecurities—and as these traits are employed in the international environment they provide opportunities as well as impose constraints on the state's foreign policy conduct. [AU: OK?] Russian policy is also affected by the ideational structures—norms, ideas, cultures, and identities—both inside and outside of Russia. It is this integrative perspective that stresses on the one hand, the interrelationship between domestic structures, processes, interests, and ideas, and on the other hand the international environment with its own distribution of material capabilities and structure of identities and ideas that provides a more complete and nuanced view of the nature of the Russian state foreign policy.

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