

## Goal Rationality in the Formulation and Conduct of Soviet and Russian Foreign Policy

ROBERT F. MILLER  
Australian National University  
robert.miller@anu.edu.au

### Abstract

*T.H. Rigby's concept of goal rationality, building on Max Weber's ideas of substantive and formal-legal rationality in the functioning of bureaucracies, provided important insights into the relevance of ideology for understanding how the Soviet system worked at both the domestic and foreign policy levels. This ideological dimension has tended to be neglected in much of the Western literature on Soviet communism. Since the end of the Soviet system, Russian leaders have tended to avoid ideology as a negative example to be avoided. Nevertheless, in their search for doctrines and principles to guide foreign and domestic aspects of the pursuit of national interests, these leaders have willy-nilly fallen back on ideological ways of thinking, which Rigby's goal rationality helps to elucidate.*

**Key Words:** goal rationality, ideology, Stalinism, Neo-Eurasianism, sovereign democracy, Putin-Medvedev tandemocracy.

### Introduction

Despite the claims of the Putin-Medvedev 'tandemocracy's to have abandoned ideology in the formulation and conduct of Russia's foreign policy and to have replaced it with the concept of 'the national interest,' that concept itself is obviously highly ambiguous and subjective. In this essay I shall attempt to show how in the process of elaborating a systematic approach to the shaping of the foreign (and domestic) goals, strategies and tactics of the Russian Federation (RF), Russian policy makers have, willy-nilly, constructed a new ideology. Because of the personal backgrounds of the current rulers and the expectations of a large segment of the elite and the Russian public, this new ideology has, over time, come to embody elements of the old Soviet ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the 'building' of socialism and communism. Why this re-emergence has taken place was foreshadowed by T.H. Rigby in his various comments on and modifications of Max Weber's famous analysis of the legitimation and rationalisation of various ideal types of governance and administration: namely, traditional, charismatic, and legal legitimacy and their associated modes of rationality—patrimonial, substantive and formal.<sup>1</sup> That is,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Weber's discussion of bureaucracy in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York, Galaxy, 1985, pp. 72-83. See also Chapter VIII, pp. 196-244 and Chapter IX on 'The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,' pp. 245-252.

traditional, charismatic and law-based forms of state authority and their associated ways of obtaining subject, or citizen, compliance.

To these, Rigby has added the concepts of 'goal legitimization' and 'goal rationality' in the context of his conceptualisation of Soviet rule as a 'mono-organisational' system.<sup>2</sup> Under such a system, Rigby envisages the various institutions and sub-institutions of Soviet rulership—for example, the army, the secret police, the judiciary, the economic planning system, the various inspection services, the Comintern and the ministry of foreign affairs—as sub-units of the mono-organisational hierarchy, each with its concrete task or *modus operandi*, as part of the overall goal of building socialism and the world-wide victory of communism. Public organisations, such as trade-unions, sports clubs, youth groups (Pioneers, Komsomol), all had their tasks and sub-goals, rationalised as furthering the overall goal.

In time, not only the USSR and its own citizens, but also citizens of the Soviet Bloc countries were subject to the same obligations of deference to the goal-setter-in-chief: the Soviet leadership under the General Secretary of the CC, CPSU. The so-called Third-World countries 'with a socialist orientation,' like Ethiopia and Nicaragua, were nominally subject to similar, albeit lesser, obligations but were also thus eligible for Soviet political and military assistance, as well as subsidised economic aid and trade relations. The introduction of the Brezhnev Doctrine in the wake of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, under which each socialist regime was under obligation not only to its own working class but also to the higher interests of the international socialist community, was a last effort at ideological legitimization of Muscovite domination. Polish President Wojciech Jaruzelski pointed to the application of this doctrine as justification for his crackdown on the Solidarity Movement in December 1981.<sup>3</sup> The scope of the mono-organisational architecture and its legitimising myth were thus fully extended right up to the penultimate moment of Soviet history.<sup>4</sup>

## Some Historical Illustrations of the Analysis

The victory of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution and the Civil War represented the triumph of substantive rationality and the naked use of organised violence. As Rigby and Ferenc Feher have argued, neither Lenin nor Stalin possessed the slightest traces of charisma, nor could they claim any of the other types of legitimacy—traditional or formal-legal. The only genuinely charismatic member of the ruling coterie during this period was Leon Trotsky, and his espousal of the doctrine of 'Permanent Revolution'—a key illustration of applied goal rationality—found little support among the exhausted Bolshevik leaders, who had just adopted, at Lenin's insistence, the New Economic Policy, or NEP. Thus, Stalin's espousal of the slogan 'Socialism in One Country' won the battle for Bolshevik hearts and minds. In some ways, the introduction of NEP signalled a shift to formal rationality, a system of rules and regulations to normalize economic expectations and prepare for the eventual

<sup>2</sup> These concepts are most comprehensively formulated in T.H. Rigby, *The Changing Soviet System: Mono-organisational Socialism from its Origins to Gorbachev's Restructuring*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar Publishing, 1990. See especially Chapter 7 on 'Political Legitimacy,' pp. 155-182.

<sup>3</sup> For General Jaruzelski's justification for his actions and the nature of Soviet pressures, see Wojciech Jaruzelski, 'Stan Wojenny Dlaczego,' Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza, "BGW," 1992.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting analysis of the nature of Soviet-type societies, with some alternative approaches to Rigby's paradigm, see Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship Over Needs: An Analysis of Soviet Societies*, Oxford, Basil Blackwood, 1983. See especially chapters 4 and 7.

advance of socialist construction on the basis of Marx's legitimising conception of primitive capitalist accumulation.

This resort to formal rationality was, however, merely a thin veneer over what had remained an internal struggle for power to dictate the further course of the revolution. During the latter 1920s and 1930s, Stalin found it expedient to create a mantle of charisma for Lenin and, by association, for himself, to legitimise his plans for the further development of socialism. Under the rubric of 'primitive socialist accumulation,' which he had borrowed from Trotsky's erstwhile ally Evgenyi Preobrazhenskii, Stalin set the stage for forced draught industrialisation on the backs of the collectivised peasantry.

In foreign policy, this pattern was replicated in the gradual reduction of the Communist International from the status of the headquarters of the world revolution to that of an instrument of Soviet foreign policy under the control of the International Department of the AUCP(B) Central Committee. Its tasks, as one of the sub-units of the mono-organisational hierarchy, was to foster Soviet interests by using the member national communist parties as conduits for pro-Soviet propaganda and financial assistance and as facilitators of Soviet intelligence activities. Their functions were similar to what we have seen recently in the case of the ten Russian espionage 'sleepers' exchanged by the USA for Russian agents of American intelligence in Russian prisons.

That these activities were considered legitimate in terms of the goal of world revolution indicated the extent to which they were indeed considered legitimate by foreign communist party members. The Great Purges of 1936-38 and the associated 'Show Trials' of former Bolshevik stalwarts did not seem to dent the credibility of Stalin's leadership. However, his legitimacy and reputation for charismatic rectitude were put to an extreme loyalty test by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939, which saw the USSR switch sides in the run up to the anticipated world war, without regard to the anti-Bolshevik fulminations of Adolph Hitler and the increasingly visible atrocities of the Nazi regime. Many communists refused to believe that the goal of world socialism could justify such blatant opportunism. However, the subsequent invasion of the USSR by Hitler in June 1941 and the transformation of the 'imperialist war' into the 'Great Patriotic War' caused most of them to jump back aboard the socialist ship and support the great crusade for victory over the Nazi and fascist phase of imperialism.

The victory over the Axis in 1945 considerably reinforced Stalin's credibility as a veritable genius in all fields of human endeavour and strengthened his personal cult status. He used this status to impose his will on the greatly expanded post-war socialist community of nations. The attempt was made to formalise the institutions of Soviet control by regularizing the procedures for nominally collective decision making, most notably by establishing the Cominform to replace the Comintern, which had formally been abolished to assuage the fears of his Western wartime allies. In reality, of course, the Comintern had never been abolished, but its functions had rather been transferred to the International Department of the Communist Party Central Committee.

This process well illustrates the persistence of substantive rationality over formal-legal rationality in Soviet practice, based as it was on Stalin's charismatic legitimacy, which was, in turn, justified by the goal rationality of building socialism on a world historical scale.

The death of Stalin in March 1953 eliminated the charismatic component of the legitimacy construct, but it did not materially weaken the policy impact of the ideological goal. However, it did for a time undermine the ability of the USSR to obtain automatic compliance with its strategic and tactical dictates. This weakening was clearly manifest in the legitimacy crisis within the Bloc following Khrushchev's anti-Stalin revelations at the XXth Party Congress in February 1956, most notably in the anti-Soviet unrest in Poland and Hungary in October and November. Mao Zedong soon recognized the dangers of de-Stalinization and began openly to question Khrushchev's legitimacy as an ideological and political goal-setter for the Bloc. Mao's abandonment of the 'Hundred Flowers' effort at liberalization and his introduction of the 'Great Leap Forward' program in 1958 demonstrated his disagreement with Khrushchev's formulation of socialist construction and his rationalisation that all socialist countries would achieve communism at about the same time.

The spillover from this disagreement on ideology to practical inter-state relations was shown in Khrushchev's refusal to fulfil promises to assist Chinese nuclear arms development or to provide military backing for China during the Formosa Straits crisis in 1958. Khrushchev's reckless policies toward the Kennedy Administration leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 and especially his back down by withdrawing the missiles from Cuba further damaged the Sino-Soviet relationship and made China an alternative rallying point for dissident leaders within the Bloc, such as Enver Hoxha, as well as for Maoist non-ruling communist parties throughout the world, including Australia. Thus, the goal of building socialism remained, but the right to prescribe the path to do so was no longer automatically conceded to the CPSU leadership.<sup>5</sup>

The failure of Khrushchev to achieve his stated goals, domestically, by lack of progress in 'overtaking and surpassing the West' in industrial and agricultural production, and in foreign policy, in the paucity of achievements of the 'peaceful co-existence' doctrine—most notably in the U-2 incident of 1960 and the ascription to him of personal responsibility for the dangerous deterioration of relations with China—led to his unseating by his colleagues, headed by Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin in October 1964. This further weakened Soviet legitimacy as head of the Bloc. Attempts to curry favour with Mao by examining the ideological disputes that had separated them soon proved to be futile. Mao himself was not entirely secure because of the disastrous failures of the Great Leap Forward. Meanwhile, efforts to reform the Soviet economy by Premier Kosygin had unleashed a call for reform of socialism itself. This occurred not only in the Western European 'Euro-communist' parties, but also even within the Bloc, most assertively in Czechoslovakia, where the 'Prague Spring' promised a new era of 'socialism with a human face.' In August 1968, Warsaw Pact tanks put a stop to that 'deviation' and saw the reassertion of Soviet domination under the rubric of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine,' mentioned above.

In an effort to re-establish Soviet ideological hegemony and call a halt to further speculation on possible alternative paths to communism, Brezhnev and his ideologists introduced the concept of 'really existing socialism.' That is, unlike the Euro-communist, Prague or Maoist versions, there was only one true model of

---

<sup>5</sup> For a good analysis of the course of Sino-Soviet relations and the vagaries of Russian influence see Thomas Bernstein's Introduction to *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*, (Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li, eds.), Lanham, Lexington Books, 2010. Ideological and practical aspects of the relationship are elaborated upon by several of the other contributors to this useful compendium.

socialism: that existing in the USSR and those socialist countries which replicated the model. It was not a very inspiring prospect for emulation, and some countries that remained loyal to Moscow, namely, Poland and Hungary and otherwise deviant Romania, obviously diverged from the model, but as long as they did not openly contest Soviet control of the Bloc and maintained party control they were allowed to operate as they saw fit. Domestically, too, the Brezhnev *modus operandi* allowed people a good deal of internal ideological leeway, as long as they did not openly challenge the existing system. It was already quite clear that the rationality of the goal of socialist and communist construction no longer conveyed much legitimacy.

The last Soviet leader, M.S. Gorbachev, although certainly a believer in socialism as a worthy goal *per se*, completed its dismantling as a source of legitimacy for Soviet rule at home and abroad. Faced with growing evidence of the failures of the system in competition with the globalising capitalist West, he began to regard the obligations associated with dominance of the 'world of socialism' as an increasing burden with little payoff for the USSR. When he asked for an expert opinion on the meaning of 'socialist orientation' as applied to certain Third-World dependencies of the USSR, he was quoted as saying "But that's crap!" (*No eto zhe gavno.*) His decision to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan was one consequence. He increasingly advised his country's Warsaw Pact and COMECON allies facing similar economic and social problems to the USSR's that they would have to deal with them on their own. His views eventually evolved to the point where he eschewed the entire edifice of the mono-organisational system, including the 'leading role' of the Communist Party, elevating his new position as President of the USSR to a higher level than his General Secretaryship of the CPSU Central Committee.

The speedy victory of the USA and its allies over Saddam Hussein in 'Desert Storm' and the centrality of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) showed that militarily, too, the Soviet Union could no longer afford to compete with the West and that Moscow would in future have to rely more on the carrots of 'soft power' than on its traditional dependence on the sticks of hard military power. The rest, as they say, is history. Within three years, the USSR itself had ceased to exist, and Gorbachev was out of a job.

## **Applying These Categories to the Present Situation**

Boris N. Yel'tsin's presidency began with a conscious effort to abandon ideology, that is, its Marxist-Leninist incarnation, in favour of the Francis Fukuyama 'end-of-history' variant of liberal democracy and free-market economics. The tacit belief was that by adopting the so-called 'Washington consensus' as the model for the transformation of the Soviet socialist economy, Yel'tsin and his economic lieutenant, Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, would ensure Western assistance and gain admission to the club of major capitalist powers.

One of the first things he did on assuming the Presidency was to break up the KGB into domestic and foreign intelligence agencies: the FSB and the SVR, respectively. Internally, by personal experience, he recognized that the security organs, as the enforcing centrepiece of the mono-organisational system, represented an enduring threat to his reformist, Western-oriented leadership. Externally, the dissolution of the KGB was intended as a signal that Russia had changed and would henceforth be a reliable partner of the West. Indeed, Yel'tsin and his Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev

went out of their way to co-operate with the USA and its Western allies in addressing conflict situations emerging from the break-up of the communist system, above all in divided Germany, Czechoslovakia and disintegrating Yugoslavia.

However, as the Russian economy increasingly fragmented, internal fissures appeared in the form of conservative challenges to the pro-Western orientation of the government. This was manifested in the refusal of the parliamentary leadership to confirm Gaidar as Prime Minister and ultimately in an abortive parliamentary coup against Yel'tsin and his reformers in 1993. He became increasingly isolated and arbitrary in his relations with colleagues and erstwhile supporters. A crucial moment for Western attitudes toward Russia and its interests was the economic meltdown of August 1998, when Russia was forced to default on its short-term bonds (GKOs) and sharply devalue the ruble.<sup>6</sup>

A major turning point came in March 1999, when the USA and NATO, ignoring Russian objections, launched a three-month bombing campaign against Serbia in support of Kosovar independence. Yeltsin was furious and took a series of largely ineffectual military steps to show the depth of Moscow's displeasure, including dispatching an intelligence-gathering ship to the Mediterranean. His decision to send Russian troops from its peacekeeping contingent in Bosnia to Pristina airbase almost led to open hostilities with NATO forces. If not for the calming actions of British General Mike Jackson, in charge of the Western peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, to finesse the situation by including the Russian troops under his UN-endorsed command, this could have led to direct armed conflict. US General Wesley Clarke's inclination to confront the Russians directly could have led to World War III, in Jackson's opinion expressed at the time.

In reality, the prospect of early incorporation of Romania and Bulgaria into NATO had led to their refusal to let Russian planes use their airspace to resupply and reinforce the Russian contingent in Kosovo. That made it impossible for Yel'tsin to act upon his evident anti-Western impulse. Meanwhile, his Prime Minister Yevgenii Primakov, as Foreign Minister from 1996, had begun to re-orient Russian foreign policy away from the USA and NATO. He introduced a new strategy of multilateralism, seeking allies in the East and South, most notably in China and India, against what he perceived as American hegemony.

Primakov's decision to abandon a fence-mending trip to Washington in March 1999 in anger at the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign was a powerful statement of Russian displeasure and its growing anti-Western orientation. Indeed, Primakov's stance was so popular in Russian policy-relevant and public circles that an increasingly paranoid and impulsive Yel'tsin found it expedient to fire him as Prime Minister in May 1999. On New Years Eve, on the cusp of the new millennium, suffering from ill health, he announced his retirement and the designation as Acting President of Vladimir V. Putin.

Yel'tsin's intention to join the Western club had clearly failed. This was largely a result of bad faith on the part of US leaders. Perceiving the economic and foreign policy weaknesses of the new Russia, they no longer felt it necessary to take Russian interests into serious consideration nor even to fulfil some of the promises made at

---

<sup>6</sup> For an insightful insider's account of these measures see Martin Gilman, *No Precedent, No Plan: Inside Russia's Default*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2010.

the time of the dissolution of the Soviet empire. Moscow's new conception of Russia's interests and how to pursue them was primarily negative. The goal became to thwart US and NATO policies and to try to regain acknowledgement of Russia's interests and primacy in the so-called 'Near Abroad,' the former republics and provinces of the USSR. In the words of American stand-up comedian Rodney Dangerfield, the problem was that Washington and its allies showed 'no respect' for Russia. This was not yet an ideology, but it was a step in that direction.

In hindsight, the choice of Putin to succeed him as President seems somewhat strange, given Yel'tsin's reformist aspirations and dislike of the rigidities of the Soviet mono-organizational system. However, at the time, Putin's credentials, despite his KGB background, seemed promising and very much in line with Yel'tsin's aspirations. He had been a middle-ranking KGB officer with a relatively liberal reputation, thanks largely to his association with Anatoly Sobchak, the reformist mayor of St. Petersburg and his former law school lecturer. Sobchak had placed him in a series of increasingly important positions, where he had shown himself to be an effective administrator and liaison officer in the city's dealings with foreign businesspeople. Moreover, in the wake of the attempted coup of August 1991, largely instigated by the KGB, Putin had demonstratively resigned his reserve commission in that organisation. He was called to Moscow in 1997 and rapidly rose in Yel'tsin's presidential staff and was named as head of the new FSB. By 16 August 1999, he had risen to the position of Prime Minister. He soon distinguished himself by defending Yel'tsin against charges of corruption by the Chief RF Prosecutor Yurii Skuratov, thus demonstrating he knew how to protect his patron and where the proverbial 'bodies were buried.' He had also demonstrated his modesty by at first refusing to accept Yel'tsin's nomination on the grounds that he did not feel himself ready for such a position. In short, by the time he became President in his own right in March 2000, Putin had demonstrated considerable administrative and political capabilities as a leader who knew how to make the rules and when and how to break them.

One of Putin's first acts upon his inauguration as President in May 2000 was to re-assert central control over the diverse regions of the country by imposing a so-called 'power vertical' and dividing the country into seven federal districts overseen by his personal representatives. During his second term in 2004 he ordered the central appointment of regional governors, who were to rule on sufferance of the President, subject only to confirmation by the local legislatures. To head up the various agencies and government departments, Putin relied on personal contacts and associates from his KGB and public service days. The fact that he was simultaneously re-establishing governmental control over previously privatised strategic sectors of the Russian economy, such as the oil and gas industry, the railroads and the armaments industry and putting his cronies in charge, meant a substantial reversal of Yel'tsin's post-communist transformation process.

Early in his reign, the Kursk nuclear submarine tragedy in August 2000, where his absence from the scene had set off a wave of anger among the families and friends of the victims and substantial criticism in the media, along with serious mishandling of the event by the authorities nominally in charge, caused him to be much more concerned with his personal image and the importance of public relations (PR.) Even before this, he had used the renewed upsurge of rebel activity in Chechnya and Ingushetiia to establish a personal image of toughness and resoluteness. The resulting PR-focussed image-building and an increasing sensitivity to contrary opinions and political opposition led to the emergence of a typical Weberian

paternalistic traditional legitimation. It was based on a kind of substantive rationality that was usually presented as formal rationality under the guise of Putin's favourite slogan of the 'dictatorship of laws.' Sarah Whitmore has recently elaborated on the domestic implications of this tension between formal-legal rationality and what she calls the 'neo-patrimonial' rationality of Putin's mode of governance.<sup>7</sup> Increasing public adulation of Putin's charismatic PR image, reflected in public opinion surveys, has demonstrated the popular legitimacy of this system. It became increasingly difficult for critics in the media and intellectual circles to oppose him, as Mikhail Khodorkovskii, Vladimir Gusinskii and Boris Berezovskii found to their discomfort. The fact of the Jewish ethnic background of these three and other so-called 'oligarchs,' did nothing to lessen the approval of their downfall by the traditionally anti-Semitic Russian public.<sup>8</sup>

The ideology legitimising his rule was thus one based on a combination of traditional Great-Russian ethnic pre-eminence, confidence in the rationality and wisdom of the leader and stable *dirigiste* government. One of Putin's most prominent policy aides, Vladislav Surkov, calls this ideology 'sovereign democracy,' that is, a form of democracy un-beholden to Western models and suitable to Russian traditions of relations between the people and the Tsar-ruler.

The introduction of a new President, Dmitry A. Medvedev, hand-picked by Putin in 2008, with Putin assuming the role of Prime Minister, has somewhat complicated this legitimating structure. This meant there were now constitutionally two nominal 'sovereigns,' with separate spheres of authority: Putin for domestic affairs and the economy, Medvedev for foreign policy and defence. Not surprisingly, Putin's views have tended to predominate, although there are obviously cases and issues where their different personalities and backgrounds have led to differences in emphasis and modes of expression of their common policies.

Despite their frequent resort to Great Russian chauvinism to marshal support for their foreign and defence initiatives, the two sometimes evince a disarming sense of pragmatism in pursuit of their goals. Following Putin's extremely aggressive, not to say arrogant, verbal assault on US hegemony and his announcement of Russia's commitment to multilateralism, international law and the sanctity of UN Security Council approval for any resort to force at the annual East-West security conference in Munich in February 2007, Russia resumed intelligence-gathering air and submarine patrols along the Arctic sea routes around the UK and North America. This led to renewed confrontations with NATO air and naval forces reminiscent of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> It appeared that the hard-liners in the military and security hierarchies, who had never ceased their opposition to Russia's decline in foreign influence and military status, had won out on such issues. The new wealth generated by the world hydrocarbon boom made it seem self-evident that Russia could now afford to restore its military fortunes.

---

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Whitmore, 'Parliamentary Oversight in Putin's Neo-patrimonial State. Watchdogs or Showdogs?' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 6, 2010, pp. 999-1025.

<sup>8</sup> To be sure, Putin went out of his way to deny his personal anti-Semitism by continuing to favour other Jewish oligarchs who played according to his rules and to show support to selected rabbis and to Jews who had been important to him during his childhood in St. Petersburg, such as his judo coach and school teachers.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Hennessy and Richard Knight, 'Russia's intelligence attacks: The Anna Chapman danger,' BBC Radio 4, Why Russia Spies, BBC News, 17 August 2010.

However, at almost the same time, Putin began a thorough reform of the Russian military by appointing a civilian tax expert—also with a St. Petersburg law school connection—as the new Minister of Defence, charged with transforming the Russian Army along modern lines. Anatolyi Serdyukov's brief was to down-size, restructure and re-equip the Russian army, navy and air force, basically along US lines. The vigorous resistance of the military hierarchy has delayed the fulfilment of these plans, but such resistance has been resolutely confronted.

The five-day war against Georgia in August 2008 demonstrated the overwhelming power but also the underlying weaknesses of the Russian Army in terms of modern weaponry and tactics. It also led to the resumption of serious political tensions with the West, causing Medvedev, barely settled into the Presidency, to issue a strident new statement of Russian foreign policy principles, in effect elaborating on Putin's Munich declaration: namely, 1) on the supremacy of international law; 2) the centrality of multi-polarity as a goal of Russian policy; 3) the basically non-confrontational character of Russian foreign policy; 4) protection of Russian citizens wherever they reside; and 5) the development of especially close relations with 'friendly regions.' Medvedev would in time resile from the more aggressive undertones of this statement as the Western furore over the Georgian intervention settled down and other issues of Russian domestic and foreign policy came to the fore.

Returning to the primary goals and sub-goals of Russian foreign (and domestic) policy, one can see that the main goal is to restore Russia's status as a major world power, with a number of sub-goals, involving various strategies and tactics to achieve it. Among these sub-goals, not necessarily in order of importance, the following stand out:

- 1) To reform and modernize the Russian military to make it a more effective and efficient instrument of hard power;
- 2) To modernize and technologically re-equip Russian science, technology and industry to make them competitive on a world scale;
- 3) To re-shape the international security 'architecture' to enhance Russia's ability to promote certain policies and interests and to block others deemed hostile to Russian interests;
- 4) To forestall Western interference in the zone of Russia's so-called 'privileged interests'—mainly in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—and to prevent 'coloured revolutions,' which unseated regimes previously friendly to Russia and its perceived interests;
- 5) To split the solidarity of the West by the use of resource diplomacy and other instruments of hard and soft power, thus gaining leverage over the political and economic decisions of certain targeted countries;
- 6) To undermine the previously undisputed power of the USA and its NATO machinery to set the content and directions of Western international, military, security, and economic policies;
- 7) To use the prospect of closer military and economic relations with China and India to enhance Russia's ability to influence Western policies.

All of these sub-goals are subordinated to the main goal of maximizing Russia's status as a world power. They are linked together, more or less effectively by a legitimising goal with its associated rationality. The ideology behind them is not necessarily

distinctly or expressly formulated, but most participants in the policy debates recognize the need for its existence as an orientation and legitimation factor.<sup>10</sup>

One candidate for such an ideology was the so-called 'Neo-Eurasian' *Weltanschauung* associated with the name of Aleksandr Dugin, a Professor of history at Moscow State University and the Director of its new Center for Conservative Studies. Neo-Eurasianism proclaims the non-Western essence of Russian culture and civilization and places Russia at the head of a movement of Aryan peoples inhabiting the space between West and East, with ethnic Russians in the role of elder brothers. Unlike its late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century forbears, Neo-Eurasianism contains an overtly anti-Semitic focus, perceiving the Jews as the leaders of the 'dark-skinned southern' peoples diabolically ill-disposed to Russian greatness. Its geopolitical origins reflect the 'heartland' concepts of Halford Mackinder and Karl Haushofer, under which whoever controls the Eurasian heartland, controls the world. For Dugin and his followers, Russia's rulers must constantly strive to defend and preserve its control of Eurasia and its mystical mission to save the world against the West and the Jews who insidiously guide its actions.<sup>11</sup> Dugin recognizes the fascination of Russia and Russians for Western technology and culture, but he warns against being seduced by them as a threat to the spiritual strength and purity of Russia and its Eurasian followers.

This chiliastic preaching of Eurasianist mysticism is precisely why the current leadership, while recognizing the usefulness of its nationalist appeal among significant sections of the elite and the *hoi polloi*, has rejected its constraints on their policy, particularly when dealing with potentially friendly foreign governments. They have instead settled for a less mystical and opportunistic form of nationalism, as espoused, for example, by right-wing nationalists of the ilk of Vladimir Zhirinovskii and the *Nashi* (Ours) youth group organized by the 'Grey Cardinal.' Vladislav Surkov, the inventor of 'sovereign democracy,' but definitely not by the left-wing nationalism promoted by Eduard Limonov's National Bolsheviks.<sup>12</sup>

The approved kind of nationalism has considerable resonance among important segments of the Russian power elite, particularly in the armed forces and the security services, as well as in the defence industry. However, it, too, can sometimes act as a constraint on the freedom of Putin and Medvedev to pursue whatever they consider necessary to achieve their overall goal of national power. This is well illustrated by the conservative resistance to their desire to purchase foreign military technology to accelerate the modernization of the Russian armed forces. The recent decision, announced by Defence Minister Serdyukov, to spend up to 10bn euros on the acquisition of West European military equipment over the 2010-2016 period,

---

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Viktor L. Larin, *Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskii region v nachale XXI veka: vyzovy, ugrozy, shansy Tikhookeanskoi Rossii*, Vladivostok, Dsal'nauka, 2010, especially pp. 49-50. I am indebted to Kyle Wilson for calling this important publication to my attention. Larin is the director of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Far Eastern Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>11</sup> For a good analysis of the content of Dugin's doctrine and its pernicious effects see Dorothy Horsfield, 'Mind the Gap: The Significance of Neo-Eurasianism Under the Putin/Medvedev Government,' unpublished MA thesis, London School of Economics, 2009, which, despite the title, does not consider Eurasianism as the dominant ideology of the Putin/Medvedev tandem.

<sup>12</sup> Limonov, a prominent writer had been a co-founder of Neo-Eurasianism, but he had quit the movement in disagreement with its anti-socialist and anti-technological biases. Limonov has occasionally joined with other anti-regime parties and movements to demonstrate against the Putin/Medvedev leadership.

although radically ambitious, demonstrates a recognition that Russian industry is not capable of carrying out this task on its own. In addition to the acquisition of four French Mistral amphibious assault ships (the first one or two to be built in France and the rest under licence in Russia), they intend to acquire French thermal imaging and fire control electronics, Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles, and Italian light multi-role vehicles.<sup>13</sup> Some of these purchases will be directly imported, but most will involve development of Russian capacity to produce the equipment under licence, thus helping to modernise Russian industry 'on the quick.'

To modernise the civilian economy, Medvedev has sought to replicate California's Silicon Valley in Skolkovo on the outskirts of Moscow to encourage the introduction of foreign capital and expertise for the development of an internationally competitive Russian hi-tech capability. This will be no easy task because of the country's unenviable reputation for corrupt and arbitrary treatment of foreign investments, as well as Putin's express intention to maintain majority state ownership of strategic sectors. Medvedev's evident fascination with the latest IT innovations is being used to legitimise foreign involvement for the benefit of Russian national interests.

There is nothing unusual or alarming in such initiatives, and indeed they are to be welcomed, provided, of course, that the interests involved are not one-sided and the benefits accrue to more than a small segment of Western business. As in the case of Western economic involvement with China, the role and intentions of the state in nominally commercial ventures deserve to be kept under close scrutiny by the Western governments affected. This is not always easy in the case of huge multi-national companies under conditions of globalisation.

The classic example of Putin's use of economic, in this case, resource, diplomacy for obvious political objectives is the attempt to lure Western businesses and, by extension, governments to join as minority partners in the exploration, extraction and transportation of oil and gas.<sup>14</sup> He succeeded in recruiting former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to sign up to the construction of the so-called Nord Stream gas pipeline under Gazprom control, thus undermining the EU policy of seeking multiplicity of oil and gas suppliers and directly harming the interests of fellow EU members Poland and Lithuania. In the South, via South Stream, Russia has attempted to do the same thing by undercutting the US- and EU- favoured Nabucco pipeline and trying to sign up a number of Balkan and SE European countries with promises of transit payments and the establishment of gas storage hubs. In the process, she has also lured Turkey, a partner in the Nabucco project, to join South Stream, so far with some partial success.

The GFC and the attendant reduction in demand for gas, as well as the development of LNG and other alternative sources have seriously undermined this resource

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Russia to Buy 10 Billion Euros in Foreign Arms By 2016,' Defence Talk, Global Defence & Military Portal, RIA Novosti, <<http://www.defencetalk.com/russia-to-buy-10-billion-euros-in-foreign-arms-by-2016-27224>>, accessed 24 June 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Previous attempts to use spurious environmental concerns to assert state control over BP and Shell partnerships showed the 'flexible' nature of Putin's attitude toward security of contracts. More recently, he and Medvedev have shown more genuine flexibility in dealings with major resource multinationals. A good example is the latest deal with BP involving a 50-50 partnership with Rosneft to explore and extract hydrocarbons from deep sea deposits under the Russian part of the Arctic Sea. See, for example, Brian Swint, 'Rosneft Deal Shows Russia Is More Open to Investment, IEA Says,' Bloomberg 10 February 2011, cited in JRL 2011-#24, 10 February 2011, <[www.worldsecurityinstitute.com](http://www.worldsecurityinstitute.com)>, accessed 10 February 2011.

diplomacy strategy, but there are no signs of its being abandoned. Indeed, Russia has tried to expand the reach of the strategy by making deals for the exploitation of hydrocarbons in Latin America and other Third World regions that welcome the opportunity to undercut the operations of the American-controlled multi-nationals which had traditionally dominated their economies.

Concerning relations with the USA, President Obama's offer of a 'reset' of Russo-American relations was greeted with cautious optimism by Moscow. The need for a re-negotiation of the START treaty on nuclear weapons was paramount, since the existing treaty was about to expire, and both sides wished to inject some element of certainty and transparency in that aspect of their relationship. The atmospherics of the relationship did improve, although hard-liners on both sides were unhappy about the alleged concessions involved and expressed fears that the concessions on their side would be seen by the other as a sign of weakness. The ratification of Start III promised a new start to the relationship.

There is little doubt that, superficially at least, the new 'détente' did provide some benefits from the American perspective: namely, on the question of Russian support for tightened UN sanctions against Iran and North Korea over their covert development of nuclear weapons. Concerning Libya, Russia and China prevailed upon not to veto the Western-sponsored resolution on a no-fly zone to protect the rebel forces in the UN Security Council, despite their reservations on the wording.

On the Russian side, it led to Washington's tacit abandonment of military and direct political support for the opposition to pro-Russian forces in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. In Serbia, too, Russia gained agreement to NATO's tacit acceptance that Belgrade, although participating in the Partnership for Peace program and having sent a few troops to Afghanistan, would never become a member of NATO.<sup>15</sup>

The re-set also resulted in the abandonment of NATO plans to station ABM rockets and radars in Poland and the Czech Republic, although their replacement by a more dispersed, mobile system based on the Aegis platform and the stationing of an American-manned Patriot anti-aircraft missile detachment (to assuage Polish fears of abandonment by NATO) did not go down very well in Moscow. Nor did President Medvedev's project to change the international security architecture and gain recognition of the Cooperative Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) as on a parallel with NATO by the UNSC and the EU, thus giving Moscow a veto over the use of force in Europe and elsewhere, gain much traction.

Again, however, Medvedev displayed a good deal of flexibility. Although Moscow agreed to UN sanctions on Iran and North Korea, it relied on overt Chinese opposition in principle to such sanctions to water them down, and tacitly to violate their spirit by continuing to supply Iran with 'defensive' weapons. Arms sales were, to be sure, a lucrative supplier of funds to the Russian arms industry, but they also reflected a continuing commitment to the underlying goal of undermining US influence throughout the world.

---

<sup>15</sup> The Russian Ambassador to the Bosnian Federation, A.B. Kharchenko, has stated that his country would defend the interest of Serbs in B-H against challenges by the Muslim-dominated and EU and NATO supported government. 'Branimo opstanak Republike Srpske,' *Srpski glas*, 6 November 2009, p.4.

Another example of Russian attempts to exert pressure and then backing down when the pressure met with strong resistance concerned the long-attempted effort to join the World Trade Organisation. Under Obama, the longstanding US Congressional opposition to Russian membership (the Jackson-Vanek amendment) was relaxed. Meanwhile, for domestic political and economic reasons, Putin ordered the establishment of a Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan and pledged to seek WTO membership only as a collective applicant. When it was pointed out that such collective memberships were invalid under WTO rules, when Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka began to resist Moscow's conditions for the customs union, and when Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev showed little enthusiasm for joint membership, Moscow backed down and announced that each member of the Customs Union would apply individually.

Nor did Russian efforts to leverage their military and economic 'strategic partnership' with China and India seem to be working as intended. Militarily, the Chinese had begun to develop their own advanced weapons-production programs. Indeed, Rosoboroneksport, the state arms sales monopoly, soon found itself directly competing with cheaper Chinese versions of Russian weapons systems on third-country markets, often with pirated Russian designs. India, meanwhile, had begun to cooperate closely with the USA in developing its own weapons systems. The arrest and pending extradition of Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout from Thailand to the US, over strong Russian Foreign Ministry protests, which suggest an SVR or GRU connection, illustrate the continued murkiness of Russian involvement in foreign military and political affairs<sup>16</sup>

A comprehensive catalogue of Medvedev's (and Putin's) foreign policies is set forth in a 'Program for the Effective Use on a Systematic Basis of Foreign Policy Factors for the Goals of the Long-Term Development of the Russian Federation,' commissioned by Medvedev and submitted for his approval by Foreign Minister Lavrov on 17 May 2010.<sup>17</sup> It is a 35-page wish list of projects for modernizing the Russian economy and fostering Russia's inclusion in all major developments in international affairs in the context of the weakening of US and European power and influence caused by the GFC. Russia demands inclusion in all institutional and policy changes in the economic and security architecture and, where possible, the right of veto over decisions which might affect Russian interests, including changes in the international financial and trade systems. It also contains goals for Russian policies toward selected countries and multilateral structures, such as the EU, the G20, APEC, the SCO and, especially the UNSC and UNGA. Most revealingly, it seeks to circumscribe the ability of the UNSC and individual countries to impose sanctions on countries, which in Russia's opinion do not constitute a threat to general world peace and security.<sup>18</sup> In this connection, it targets US sanctions against Russian firms which allegedly quite legally supply arms to countries like Iran, and Syria that are considered rogue states in the West.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Especially in connection with the recent affair of the ten Russian 'sleepers' exchanged for Russian informers for the USA held in Russian detention, sometimes called the 'Anna Chapman Affair'. Hennessy and Knight, BBC, loc.cit. Further speculation on Bout's high-level intelligence connections see Peter Yost and Stephen Braun, 'U.S., Russia face off over alleged arms trafficker.' *Post*, 23 August 2010, reproduced in Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#159, item 23. <[www.cdi.org/russia/johnson](http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson)>, accessed 23 August 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Published in Russian by *Russkii Newsweek* on 17 May 2010., pp. 1-35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

By and large, few of Russia's initiatives in foreign policy reflected in Lavrov's ambitious project have borne much fruit. That is partly because the gap between policies and their implementation remains wide, which, in turn, reflects a certain ambivalence on the part of the bureaucrats involved about making the kinds of compromises with target countries that true diplomacy requires. In the words of Stephen Blank of the US Army War College, in reference to Russia's failure to treat Japan with consideration, despite her strategic and economic importance in the Far East, 'Evidently, the old Soviet idea that you can only be friends with someone you can intimidate, still dominates elite thinking in Moscow.'<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusions

Early post-Soviet Russia was adrift in its foreign and domestic policy. Under the delusion that by eschewing the goals and processes of Soviet socialism, it would be accepted as a member of the Western club of advanced nation-states As part of the presumed bargain, Yel'tsin and his supporters fully accepted the Fukuyama construct of 'the end of history' and the triumph of the democratic-free-market capitalist model. In governance terms, that meant introducing formal-legal rationality and legitimate parliamentary democracy with a separation of powers. Unlike his Stalinist predecessors, however, he had not annihilated his opponents, and their increasingly strident opposition to his policies of cooperation with the West soon led to chaos and a direct clampdown on challenges to his policies. By the end of his reign, Yel'tsin himself had begun to question his pro-Western orientation. His selection of V.V.Putin as his successor reflected this turn-about.

Gradually, as Putin restored order in the system and brought about changes in the way formal-legal institutions operated, it became increasingly clear that the operation of his so-called 'dictatorship of laws' was subordinate to his personal wishes and perspectives and to the whims of the juridical and functional bureaucracies involved in implementing his policies. Thus, although the levers of decision-making power were concentrated in Putin's hands at the apex of the 'vertical of power,' there was a certain amount of bargaining among the various groupings of his supporters. In short, under this evolving 'neo- patrimonial' system, formal rationality, in Weberian terms, served as a mere fig leaf for substantive rationality. In any event, Putin did not realistically have to worry very much about public support for his policies. In a Weberian sense, the formal rationality basis of his (and Medvedev's) authority rested on compliance with the wishes of his bureaucratic supporters, primarily among the *siloviki*.<sup>21</sup> Opinion polls have shown declining interest among the populace at large in political matters, which they see as a 'dirty business.'<sup>22</sup>

What was still lacking was some form of goal legitimation, that is, an ideology with which to bind the various institutional and personal components of the system to a common purpose. This is not necessarily a universal impulse, but it was especially

---

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Blank, 'Russia Insults Japan Even As It Seeks Peace and Friendship.' Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 7, Issue 154, August 10, 2010, pp. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> This important point was suggested to me by an anonymous reviewer of this essay, for which I express my thanks.

<sup>22</sup> Olga Zhermeleva, 'Sociologists Say That the Russians Become Increasingly More Apolitical.' RBC Daily 12 April 2011. In JRL No. 2011 # 65. 12 April 2011 <[www.worldsecurityinstitute.org](http://www.worldsecurityinstitute.org)>, accessed 12 April 2011.

powerful within the inherited political culture of Soviet bolshevism. In the words of Valerii Senderov,

‘...the fact, perhaps, is not so much in the [content] of the idea itself as in the permanent longing for it. In the aggressive longing for finality and clarity, primitiveness and simplicity—in the basic feeling of the nostalgic post-Soviet mentality.’ [my translation]<sup>23</sup>

The content of the anti-American nationalist ideology began to emerge under Putin, after a brief hiatus of closer ties with the USA following the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001. According to Andreas Umland and other authors cited by him in the Introduction to the symposium volume cited above, the nationalist, anti-American and anti-Western ideological campaign was not purposely focussed on popular sentiment until 2005 and became more or less official in 2007 in Putin’s Munich speech already mentioned.

The goal of the emerging ideology, which in Rigby’s terms served to legitimise Russian foreign policy, was to advance Russian national interests, as interpreted by Putin and Medvedev, by thwarting US efforts at collective action to maintain its hegemony in international affairs. The five-day war against Georgia in August 2008 intensified this hostility to the West. As long as Russia seemed to be relatively unaffected by the GFC, this goal played a significant role in rallying support for the policy of taking advantage of American weakness to push for changes in the world economic and security architecture.

It was only after the full effect of the collapse of oil revenues and foreign investment in the Russian economy and the failure of efforts to leverage Russian control over resources and downstream capacities became apparent, that Putin and Medvedev began to change their tone. In particular, they sought to take advantage of the new ‘re-set’ offered by US President Obama to improve relations and to try to attract Western technology and capital to accelerate the reform of the Russian military and improve the competitiveness of Russia’s scientific and technological establishments. However, this change of tone does not necessarily signify abandonment of the overall goal of reducing American power and influence in the management of major international issues.

The entire system of legitimation rests on the strength of leadership of Putin and his alter ego Medvedev. Their carefully scripted image of strength, decisiveness and wisdom are the cement which has held together what is essentially a hierarchical neo-Soviet authoritarian system. The Russian nationalist ideology which legitimises their actions and the modes for undertaking them is essentially a negative one. The evident shortcomings in their responses to the recent series of calamities and natural disasters have illustrated the rigidity and inefficiencies of their evolving governance model and may call into question the automatic support they have enjoyed in the past.<sup>24</sup> Both leaders of the tandem seem to be ambivalent, not to say concerned, over

---

<sup>23</sup> Boris Senderov, ‘Neoevraziistvo: real’nost.’ opasnost.’ perspektivy.’ in Andreas Umland (ed.) *Antizapadnye ideologicheskie techeniia v postsovetsoi Rossii I ih istoki*, Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeskoii istorii I kul’tury – Russkoe izdanie, No. 1, 2009. p. 115. <<http://www.1.ku.eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/inhaltruss11.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> Most notably the suicide bombings in the Moscow Metro and Domodedovo airport and the bushfires and later winter freeze showed Medvedev, in particular, to be weak on action. Not even Putin’s customary ‘Action Man’ blather seemed to have the customary effect on the population.

the democratic turmoil in the Middle East. Medvedev, at least rhetorically, appears to be more accommodating of the changes, but the differences between them are probably being overdrawn by both domestic and foreign observers. At the time of writing, no-one seems to be able to predict which of them will choose to run for President in the 2012 elections. They may not yet have decided themselves.

The new ideology is thus not really comparable to the universalistic, positively oriented ideology of Marxism-Leninism which preceded it. Nor can the new model of moderate authoritarian control over politics and the media be compared with the monopolisation of truths achieved under Stalin and opportunistically extended under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Rigby's conception of goal rationality is thus not strictly applicable to this new power configuration, but it does provide some useful criteria for distinguishing the post-Soviet system from its predecessors and highlighting the search for some sort of orientational ideology.