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New Concept of Russian Foreign Policy and the "turn to the East": expectations and realities

Introduction

On March 31, 2023, a new concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation was published. An important denominator worth noting is that the new concept was developed after the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict, which began on February 24, 2022. Additionally, due to the above conflict, sanctions were imposed on Russia. On March 17, 2023 (just two and a half weeks before adopting the new concept), the International Court of Justice in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin on charges of deportation of Ukrainian children. In addition, the order was issued for the arrest of the Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova.

In Russia, they considered that the developments of events in the last year require a reassessment of the perception of the international system and policy and, therefore, the adoption of a new foreign policy concept. An essential aspect of this concept is paying more in-depth attention to actors in international relations alternative to the West. It is no coincidence that this trend was announced as a “turn to the East.”

Previous and new conceptions: similarities and differences

It is worth noting that since independence, six foreign policy conceptions have been adopted (the first of President Boris Yeltsin, April 23, 1993) and have the peculiarity of defining the basic strategic directions of foreign policy. In addition, if the first four concepts were adopted as the working map of each of the presidents (Yeltsin (1993), Putin (2000), Medvedev (2008), Putin (2013)), then the last two (2016 (adopted after the annexation of Krvma), 2023 (after the conflict in Ukraine) are different: they mark Russia's response to trends in the international arena, including the last concept, the last three concentrate on the ideas of forming a multipolar world.

The sixth concept, prepared under conditions of sanctions pressure on Russia from the West (or the collective West, as is now commonly used in Russia) and a "turn to the East" (which also predetermines the new concept), provides a different approach.

In the new concept, the basis for forming relations between the actors of international relations is the coordinating role of the UN, which, according to the concept, began to change. Consequently, the loss of the central position of the UN, based on the principle of equality of sovereign states, leads to a reality where the collective West dictates the rules. Russia advocates updating the UN, considering non-Western states' interests. It will also serve two postulates, preventing the emergence of neo-colonialist tendencies and forming a multipolar international system, which, according to Russia, will be a more stable structure for strengthening relations. The new concept of Russia identifies new areas of Russia's national interests, such as the World Ocean, outer space, and airspace. Interests are formed within a framework designated as "three-dimensional geopolitics," which goes beyond the interests of traditional geopolitics. Also, concepts such as the "Islamic world" and "Eurasian continent," not previously found in such documents, are used for the first time. As a result, using newly coined terms, Russia declares the importance of developing relations with these and other regions outside the West's borders.

It is also worth mentioning one more aspect, which in principle existed in practice and was voiced more than once in official speeches: "protection of Russian citizens and organizations from foreign illegal attacks, providing support to compatriots living abroad." Thus, Russia has outlined the protection of the rights of Russian citizens in its foreign policy concept. It is worth noting here that, as Russia's actions show, primarily in Georgia and Ukraine, the protection of Russian citizens or "compatriots," as commonly stated in this example, is not limited to just providing legal assistance. Russia can also use force in areas where Russian citizens live outside the territory of Russia. It was not by chance that I used the term "compatriot" since forceful intervention may also occur if, in Russia's opinion, it is necessary to protect persons who have common ethnic roots with the titular nations of Russia (not only Russians) but do not have Russian citizenship.

In the new concept, also in the section on regional priorities, all Western countries were removed, including Japan and Korea (at the same time, the DPRK is also not mentioned now, apparently in connection with South Korea). The new concept includes Belarus, Abkhazia, South Ossetia (two partially recognized states under the patronage of Russia, considered part of Georgia), China, India, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt,

Israel, Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, USA. Even if we do not delve into the context in which the states mentioned above are designated, the list of countries is very expressive and says a lot. First, this results from sanctions imposed on Russia and an attempt to escape the current situation and form a possible new reality. As can be seen, Russia is trying to strengthen relations with countries without disagreements regarding the foreign policy agenda.

"Turn to the East" Concept, what does real life show?

It is worth noting that new trends in foreign policy, which have already been called the "turn to the East", were formed even before the adoption of the concept and, in principle, are not something new or unique in Russian foreign policy. The West and the East have traditionally played a significant role in Russian foreign policy. However, due to the events of recent years, the West has fallen out of this format, and relations with the Afro-Asian world have come to the fore.

If we take the East Asian region as a basis, we see that this development is also connected with Russia's attempts to develop its Far Eastern region. It is no secret that the region has enormous natural resources but has a small population. Russia is also trying to attract regional countries for investment, which could act as an impetus for the economic development of Eastern Russia. The energy sector plays a vital denominator; back in 2009, the first East Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline was launched. In 2019, the oil pipeline reached its maximum design capacity of 80 million tons. In this sense, relations with China play a key role, with which relations are developing in many areas. Several transport energy projects have also been implemented with it. For example, the Power of Siberia gas pipeline was built to supply gas from Yakutia to the Primorsky Territory and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The export capacity of the gas pipeline is 38 billion cubic meters of gas per year. Gas through this gas pipeline has already begun to flow to China. The gas pipelines Power of Siberia-2 and Power of Siberia-3 are being designed and planned. Trade turnover between the two countries is also growing. In the first half of 2023, trade turnover increased by 40.6% and amounted to 114.54 billion US dollars. Both countries plan to continue there and increase trade turnover to \$200 billion by 2024.

There is also an increase in trade turnover with another country in the region, with a population of more than a billion people - India. Although the figures are more modest than with China, for the five months of 2023, they amounted to 27.1 billion US dollars, a new record that allowed

Russia to be in India's top three trading partners for the first time.

However, some experts believe that the growth in trade turnover does not favor Russia. In short, Russia is becoming a raw material appendage to these countries, providing oil, petroleum products, and gas at reduced prices. At the same time, China's trade turnover with Western countries over the same period amounted to more than \$1 trillion. China traded with the US alone for US\$327.264 billion. Russia still needs to be China's leading trading partner. Other types of dependence on China also emerged. By the way, the share of Chinese smartphones in the Russian market exceeded 70%, and this is also due to sanctions.

As for India, Russia agreed with this country to trade in Indian rupees, but the incomplete convertibility of the Indian currency has led to the fact that there is nowhere to use it, and money, the equivalent of billions of dollars, accumulates in banks.

At the same time, China and India, in trade transactions with Russia, follow their interests and do not act out of altruistic motives regarding the situation in which Russia finds itself. As soon as Russia slightly reduced the discounts on its oil, these countries stopped purchasing it.

In the political field, China and India also began to play a more significant role in relations with Russia. In short, on July 4, 2023, the next Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization opened in New Delhi, which was held virtually, the main reason for which was the decision of the International Criminal Court about Putin. The SCO is the brainchild of Russia and China, initially created in 2001 to prevent Western penetration into the Central Asian region.

Let's touch on relations with such large economies as Japan and South Korea. Since these countries are in the Western bloc, they adjust their relations with Russia by the general approach of Western countries.

In this case, the US position is critical. The foreign policy of Japan and South Korea towards the countries of the former Soviet Union is traditionally formed through the prism of the perception of this superpower. Therefore, both countries supported the sanctions imposed by the West against Russia. These sanctions negatively affected the economies of Japan and South Korea. Despite this, both countries adhere to the decisions made by the West.

At the same time, South Korea's relations with Russia became more complicated because this country began to expand ties with North Korea despite sanctions against South Korea's

northern neighbor. Russia and North Korea are forming cooperation in various fields, including military, which South Korea considers a threat to its security. South Korea has already expressed its concern to Russia. Although there is no direct evidence of a connection to this development, South Korea has decided to increase aid to Ukraine in 2024 significantly. In 2024, assistance will rise to 520 billion won (US\$394 million). For comparison, in 2023, assistance will amount to \$150 million. This amount was also increased after Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol visited Ukraine in mid-July 2023. The visit can also be characterized as South Korea's reaction to the rapprochement between Russia and North Korea.

Cooperation within International organizations: is it effective?

The SCO summit was of great importance for Russia, which is trying to present this organization as one of the alternatives to the West. The SCO countries represent almost half the world's population, about 3.4 billion people, and occupy more than 20% of the planet's territory, approximately 34 million square km. These countries accounted for a quarter of global GDP in 2022 (more than \$23 trillion). Russia, India, Pakistan, and China have nuclear weapons. Despite this, expectations still needed to be met. At the Summit, the countries acted as carefully as possible, based purely on their interests. 14 documents were signed. However, none represented a revolutionary breakthrough in the organization's activities. At the Summit, Iran also became the ninth member of the organization. At the same time, there were expectations of more significant replenishment. Even though in previous years there were statements that Arab countries wanted to join the SCO, at this Summit, countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, the Maldives, Myanmar, and the United Arab Emirates decided for the future to be content with only formalizing a dialogue partnership agreement.

The same perception regarding another BRICS organization (in Russia, some wits, rearranging the letters, call it "БРИОКИ", which in Russian means trousers. On August 22-24, 2023, the BRICS Summit was held in South Africa. It is worth noting that by invitation to the Summit, 40 African states participated, as the theme of the meeting was "BRICS and Africa: a partnership for shared accelerated growth, sustainable development, and inclusive multilateralism." One of the goals of the Summit was to build a dialogue with the states of the Global South.

It is worth noting that 26% of the planet's GDP comes from these five countries. President Putin

participated in the meeting online. The organization is abstract and amorphous, and its real goals must be clarified. At one time, it was considered a possible alternative pole to the West to build a multipolar world. However, its members do not observe any specific solidarity, and in particular, there is no desire to turn into a pole under the leadership of Russia. In addition, China and India are present in this organization, and their aspirations were reported early. By the way, it was China that in 2022 proposed to expand the organization in order to force an alternative economic pole to the West. In a significant development, six more (Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates) were admitted to the five existing members (Brazil, Russia, South Africa, China, and India). Seventeen more countries applied for membership. In the future, some of them will be accepted. It is very doubtful that even new members of the organization feel comfortable with such a rapprochement with each other. The motivation for membership in this organization maybe because it does not require special responsibilities. Brazil was skeptical about the organization's expansion, believing it would lose authority, so India was against it.

Among the decisions that meet the modern realities of Russian foreign policy, members of the organization will consider the possibility of conducting trade operations without using the American dollar. In addition, BRICS called for reforms at the UN. As is known, in 2004, Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan (two of these countries are members of the BRICS) formed the Group of Four (G4) and agreed to seek permanent membership in the UN Security Council jointly. In addition, BRICS members insist that quotas in this organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), be revised. The organization called for completing the 16th general review of IMF quotas by mid-December 2023.

It is also a positive aspect that Brazil gave up its turn to host the Summit to Russia, which means that in 2024, it will be held in Russia (Kazan), and at least ten world leaders will participate.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Eastern direction in Russian foreign policy is not a new reality but existed earlier. Along with this, due to the Ukrainian crisis and the deterioration of relations with the West, it acquired new significance. Russia wants to play a more active role whenever possible. In general, Russia's goal from an economic point of view is to increase trade turnover, and its political goal is to become more involved in the affairs of the region.

It is too early to say how effectively it will be possible to implement the new Concept of Russian foreign policy and achieve the necessary results. However, in light of Western sanctions against Russia, touching upon the statistical data will be helpful. In short, in the first half of 2023, the economy coped with the recession and even grew by 1.5%.

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