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THE UNITED NATIONS

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Introduction

Russia succeeded to the Soviet Union's seat, including its permanent membership, on the UN Security Council after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Eleven of the twelve members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) signed a declaration on December 21, 1991, agreeing that "Member states of the Commonwealth support Russia in taking over the USSR membership in the UN, including permanent membership in the Security Council." One day before the resignation of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Ambassador Y. Vorontsov forwarded to the UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar a letter from the Russian President Boris Yeltsin stating that:

[t]he membership of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the United Nations, including the Security Council and all other organs and organizations of the United Nations system, is being continued by the Russian Federation (RSFSR) with the support of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In this connection, I request that the name "Russian Federation" should be used in the United Nations in place of the name "the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." The Russian Federation maintains full responsibility for all the rights and obligations of the USSR under the Charter of the United Nations, including the financial obligations. I request that you consider this letter as confirmation of the credentials to represent the Russian Federation in United Nations organs for all the persons currently holding the credentials of representatives of the USSR to the United Nations.

(Yeltsin, 1991)

The Secretary-General circulated the request among the UN membership. Since there were no major objections, the Russian Federation took the USSR's place. On January 31, 1992 President Yeltsin personally took Russia's seat at the Security Council meeting.

Russia's role and policies in the UN in the post-Cold War era is a rather vexed issue in the present-day scholarship. One group of researchers (Petro and Rubinstein, 1997: 283; Zaemsky, 2010; Belenkova, 2011; Dzhantaev, 2013; Kalyadin, 2016; Pacer, 2016: 119–120) believes that Russia is serious about the role of the UN in world politics, considers it the most significant

international organization which is helpful in making the world a better and safer place, as well as views the UN as an important priority of Moscow's foreign policy.

On the other hand, there are authors (Lo, 2002: 87–90, 93–94; Cameron, 2008: 1; Oldberg, 2010: 32; Gowan, 2015; Shevchenko, 2015; Snetkov and Lanteigne, 2015) who think that the Kremlin's UN-first principle was not some abstract ideal to which Russia had a particular emotional or even intellectual attachment, but an instrument to be used selectively to promote specific policy aims. In the 1990s, this approach was a logical response to Russia's diminishing importance in the post-Cold War world and, at the same time, an effective tool to restrain U.S. power in the unipolar world. According to this school, currently, Moscow's UN-primacy line aims to ascertain Russia's great power status, promote its global ambitions, and prevent any anti-Russian moves of its political opponents.

This chapter aims at examining the following research questions:

- How can Russia's organizational behavior in the UN be explained? Is Russia guided primarily by national interests as it sees them or by wider global and regional concerns, or both?
- What role has the UN played in Russia's overall foreign policy relative to other regional and global organizations?
- What has been the record of Russia's UN membership since the Cold War end? How has Russia's role evolved? What have been some of the main issues, agreements, and disagreements?
- Has this been a record of success, failure, or a mixed bag? Has Russia accepted the rules as they are or tried to change or violate them?
- What future questions and themes are likely to arise in Russia's relations with the UN, including the much discussed reform of this organization?

The UN in the system of Russia's foreign policy priorities

For Moscow, the UN remains the key institution for regulating international relations, which can be traced in all Russian foreign policy documents and in multilateral and bilateral treaties and declarations. From Russia's point of view, the UN remains a unique universal format for the interaction of the states of the world. This organization has considerable potential for keeping international peace and security and offers every state equal rights to uphold its national interests. The UN is the foundation of a democratic world order which Russia publicly advocates.

For example, the UN is mentioned many times in Russia's 2016 foreign policy concept. In particular, its primacy in international relations is stressed in the sections on Moscow's foreign policy priorities as the most important one (subchapters "Shaping a just and sustainable world order" and "International law supremacy in international relations"). The paper emphasizes: "The UN which proved its indispensability and international legitimacy shall remain a centerpiece of the 21st century's world policy regulation and coordination" (Putin, 2016).

According to the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov:

First of all, the United Nations' legitimacy is unique. It is the only mechanism of international cooperation that relies on a solid foundation of international law and covers all spheres of human endeavor without exception: military-political, security, conflict resolution, development of economic and humanitarian cooperation and one more important function – modernization of international law.

(Cited in Khaspekova et al., 2015)

First and foremost, the Kremlin views the UN as a backbone of the global security system. The UN Security Council (as well as some other UN specialized bodies) is a principal platform for conflict prevention, management, and resolution. With rare exception (such as some conflicts in the post-Soviet space), Moscow insists on UN involvement in preventive diplomacy, crisis management, peace-making, and post-conflict peace-building. This is explained by the UN's unique capabilities, including its unchallenged international legitimacy and authority as well as by its organizational and financial resources.

As part of its attempts to increase its role internationally, and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia presents itself as a guardian of international security. It demands that its opinion be sought, and its position respected, at times of crises. According to Minister Lavrov, the UN veto is an important instrument for avoiding the mistakes of the League of Nations, the precursor to the UN, which he suggests “collapsed because of [the] ignoring of the interests of the largest states” (Lavrov, 2012). In this respect, Russia views its UN veto as a special privilege that grants it a significant role internationally.

As far as the military aspects of international security are concerned, the Kremlin also values the UN role in developing arms control and the disarmament process, and maintaining/monitoring relevant regimes. Particularly, Russia favors international cooperation on strengthening the UN-born arms control and disarmament regimes, such as the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1971 Convention on Prohibition of the Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons, the 1993 Convention on Prohibition and Utilization of the Chemical Weapons, and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Moscow also tends to use its seat at the UN Security Council to counter U.S. attempts to dominate world politics. Since the early 1990s, Russia has tried to use the Council to contain U.S. ‘unipolarity’ and Washington’s alleged pretensions to the role of supreme arbiter who aimed to supplant the UN in this area. The great attraction of the UN for Russia was that it diffused power and authority among a greater number of international players – or at least gave the impression of doing so. To some extent, it compensated for the growing gap between the two former superpowers. It was therefore natural for Russia to insist on the UN Security Council’s continuing role in international dispute settlement, because this forum was one of the few where it could aspire to a rough equality with the United States as well as claim major power status by ‘right’ and precedent.

The Kremlin is also serious about the use of the UN as an international norms and rules producer and guarantor. According to the 2016 Russian foreign policy concept, the UN should retain its leading role in the development of international law by codification of the customary law, producing new norms, eliminating collisions, and proper interpretation of disputable norms and principles (Putin, 2016). The document insists on the need to protect international law (first and foremost, the UN Charter) from any revisions to the benefit or interests of certain states. For example, Moscow strongly objects to some Western countries’ attempts to interpret the ‘responsibility to protect’ concept as a right to intervene militarily in domestic affairs of ‘rogue’ states and/or oust ‘undemocratic’ regimes throughout the world.

Moscow believes that the UN is indispensable for solving some global problems of mutual concern for the whole of humankind. They can range from climate change and environment degradation to the world famine and demographic problems. On a number of occasions, President Putin has stressed the advantages of using the UN as the base for forging a global anti-terrorist coalition to solve this common problem. Despite the UN’s importance the Kremlin believes that this global institution cannot properly work without the help of and coordination with other international organizations – global (World Trade Organization, Organization of

Economic Cooperation and Development), regional (e.g. the OSCE, EU, Council of Europe, CIS, ASEAN, African Union, etc.) and subregional (e.g. the Arctic Council, Barents-Euro-Arctic Council, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc.). As former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov rightly notes:

For the United Nations to be more effective, we need supporting organizations. The UN will be unable to cope with contemporary security issues with its own forces. An interrelated network of regional institutions should “lend a shoulder” to the UN in the creation of a new security regime. However, these institutions should provide support to the UN without replacing it.

(Cited in Khaspekova et al., 2015)

In general, Russia sees no alternative to the UN, although Moscow recognizes the fact that this organization is indeed in need of reform.

Russia’s policies within the UN

Russia tries to be a responsible player in the UN. It is the 11th biggest contributor to the UN budget with its share under an approved scale being 2.438% (Khaspekova et al., 2015). Its total financial contribution in 2014, according to the Russian UN mission’s information, amounted to some \$325 million, including contributions not only to the regular budget, but to the budgets of peacekeeping operations as well as tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Being a UN Security Council permanent member, Russia tries to use its veto right in a responsible manner. It exercised its veto right 13 times in 1992–2015. To compare, in the same period, the United States used its veto 16 times, and China 8 times, of which 6 times jointly with Russia (Khaspekova et al., 2015). Russia has recently been using its veto right more frequently (four times in 2014–2015), because of the growing tensions with the West. The most conflictual issues related to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East (Iraq, Libya, and Syria), and Ukraine.

Moscow believes that the veto right has always been crucial in terms of safeguarding international peace and security. Russia considers recent British, French, Polish, and Ukrainian proposals on modifying this instrument, aimed at restricting the Council’s five permanent members’ (P5) veto right, to be both unrealistic and detrimental to the stability of the UN system.

Sustainable development

Since the late 1980s, the USSR/Russia has contributed to the UN debate on sustainable development (SD). This discussion dates back to the 1987 UN Brundtland report, which defines SD as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987).

Similar to their foreign counterparts, the Russian experts differ by their interpretation of the SD concept. One school, the ‘economists’, following the Brundtland report’s approach believes that SD is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations. For this school, SD is an economy in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems. The ‘economists’ insist on the need to preserve its fragile ecological balance while exploring and developing a region’s natural resources. They oppose unlimited economic growth and call for a mandatory ecological expertise for all developmental projects.

The ‘green’, environmentalist, school emphasizes SD’s ecological aspects. The ‘greens’ believe that many ecosystems on the planet are both unique and – at the same time – fragile. For this reason, it cannot be sacrificed to successful economic development based on the exploitation of natural resources. They underline that Russia should avoid the so-called ‘resource curse’ and keep its ecosystems intact. They warn that if the economic activities in the environmentally fragile regions are not reduced to a reasonable minimum, the ecological implications will be catastrophic not only for Russia itself but also for the entire world. They note, for example, that Russian forests (taiga) produce a quarter of the planet’s oxygen and its Arctic sector shapes not only regional but also global weather.

The third, ‘anthropological’/human-centric, approach focuses on SD’s social aspects, underlining the need to subordinate its economic and ecological components to the needs of human development. For this reason, it suggests concentrating on the ‘human dimensions’ of the UN’s strategy – well-being, elimination of social inequality, healthcare, education, indigenous peoples, migratory processes, etc.

However, since the late 2000s, the so-called integrated approach to SD has gained a momentum both in the Russian and world academic communities. According to such an integrated approach, SD is conceptually broken down into three constituent parts: environmental, economic, and social (see Figure 22.1).

The *economic dimension* of the Russian SD strategy has the following priorities: sustainable economic activity; sustainable use of natural, including living, resources; development of transport infrastructure (including aviation, marine, and surface transport), information technologies, and modern telecommunications.

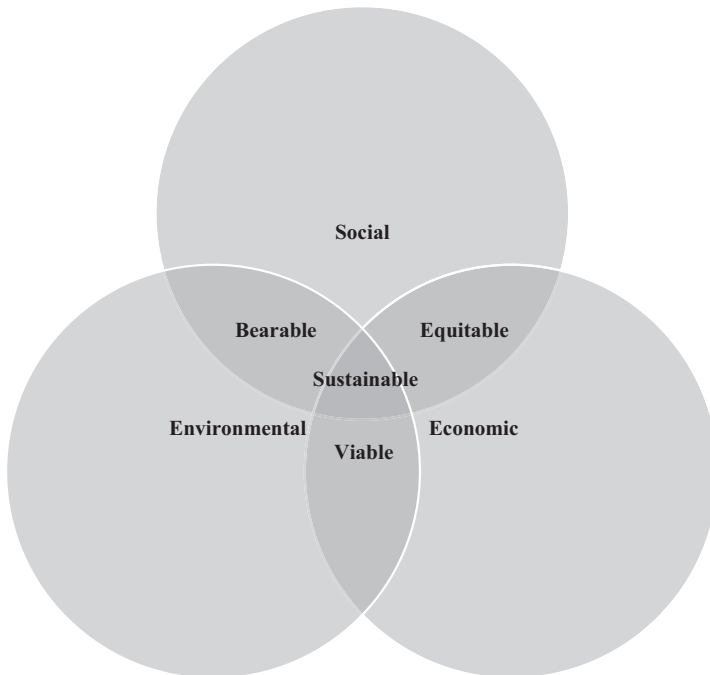


Figure 22.1 Sustainable development: three dimensions

The *environmental dimension* of Russia's SD strategy includes monitoring and assessment of the state of the environment; prevention and elimination of environmental pollution; biodiversity conservation; climate change impact assessment – globally and regionally, and prevention and elimination of ecological emergencies, including those relating to climate change.

Finally, the *social dimension* of the strategy focuses on the health of the people; education and cultural heritage; prosperity and capacity building for children and the youth; gender equality, and enhancing well-being, and eradication of poverty.

Russia has supported and vigorously participated in developing all the UN-related SD initiatives ranging from the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports (including the last one in 2014) to the International Maritime Organization's Polar Code (2014–2015), and Paris agreement on climate change (2015).

Together with other members of the international community, Russia worked hard to organize the UN Sustainable Development Summit held on 25 September 2015. The agreement by all 193 member countries of the UN General Assembly (GA) to approve the final document titled *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is unique as it applies to all countries. The UN formally adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets. These goals and targets are ambitious, indivisible, and interlinked and focus on all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental.

In particular, the SDGs include priorities, such as ending poverty in all its forms everywhere; eliminating hunger, achieving food security and adequate nutrition for all, and promoting sustainable agriculture; attaining a healthy lifestyle for all at all ages; providing equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all; attaining gender equality, empowering women and girls everywhere; securing water and sanitation for all for a sustainable world; ensuring access to affordable, sustainable, and reliable modern energy services for all; promoting strong, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all; promoting sustainable industrialization; reducing inequality within and among countries; building inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities and human settlements; promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns; promoting actions at all levels to address climate change; attaining conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans, and seas; protecting and restoring terrestrial ecosystems and halting all biodiversity loss; achieving peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions; and strengthening and enhancing the means of implementation and global partnership for sustainable development.

Crisis management, responsibility to protect and peacekeeping

Russia believes that with all its shortcomings and contradictions, the UN system of conflict prevention and management as well as peacekeeping, based primarily on the legal principles and mechanisms of the UN Charter, is an effective mechanism for ensuring international security and world order. Particularly, Moscow insists that the UN should play a critical role in promoting normative frameworks to address issues of conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

Russia played an active role in discussing the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept, one of the most controversial initiatives introduced in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and later endorsed by the UN GA at the 2005 World Summit. R2P, often described as an emerging norm, essentially demands that states: (1) protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity; (2) encourage and assist others to fulfill their responsibility; and (3) take timely and decisive action when necessary to and in accordance with the UN Charter to protect populations from these crimes.

R2P is premised on the idea that state sovereignty is not to be taken as a right, but as a responsibility, with the understanding that the most basic responsibility “for the protection of its people lies with the state itself” (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 7). R2P has also been described as a contemporary way of framing humanitarian intervention and an innovative framework for the protection of human beings/communities from the abuse of state power and/or its failure to protect. Moscow, however, made some reservations on this point saying that R2P should not be interpreted as a right of certain states to interfere in internal affairs of countries with allegedly undemocratic regimes. The R2P principle should not be transformed from ‘responsibility to protect’ into ‘right to punish.’

The endorsement of the R2P at the 2005 World Summit reflects a cautious, yet in essence an acceptance of its basic principles: responsibility to prevent, responsibility to react, and the responsibility to rebuild. While ultimately sanctioning the use of military interventions in the case of grave abuses of human rights that meet its designated ‘threshold,’ the R2P that emerged from the World Summit placed more emphasis on the importance of promoting a culture of prevention than previous conceptualizations of the principle (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004).

The subsequent GA debate on the R2P further revealed the preference of the international community for pillars 1 and 2 of the R2P, which call for preventive measures and international assistance. Moscow notes that there has yet to emerge a clear consensus on the third pillar, which focuses on timely and decisive (military) response, largely due to concern about the implications of humanitarian intervention. In particular, a common issue raised by Moscow and many other governments is R2P’s application, which could be based on unfair selectivity within the Security Council. The veto power of the P5 is central to these concerns because it guarantees that the Security Council is being a “neutral arbiter.”

Moscow is sensitive to any international security crises where its voice, *via* the UN Security Council, is disregarded, and this leads to Russia returning to a much more vocal, obstinate, and obdurate position, as seen during the Kosovo (1998–1999), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), and Syria (2011–) crises (Snetkov and Lanteigne, 2015). It thus remains very sensitive to events or circumstances in which its position as a great power is challenged or is seen to be undermined by other international actors, while embracing its role and position as a mediator in international disputes.

From the Russian perspective, controversies around R2P arise largely as a result of the way it is applied in practice, particularly by the West, rather than from the principle itself. Events such as Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria have, for Russia, become precedents by which Western powers have ‘instrumentalized’ the principle of humanitarian intervention to further their own agendas internationally. Russia remains deeply suspicious of any proposal that appears to encourage regime change. For instance, the Kremlin refers to the Libyan case when the United States and NATO interpreted the UN Security Council resolution on establishing no-fly zones in a way as to legitimize first bombing the central government’s troops and then ousting the Gaddafi regime.

Instead of the use of force, Russia advocates diplomacy as the best route for resolving civil crises, as in the case of the conflicts in Darfur (Sudan), Myanmar, Côte d’Ivoire, Libya, and most recently in Syria. In the latter case, Russia maintained its position that the Syrians should decide on their own future at the negotiation table with all the parties included.

In an attempt to raise its international profile, Russia has been willing to act as a mediator and engage in shuttle diplomacy between warring parties, as in the case of Libya, and most recently, Syria.

It should be noted that despite adopting its public role as a mediator for the regime, Moscow also emphasized that most mediation efforts should be undertaken either by the UN or regional

actors. For example, in Syria, Russia backed the Arab League initiative which was better aligned with its version of how such humanitarian crises should be resolved. In this respect, Russia appeared to have come to accept the importance of the role that regional actors can and should play in such crises as foreseen within the 2005 R2P Convention.

As for the Russian contribution to peacekeeping operations, Moscow is among the top ten (eighth place with 3.15%) (Khaspekova et al., 2015). Russia's contribution is rather modest compared with the amounts allocated by the United States (first place, 28.38%) and Japan (second place, 10.83%). However, if one compares the contribution with the size of GDP, Russia's record is quite good, especially if one compares its contribution to that of another country comparable to the United States in terms of GDP calculated in accordance with the parity of purchasing power (PPP), e.g. China (6.64%). As of 2015, Russia had 66 servicemen (46 observers and 20 policemen) in the framework of the current 16 UN peacekeeping missions (versus 110 in 2014) (Khaspekova et al., 2015).

Moscow underlines that with the world facing new challenges, UN peacekeeping should evolve and be flexible. The Russian diplomats in the UN pose the following questions: How are peacekeeping missions established? Who funds them? How are they composed? Do regional institutions contribute to them? What is Russia's role in the present-day peacekeeping? What is the future of peacekeeping in general?

UN reform

The UN is usually criticized for its inability to quickly adapt to change and conduct relevant and timely reforms. The proponents of the UN reform believe that this organization was designed for the post-war and Cold War realities and its structure, procedures, and the way of functioning do not correspond to present-day needs.

First and foremost, such criticism is addressed to the UN Security Council. The reformist proposals concerning the Council boil down to five groups/'pillars':

- Council membership categories (number of permanent and non-permanent members; introduction of a third membership category; the possibility of immediate reelection for some non-permanent members, etc.).
- Veto right (status quo option, i.e. keeping the veto power only for the P5; providing other Council's members with the veto right; abolition of the veto right; introduction of limitations for the use of veto power in some circumstance such as, for example, the cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, mass human rights violations, and so on).
- 'Fair' distribution of the Council's seats among different regions.
- The Council's transparency and accountability.
- Its relations with the GA, including the Assembly's right to decision-making in the case of the Council's inability to act in critical situations.

Russia's official position on the Security Council's reform is rather general and lacks any specific details.

The efforts to reform the UN and adapt it to current realities should be aimed at safeguarding its intergovernmental nature and be in full compliance with the charter principle of labor division among its main bodies. The purpose of the reform of the UN Security Council is to achieve broader representation without damaging the effectiveness and efficiency of its work, and timely decision-making processes. It is necessary to keep searching for a compromise reform

model which would enjoy the broadest support within the UN (The Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 2013).

On the other hand, it is known that Moscow's position on the Council's reform was not always the same and has evolved over time. In the 1990s and 2000s, when the neoliberal approach prevailed in Moscow's thinking on the UN, some Russian experts supported the Council's permanent membership for the 'group of four' (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) (Orlov, 2005) or even for five countries (Germany, Japan, and one state from each continent – Africa, Asia, and America) (Igor Ivanov, 2003). However, with the growth in tensions between Russia and the West, the Kremlin signaled that it favors permanent seats only for its two BRICS partners – Brazil and India – and, again, on the consensus basis (Khaspekova et al., 2015).

The Kremlin also believes that the veto right should not be modified and that only permanent members (existing and potential) should have it. As Yuliy Vorontsov, Russia's former representative in the UN, underlined, the Council's membership extension coupled with the abolishment or weakening of the veto right could make the Council a 'discussion club' rather than a decision-making body (Vorobyev, 2005). Similarly, Minister Lavrov (who has also served as Russia's representative in the UN from 1994 to 2004) objected to a veto system reform because it could make the Council even less efficient than now (Belenkova, 2011: 117).

Moscow supported two UN resolutions that made more difficult any hasty reforms of the Security Council. In 1998, the GA passed the resolution 53/30 that required 2/3 majority for any decisions related to UN reform. In 2008, another resolution (62/557) was adopted to introduce a 'package principle' for UN reform: all five 'pillars' should be approved by the GA at once. The proponents of UN reform heavily criticized these resolutions, trying to argue that they made any changes in the Security Council's composition and procedures virtually impossible.

At the same time, Russia's position on other aspects of UN reform is much more flexible. For example, in September 2015 Moscow supported a partial reform of the Secretary-General's election procedure. In particular, the principle of geographic rotation for Secretaries was abandoned; nomination of multiple candidates was welcomed; the public discussion of the candidates' political platforms was introduced; debates (including the televised ones) between the candidates were encouraged, etc. As a result of these innovations, the former prime minister of Portugal and UN High Commissioner on Refugees, António Guterres, was elected as a new Secretary-General in 2016.

The Russian UN mission actively participated in GA reform as well. In 1993, the initial GA committee system was changed, and the present six-committee structure was established. The GA procedures were also changed: it was decided that in addition to the fall three-month session, occasional spring and summer sessions can be convened, if needed.

Moscow upheld establishing new UN bodies to modernize its institutional structure. For example, the Kremlin assisted in creating a UN anti-terrorism committee in 2001. In 2006, Russia was helpful in transforming the UN Commission on Human Rights to a Human Rights Council with a higher status and broader powers.

Together with its BRICS partners (Brazil, China, India, and South Africa), Russia supports the idea of a substantial reform of the UN's economic and financial bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council, World Bank group, and the International Monetary Fund. Along with other emerging and developing countries, Russia believes that these UN institutions no longer reflect 'correlation of forces' in the world economic and financial systems trying to secure the dominance of Western powers in this sphere. Under Russian and Chinese pressure, an expert panel on the reform of the world financial-monetary system was created in 2009

(Gorelik, 2016). However, when this panel recommended establishing a Global Council on Economic Coordination under the auspices of the UN, the developed countries quietly put on hold this initiative. No surprise that the BRICS countries, which were disappointed with the lack of progress in this area, preferred to establish their own financial institutions' alternative to the Bretton-Woods system.

To sum up, Moscow favors UN reform but in a gradual way and on a consensus basis. The aim of the reform is to adapt the UN to present-day geoeconomic and geopolitical realities but, on the other hand, to not damage its effectiveness as a global governance institute.

Conclusions

In general terms, Russia's UN policies represent a combination – sometimes quite eclectic – of the pragmatic and ideational approaches. On the one hand, Moscow is guided by rather practical/material motives, viewing the UN as an efficient instrument for protecting and promoting its national interests – both regionally and globally. In particular, Russia tries to use the UN for conflict prevention, management, and resolution in its close geopolitical proximity. The UN (and especially its seat on the Security Council) is also important for the Kremlin in terms of ascertaining Russia's great power status and gaining international authority and prestige. Moreover, the UN is viewed by Russia as a rather useful tool for containing U.S. and other developed nations' hegemonic aspirations and shaping a more just and safer world order.

On the other hand, the UN is perceived by Moscow in civilizational terms. It is seen as a proper instrument to address the global problems that humankind currently faces as well as those looming ahead. The Kremlin aims to represent itself as a responsible international player that tries to contribute to making the UN an efficient global governance institute. Russia believes that the UN should play a crucial role in solving global problems, such as sustainable development (including the SDGs' achievement), conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict peace-building, arms control and disarmament, climate change mitigation, fighting global crime and international terrorism, and so on.

Moscow aims at harmonizing UN activities with other global, regional, and subregional institutions to generate a synergetic effect in solving different international problems. However, if Russia's efforts to establish a division of labor between the UN and other international organizations in specific areas fail, Moscow does not hesitate to make a pragmatic choice between them. For example, when NATO intervened militarily in the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s, the Kremlin used the UN to prevent these interventions and later to maximally neutralize their negative implications. On the contrary, Russia has effectively blocked any UN attempts to interfere in the 2008 Georgia-Russia armed conflict and the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, preferring to manage these conflicts in the OSCE, CIS, 'Normandy,' and bilateral formats.

Russia's UN membership record since the end of the Cold War has been rather positive. Moscow has tried to use its veto right in a responsible manner, doing it less frequently than, for instance, the United States. However, with the start of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia's confrontation with Western countries in the UN Security Council increased, including its veto exercise. The so-called 'Arab awakening' and Ukrainian crisis were the most conflictual issues in the Council.

Russia is also a 'good UN citizen' in a sense that it contributes to the organization's budget on a regular basis and at a sufficient level. Moscow has also significantly contributed to UN discussions on all major issues ranging from sustainable development strategy and R2P to conflict resolution and fighting international terrorism and transnational crime.

Russia actively partakes in the ongoing debates on UN reform, including the Security Council. Moscow's position on this issue has evolved since the early 1990s from the rather favorable/liberal to the cautious/conservative one. The Kremlin is afraid of too radical changes in the UN system because it could weaken or make less efficient this organization and undermine Russia's global standing. Moscow wants to make sure that the suggested reforms will make this institution stronger and more adequate to the globalizing world, not the other way round. That's why Russia suggests a balanced approach to reform implementation based on consensus and incrementalism. At the same time, Moscow understands that to effectively meet the challenges of globalization, the UN should transform itself from a purely intergovernmental organization to a transnational body capable of functioning as a global governance institution.

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