

Russia reborn

Reimagining Moscow's foreign policy

Two decades after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and nearly 20 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has shed communism and lost its historical empire. But it has not yet found a new role. Instead, it sits uncomfortably on the periphery of both Europe and Asia while apprehensively rubbing shoulders with the Muslim world.

Throughout the 1990s, Moscow attempted to integrate into, and then with, the West. These efforts failed, both because the West lacked the will to adopt Russia as one of its own and because Russian elites chose to embrace a corporatist and conservative policy agenda at home and abroad.

As a result, in the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin, Russia abandoned its goal of joining the West and returned to its default option of behaving as an independent great power. It redefined its objectives: soft dominance in its immediate neighborhood; equality with the world's principal power centers, China, the European Union, and the United States; and membership in a global multipolar order.

Half a decade later, this policy course has revealed its failures and flaws. Most are rooted in the Russian government's inability and unwillingness to reform the country's energy-dependent economy, the noncompetitive nature of Russian politics, and a trend toward nationalism and isolationism. In terms of foreign policy, Russia's leaders have failed to close the book on the lost Soviet empire. It is as if they exited the twentieth century through two doors at the same time: one leading to the globalized market of the twenty-first century and the other opening onto the Great Game of the nineteenth century.

As the current global economic crisis has demonstrated, the model that Russia's contemporary leaders have chosen--growth without development, capitalism without democracy, and great-power policies without international appeal--cannot hold forever. Not only will Russia fail to achieve its principal foreign policy objectives, it will fall further behind in a world increasingly defined by instant communication and open borders, leading to dangers not merely to its status but also to its existence. Russia's foreign policy needs more than a reset: it requires a new strategy and new policy instruments and mechanisms to implement it.

The hibernation ends

WHEN RUSSIA abandoned its aspirations to join the West, it set about working on what could be called Project CIS. This effort attempted to turn the Commonwealth of Independent States--a loose association of ex-Soviet republics minus the three Baltic countries--into a Russian power center. Russia aimed not to restore the Soviet Union but to ensure the political loyalty of these new states to Moscow, a privileged position in these states for Russian business interests, and the predominant influence of Russian culture. After the 2008 war in Georgia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called the region "a zone of privileged interests" for the Russian Federation.

Russia's victory in last year's war seemed to strengthen its claim that it wields such power. Moscow defended South Ossetia from the advances of the Georgian military and sent troops to allow the breakaway republic of Abkhazia to evict Georgian forces from the strategic Kodori Gorge. In a departure from its long-standing adherence to the post-Soviet borders, Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two enclaves that seceded from Georgia in the early 1990s.

In contrast, the war made the United States appear irrelevant. First, the Bush administration failed to restrain Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili from taking reckless action against South Ossetia, provoking Russia's darkest suspicions about Washington's motives. It then failed to come to Tbilisi's rescue once the war began, raising questions among U.S. allies along Russia's borders about the United States' credibility as a guarantor of security. Europe's reaction seemed equally disjointed. In a largely symbolic move, NATO cut off all formal contact with Russia because of Moscow's disproportionate use of force, while also putting accession plans for Georgia and Ukraine on the back burner, essentially fulfilling a longtime Russian wish. There was brief discussion of Western countries' sanctioning Russia, but such measures were never under serious consideration.

A year later, the picture looks less rosy for Russia. No other country in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the mutual-security pact of six CIS states, has recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia has tried to cast this in a positive light: Prime Minister Putin says that such de jure recognition is unnecessary and that what really matters is Russia's protection and support for the two regions; for his part, Medvedev reports that several foreign leaders have privately said that they would recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia if not for the diplomatic sensitivity or their own ethnic disputes. Although both Putin and Medvedev may be right, it is clear that not a single Russian ally wants--or can afford--to be seen as Moscow's satellite.

Other indicators suggest that Russia's plans for a regional political system centered on Moscow are not shaping up. In 2005, there was glee in Moscow when Uzbek President Islam Karimov closed the U.S. military bases in his country and rejoined the CSTO and later the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community. That same year, Karimov brutally suppressed a revolt in the city of Andijon, making him a pariah in the West and something of a prodigal son in Moscow. The mood has changed since then, however. Uzbekistan is unhappy with the terms of its economic cooperation with Russia, angry about Russia's plan to establish a second military base in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, and warming to the presence of the U.S. military.

Even smaller countries in Central Asia are feeling similarly emboldened to contradict Moscow's preferences. For years, Russia had publicly expressed its desire to see a U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan closed, and in early 2009, Kyrgyzstan obliged: it was seeking a large economic assistance package from Russia and hoped to please Moscow by expelling the U.S. military. But some months later, the seemingly disorganized and cash-strapped Kyrgyz government managed a double act: it allowed the United States to stay and raised the rent on the use of the base while also securing an aid package from Russia worth about \$2 billion. Moscow was surprised by Bishkek's volte-face and had to be content with a promise that it would get its own base in Kyrgyzstan.

After the war in Georgia, Russia was keen to demonstrate that drawing new borders around Abkhazia and South Ossetia was a special case and that it was serious about its responsibility as a peacekeeper in the contested enclaves of Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. Medvedev held a series of joint meetings with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and he conferred with the president of Moldova. Yet there has been no breakthrough in any of these conflicts, and it has become clear that Moscow is unable to single-handedly broker any peace settlement.

Moscow's dreams

Before the global economic crisis struck in the fall of 2008, the Kremlin was confident that Russia was on the rise as an economic and geopolitical powerhouse. In June 2008, Medvedev hailed the Russian ruble as the future reserve currency of Eurasia. Since then, Russia's foreign

exchange reserves have shrunk, and the ruble has lost much of its value and potential appeal as an international currency. Last January, when Russia offered Belarus a loan of \$500 million in rubles instead of dollars, as had been agreed, the Belarusians felt shortchanged and insulted.

The crisis has hit Russia harder than any other major country. The Russian economy has only grown more dependent on oil and gas since its financial crisis in 1998. As global commodity prices dropped, so did Russia's GDP, which fell by more than ten percent between mid-2008 and mid-2009. Other CIS countries have been affected even more severely: in Ukraine, GDP has fallen by nearly 20 percent. Conscious of this, Moscow is attempting to use the crisis as an opportunity, offering cash to its neighbors in the hope that economic assistance will buy a measure of political influence. But Kyrgyzstan played this game to its benefit. Ukraine never claimed the 15 billion that Russia offered it to help with its energy needs, instead choosing to bypass Russia altogether and secure a much smaller sum from the EU to modernize its gas transportation network. As for Belarus, Minsk collected most of an earlier \$2 billion package offered by Moscow, but then the two countries quickly got embroiled in a dispute over issues ranging from the two countries' trade in dairy products to conditions for the privatization of industry in Belarus.

At the same time, Moscow suspended its 16-year quest to join the World Trade Organization. Russia certainly was frustrated with the protracted negotiations, but more than anything, Moscow's decision showed its ambition and desire to reorder its foreign policy priorities. It started championing the creation of a customs union comprising Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, which would build on the Union State of Russia and Belarus, a vaguely defined political entity linking the two countries that has existed since the 1990s. But Moscow's spat with Minsk exposed this union state as a sham and suggested that any expansion of the model is unrealistic. It is ironic that just as Moscow abandoned the WTO, its hopes for an alternative were falling apart.

Since 2003--when the United States invaded Iraq, the Russian government moved to seize the Yukos oil company, and oil prices began a five-year rise--Moscow has championed its new position as an energy power. It compares its oil and gas resources today to the nuclear arsenal that gave the Soviet Union superpower status during the Cold War. But as the state oil giant Gazprom's clumsy gas cutoffs to Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 made clear, the use of energy as a weapon has proved to be a disaster. Over the past several years, Gazprom has been scrambling to buy the gas produced by other CIS countries and to maintain control over its export routes. In 2003, the company acquired the rights to the entire gas production of Turkmenistan for the next 25 years; and in 2007, the Russian government agreed with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to build a new pipeline from the Caspian Sea.

By 2009, however, many of Moscow's plans for energy dominance had unraveled. Gazprom's relations with Turkmenistan have soured: in the spring of 2009, the newly price-conscious Russian government refused to buy any gas from Turkmenistan, leading the Turkmen government to look west for new customers. At the same time, China neared the completion of a gas pipeline running from Turkmenistan eastward; it will be the Caspian region's first pipeline that does not traverse Russian territory.

Thus, the fear that Russia might create a gas caliphate in Central Asia has been revealed to be unfounded. In its gas crises with Ukraine, Russia did the wrong thing (shutting off supplies to Ukraine and thereby to Europe) for the right reason (claiming a fair price for its product). As a result, its reputation as a reliable gas exporter was left in tatters, and Europe finally decided it needed to find alternative energy sources. As a result, the Nabucco pipeline, which is planned to terminate in Austria, started to look more realistic. Europe has imagined the pipeline as an

alternative supply route for natural gas, whereas Russia has long derided the proposal as unfeasible. In the hopes of maintaining its regional energy hegemony, Russia has signed a deal with Turkey to build the Blue Stream 2 pipeline, which could bring Russian gas as far as Israel. Russia is also pursuing the South Stream pipeline, which would run under the Black Sea. The upshot is that Europe, even after it gains some diversity in its gas supplies, will remain heavily dependent on Russia and that Russia will have to tolerate multiple pipelines from the Caspian going in several directions.

Finally, last year's demonstration of Russian military power in Georgia has done nothing to forestall the deterioration of the security situation in Russia's own North Caucasus region. The republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia are flashpoints, and Chechnya, newly pacified after years of war, is again experiencing a spate of terrorist attacks. Moscow's strategy of buying off corrupt local elites in the region has not purchased stability. Islamist radicals thrive on official corruption, interclan warfare, and the heavy-handedness of the police and security services. As a result, Russia's grip on the North Caucasus is loosening, with the danger that extremists could turn the mountainous region into a base of operations similar to Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.

South of the mountains, the challenges are different. Abkhazia and South Ossetia may be the only places in the former Soviet space that firmly fall into Moscow's sphere of influence. But each poses a problem. Regarding Abkhazia, Putin has said that Russian recognition was enough. But in the long term, Abkhazia wants to become a genuinely independent state and not a protectorate on Russia's Black Sea coast. South Ossetia, meanwhile, cannot become a viable state, despite Russian hopes, but its accession to neighboring North Ossetia, in Russia, would be seen by Russia's neighbors as evidence of Moscow's territorial aggrandizement.

Russia may have many interests and some sway in its neighborhood, but it does not have--and is unlikely to have--anything it can call a zone of influence. And it is hampered by its territorial thinking, its view that the world is set up as a handful of imperial poles battling for influence in smaller countries, which ignores the real nature of contemporary global politics.

Neighborly relations

AT THE same time that Russia aspires to primacy in the former Soviet space, it craves equality with the United States and the EU in the Euro-Atlantic area. In a speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin made clear that Russia no longer accepted the rules of the game set up after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Russia was weak. Putin's revisionism was backed up by Russia's suspension of its responsibilities under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which limit the Russian military presence in Georgia and Moldova. Last year, as tensions over Georgia were rising, Moscow resumed air patrols off the coasts of Europe and North America and sent bombers and navy ships on missions to Venezuela. The message was clear: ignoring Russian security interests could be hazardous.

Although the Kremlin did succeed in proving its strategic independence from Europe and the United States, there can be no talk of Russia's overall equality with either of the two. This leaves Moscow with a paradox: it is unwilling to become a junior partner to Brussels and Washington, but they will not accept it as an equal. Likewise, as Medvedev has pointed out, Russia is excluded from any meaningful security structure in Europe, but the notion of a new treaty that would formally block further NATO enlargement has been rejected. It is wholly unrealistic to think that Europe's security will be jointly managed by a troika of United States and NATO, the EU, and Russia and the CSTO. Similarly, the idea of a grand bargain--in which Washington would allow Moscow to dominate the former Soviet states on its borders in exchange for its support for U.S. and Western policies in the Middle East and elsewhere--is a

chimera. Unlike during the Great Game of the nineteenth century, the political futures of countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine will be decided not by strategists in Moscow or Washington but by people on the ground.

In the twenty-first century, the power of attraction trumps that of coercion. But this runs contrary to the view of many inside the Russian leadership that the world is composed of sovereign empires competing over zones of influence. Russia, a nuclear superpower, is fighting a losing battle for influence in Ukraine, Moldova (where the post-Soviet generation looks to the EU), and even Belarus (where younger urbanites consider themselves European). Georgia is overwhelmingly pro-Western, largely because Moscow's policies over the last two decades have made the population vehemently anti-Russian. Azerbaijan has managed to do business with Western oil companies while staying on friendly terms with Moscow and avoiding being dominated by it. Armenia notionally depends on Russian security guarantees, but as a result of the continued confrontation between Georgia and Russia, it is more physically isolated. Recently, Armenia started a dialogue with Turkey that could lift the 16-year-old economic blockade imposed by Ankara at the height of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

This suggests that a binary Europe--made up of the NATO/EU community in the west and the center and a Russian-led bloc in the east--is less imaginable now than at any moment since the end of the Cold War. Even if the CSTO becomes more competent and Moscow's proposed customs union comes into being, these bodies' effectiveness will be limited by Moscow's desire to turn them into its own policy instruments--and this will clash with the interests of even Russia's closest partners, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The Kremlin leadership consciously ignores the relative modesty of Russia's economic potential, its dependency on raw materials, and its technological backwardness. Russia has slightly over 140 million people, produces around two percent of global GDP, has a level of economic productivity about one-fourth that of the United States, and is dependent on fluctuations in the price of oil. Such a country may wield a measure of power and influence with near neighbors and distant partners, but it will need to make a monumental effort to upgrade its economic clout, technological prowess, and societal appeal before it can claim the status of a world-class power.

In the tsarist and Soviet pasts, Russia compensated for its weakness and backwardness with superior manpower, political centralism, and industry heavily focused on military production. Today, it is unable to do the same. The country is in the midst of a demographic crisis that threatens to cut its population by more than 15 percent by the middle of this century. Its raw military power is also declining. The Russian defense industry is no longer capable of producing a full range of conventional weapons systems, and it has been forced to buy arms from abroad, such as drones from Israel and ships from France. The continuing failure of the Bulava ballistic missile suggests that even Russia's nuclear weapons sector is plagued with deficiencies.

Three hundred years ago, the newly reformed Russian army defeated Swedish forces at the Battle of Poltava, heralding Russia's emergence as a European power. The long era of Russian military dominance in Europe that followed has now come to an end. Russia is the EU'S largest and most important neighbor, but emphasizing power relationships is not to Russia's advantage. The currency of world politics has changed, and Russia will have to work hard to acquire it. Unfortunately, Russia's leadership is looking not so much to build a new power base at home but more to find ways to borrow power from others.

Another BRIC in the wall

This summer, the Russian city of Yekaterinburg hosted three international summits at nearly the same time: of the CSTO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRIC, a group whose name comes from a 2003 Goldman Sachs report that lumped together the world's four largest emerging markets, Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The BRIC summit was an unprecedented gathering, marking the first formal meeting of the leaders of the four countries.

Moscow has been keen to promote closer links among the leading non-Western powers, in order to expedite the withering away of U.S. global hegemony and replace it with a multipolar world order. In his 2007 speech in Munich, Putin sounded not only like the leader of Russia but also like the spokesperson for the non-West. He was the only major world figure willing--and who thought he could afford--to openly challenge U.S. power.

But the BRIC summit provided little more than a photo opportunity. The effects of the economic crisis made many analysts talk about BIC--rather than BRIC--because Russia's resource-based economy has been much harder hit than the economies of Brazil, India, or China. Russia's approach to foreign policy bears little resemblance to that of the other BRIC countries. Brazil, India, and China are all WTO members and have been active in the Doha Round of international trade negotiations, whereas Russia has essentially given up on its accession process to the WTO. China is cautious, and India is insular, but Russia is assertive and openly revisionist. Russia's plans to use BRIC to propel the country into a higher international orbit are unlikely to do the trick. The Chinese and the Indians often act alone and now tend to look down on the Russians. Brazil, meanwhile, is just getting on its feet.

Although Russian-Chinese collaboration is growing--as within the SCO--China is emerging as the state driving the bilateral agenda. For the first time in 300 years, China is more powerful and dynamic than Russia--and it can back up its economic and security interests with hefty infusions of cash. In recent months, Beijing has offered a \$10 billion loan to countries in Central Asia; provided a currency swap to Belarus, which was haggling with Russia over the terms of its dollar credit; and found a billion dollars of aid for faraway Moldova, double Moscow's promised sum. It is worth remembering that China refused to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008, setting an example for the SCO's Central Asian members, which then followed its lead, not Russia's.

Moscow's attitude adjustment

The conclusion is not that Russia has no useful role to play in its own neighborhood, in the Euro-Atlantic area, or on the global stage. Rather, it is that Russia's foreign policy priorities and objectives must change. Seeking political status and economic rents will end in failure and, in the process, waste precious resources and breed more disappointment and resentment among Russian elites and the Russian public. Russia must develop a new foreign policy commensurate with its needs, size, and capacity--one that is shaped by the realities of the twenty-first century's globalized environment. In short, Russia needs to focus on overcoming its economic, social, and political backwardness--and use foreign policy as a resource to meet this supreme national interest.

Moscow's first priority should be strengthening Russia's own economic, intellectual, and social potential. Attempts to restore a "soft" equivalent of an empire will not add to Russia, only take away from it. This does not mean that Russia should ignore its immediate neighbors (which would be impossible) or shy away from close cooperation with them (which would be foolish). Russia's looming demographic crisis requires that it learn to win over people rather than collect their lands and seek to integrate them as full citizens.

Soft power should be central to Russia's foreign policy. Russia possesses precious and virtually unused elements of this kind of power across the post-Soviet world: the Russian language is

used from Riga to Almaty, and Russian culture, from Pushkin to pop music, is still in big demand. If Russia rebuilt its infrastructure, its neighbors would be increasingly attracted to opportunities for higher education--especially in science--and research and development in the country. And if Russia manages to enact fundamental changes in how its political system and economy are run, the benefits could be dramatic: Russian businesspeople would no longer be perceived as agents of the Kremlin and would be more welcome abroad, a Russian-language television channel could become a sort of al Jazeera for Russophones, and the Russian Orthodox Church, if it were seen as a transnational institution and not an extension of the state, could gain authority outside Russia. But such an outcome would require transcending the view that Russia is defined by its leader--whether Yeltsin, Putin, or Medvedev--and envisaging instead a Russia of multiple actors in which the nation, and not the authority, is sovereign.

In such an approach, Russia's policy toward Ukraine could become a useful standard. Rather than pressuring its neighbor not to defect to the West, Russia must reach out to the Ukrainian people directly, to attract new business opportunities, new workers, and new students. The Caucasus are another important test: solving the conundrum of Russia's relationship with Georgia and the final status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a sine qua non of Russia's goal of assuming the role of a benevolent regional leader. Meanwhile, settling the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria will require Russia to work alongside the EU, the United States, Turkey, and Ukraine, not to mention the parties to the conflicts themselves.

Russia needs hard power, too, but the kind that addresses the challenges of the present, not the past. It needs a well-trained and well-equipped mobile army to deal with crises along its vast border, as well as a modern air force and a modern navy. In many cases, Russia will not be acting alone. It will need to master the mechanisms of military and security cooperation in Eurasia with its allies in the CSTO, its NATO partners, and its Asian neighbors, such as China, India, and Japan.

Making Russia modern

Rather than focusing on where it stands in the international pecking order, Russia now must overcome the deficiencies of its institutions compared to those of the West. Accordingly, Russia needs to identify modernization--not only technological or economic but sociopolitical as well--as its top priority. Consistent with this view, the principal task of Russian foreign policy--along with protecting national security--must be to tap external resources for domestic transformation, to modernize both Russia's people and its institutions.

Such a vision prioritizes relations with developed countries that can provide technology, expertise, and investment. Luckily, the EU, Japan, and the United States are Russia's neighbors, a fact that Russia can use to further development in those areas near these shared borders, from the Kola Peninsula to Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands. Due to its proximity and Russia's European roots, the EU is Russia's most important partner for modernization. A 2005 EU-Russian agreement defined four areas for cooperation--economics, justice and internal security, cultural and human contacts, and external relations--precisely the areas in which closer ties with the EU would contribute to Russia's transformation.

Russia's goal should be not to join the EU but to create a common European economic space with it. When Russia finally joins the WTO, a free-trade area between the EU and Russia--with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and others joining--will become possible. Energy could form the underlying basis for this common space, but for that to happen, energy trade between the EU and Russia must be less contentious. Visa-free travel would also be a central human element of this new arrangement. The statement by the European Commission's former president,

Romano Prodi, that the EU and Russia "share everything but the institutions" remains sound and valid.

As Europe's own experience shows, such a common economic space can only exist in an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Therefore, Russia must seek to create a Euro-Atlantic security order that would finally demilitarize relations from Vancouver to Vladivostok. To this end, Russia must be convinced to give up its lingering suspicion of U.S. power and intentions. Similarly, countries in central and eastern Europe must be induced to let go of their fear of Russia. On the U.S. side, this means moving away from the institutionalized hostility enshrined in the nuclear deterrence strategy of mutually assured destruction, by pursuing a policy centered on collaboration on strategic defenses rather than on regulating strategic arsenals.

Russia, meanwhile, should stop being obsessed with NATO and instead pursue joint projects with the alliance that could help Russia modernize its own defenses. (In order both to keep its strategic independence and to maintain relations with China on an even keel, it should not seek to join NATO.) Also, Russia's reconciliation with its central and eastern European neighbors is indispensable: for Moscow, Europe no longer starts at the Elbe but at the Narva and the Neman. Within Europe, multilateralism has taken over from multipolarity, and it is time for Moscow to start paying attention.

China is one of Russia's leading trading partners and is a fast-growing market that could also become a major source of capital investment for Russia. In addition, Beijing is an indispensable partner in assuring security and stability in Russia's "near abroad," from Central and Northeast Asia to the greater Middle East. Thus, Moscow has no alternative but to seek friendly and cooperative relations with Beijing. A key challenge for Russia's foreign policy will be to learn to live alongside a China that is strong, dynamic, assertive, and increasingly advanced.

Russia's territory extends all the way to the Pacific, making it more of a Euro-Pacific power than a Eurasian one. The United States is its neighbor to the east, right across the Bering Strait. In fact, there are far fewer points of contention between Moscow and Washington in the Pacific than there are in the Atlantic or the Caspian Sea. Russia's twenty-first-century frontier lies to the east, where it has both a need and a chance to catch up with its immediate Pacific neighbors: China, Japan, and South Korea. The global power shift toward the Pacific necessitates a new focus in Russia's foreign policy. If Peter the Great were alive today, he would decamp from Moscow again--only this time to the Sea of Japan, not the Baltic.

As such, Russia would do well to think of Vladivostok as its twenty-first-century capital. It is a seaport, breathing openness. Its location within easy reach of East Asia's most important cities--Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul, Shanghai, and Tokyo--puts Russia in immediate contact with the world's most dynamic peoples. In addition, Vladivostok's location on Russia's border would serve as an ultimate guarantee of peace and territorial integrity.

A new emphasis on the Pacific Rim would not only develop the Russian Far East but also the many time zones that lie between Vladivostok and St. Petersburg. Such a focus would help develop all of Siberia. It would also push Russia to pursue economic and geostrategic opportunities in the Arctic Ocean, which is emerging as a resource-rich and potentially productive area. The Arctic--which brings together Europe, North America, and Russia--is a region whose very harshness requires cooperation.

Needs, not nostalgia

Russia would better serve its interests by strengthening its ties to the world's most relevant and influential actors, rather than by focusing on power balances and exclusive zones. And

instead of favoring diplomacy at the United Nations merely because it wields a veto in the Security Council, Russia needs to engage in producing global public goods. Thus, it should focus on conflict resolution closer to home, in places such as the Caucasus and Moldova; in Asia and the Middle East, it should concentrate on reducing religious extremism and building political stability. With an indigenous Muslim population that has grown by 40 percent since 1989, Russia has a role to play in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. Finally, Russia can make significant contributions to the world's environmental well-being--devising a new international energy charter together with the EU, reducing its own vastly inefficient use of energy, and protecting the clean water and forest resources of Siberia.

Adopting a new role after 500 years as an empire, 70 years as an ideological warrior, and over 40 years during the Cold War as a military superpower will be difficult. Russia's post-Soviet comeback disproved forecasts that Russia was going to descend into irrelevance. Russia will certainly survive the present economic crisis. But it does have a long way to go before it becomes a modern state capable of pursuing a foreign policy that serves its needs, not its nostalgia. Russia will not formally join the West as its former satellites have done and as its erstwhile borderlands may do. But as it becomes more modern as a result of its domestic transformation--and adapts its foreign policy accordingly--it will emerge as a serious, desirable, and indispensable partner, as well as a significant global actor.

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