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FOREIGN AND
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THESES ON RUSSIA'S
FOREIGN POLICY
**AND GLOBAL
POSITIONING**
(2017–2024)

FOREIGN AND
SECURITY POLICY

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Abstract and **key points**

The theses on foreign policy presented below are the result of a project co-run by the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). As part of the project, 30 interviews were conducted with RIAC members: prominent diplomats, major international relations experts, media executives and entrepreneurs. As a separate part of the project, a series of case studies were conducted with the participation of experts and RIAC members. Work on the project was closely related to other aspects of the CSR's activity with regard to the most topical issues of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. The theses were based upon the results of a parallel study conducted by a team of researchers at the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The key findings of this study are as follows:

The modern world is at a crossroads. There is a high possibility that rivalry between the key players will intensify. A number of global problems are worsening. At the same time, the level of globalization that has been reached to date allows for negative trends to be mitigated by making the cost of conflicts unacceptably high. It is in Russia's best interests to help ensure that this is the scenario that unfolds. Efforts to facilitate the resolution of conflicts and help create a comfortable, democratic, controllable and safe international environment without boundaries and divisions should form the core of Russia's global positioning. It should not be a fundamental premise of Russia's foreign policy to count on the inevitable "chaotization" of international relations.

Russia is one of the most prominent powers in the world today. It has managed to overcome the threat of disintegration and the most difficult political consequences that resulted from the collapse of the USSR. The country conducts an active foreign policy, and is consistent in protecting its interests abroad. At the same time, Russia is lagging behind in a number of critical areas. This backwardness undermines Russia's sovereignty, restricts its foreign policy potential, and limits the available foreign political arsenal to a narrow choice of instruments. Overcoming this is a strategic task that is critical to Russia's global positioning.

The underdevelopment of the Russian economy and its governance institutions poses a much more significant threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity than realistic military threats that Russia is already well protected from. A favorable

international environment needs to be created in order to tackle these problems. It is impossible to overcome this underdevelopment in isolation from the increasingly globalizing outside world. Russia is faced with the urgent need to produce an optimal formula that would help it benefit from globalization in the interests of its own development, while simultaneously retaining room for broad foreign political manoeuvre in the interests of protecting its security.

Participation in globalization processes, and developing foreign policy that serves the interests of the country's development while preserving strategic security independence, is the essence of Russia's global positioning. To achieve this goal, several interconnected tasks must be resolved.

1

THE FIRST TASK is to radically change the country's policy in the post-Soviet space through the creation of appealing economic integration and collective security institutions. Russia should also transcend the borders of the "post-Soviet" paradigm through cooperation with partners outside the region. Overcoming boundaries and settling conflicts in the post-Soviet states, the most violent of which is the conflict in Donbass, is also on the agenda.

2

THE SECOND TASK is to use and actively develop non-Western lines of economic and political cooperation. There is an imbalance in Russia's relations with China and India, which are its key strategic partners, between the high level of political confidence and the relatively weak economic interaction. The same is observed in Russia's relations with a number of other partners. What is required here is a qualitative strengthening of the economic foundations of these relations, using growth power of new development centers in order to overcome Russia's underdevelopment. In many cases, Russia's partnerships with other countries are restricted by the structure of its economy and the narrow range of its exports. Russia should be consistent in eliminating obstacles to bilateral ties such as cumbersome customs procedures, infrastructural limitations, etc.

3

THE THIRD TASK is to be consistent in securing compromises on key political problems in Russia's relations with the West. This means preventing a new arms race, reformatting the Euro-Atlantic security system, maintaining selective cooperation on common problems with a view to engaging in other aspects of such cooperation, and changing the spirit of Russia's relations with the West from confrontation to mutually beneficial cooperation in the modern polycentric world.

6

THE FOURTH TASK is to reinforce the global governance institutions, while the UN will secure the central role. Russia needs to create a larger, common interest in tackling common global problems. Such topics as global energy security, food security, cyber security, cooperation on climate change and the environment have huge potential in this respect. At the same time, Russia should maintain its stance on those issues on which it already has a strong position, such as nuclear non-proliferation, peacekeeping, space exploration, polar research, etc.

THE FIFTH TASK is to link Russia's foreign policy to its domestic development goals. This will require diversification of its foreign policy instruments. The country should actively involve regions, businesspeople, universities and non-governmental organizations in international cooperation, and also create a comfortable environment for highly qualified migrants and investors.

Two extreme alternatives need to be avoided in foreign politics. The first alternative is self-isolation, the militarization of the economy and society, and rigid centralization against the background of Russia's involvement in further conflicts. The second alternative is a chaotic retreat with unilateral concessions and capitulations forced by worsening problems at home. Both these alternatives are fraught with catastrophe for the country.

Russia's future in the modern world is defined by the viability of its production forces, the quality of its human capital, and the stability and effectiveness of its state governance institutions. Without a qualitative leap forward at home, Russia is doomed to a peripheral role in the world. It is a strategic priority of Russia's foreign policy to create favourable international conditions for such a leap to take place.

The Situation in the Modern World

THESIS 1

The modern world is undergoing radical transformations, which are part of a protracted period that has been unfolding since the end of the Cold War. However, these transformations have taken on a new quality in the past several years. From the transition mode of the past 25 years, the system of international relations started to deteriorate towards serious conflicts between the key players. New divisions emerged, with the conflict between Russia and the West as a whole is one of the most prominent examples of this new reality.

At the same time, the modern world is characterized by an unprecedented level of globalization, human and capital mobility, and opportunities for cooperation in an extremely broad variety of areas. The globalization factor has so far mitigated the political contradictions. Nevertheless, the very process of globalization has been developing signs of serious imbalances. These imbalances are capable of amplifying political contradictions and social stratification, thus eroding the system of international relations and increasing the risks of open conflicts between the established centers of power.

The international environment is undergoing transformations on multiple levels. The balance of power is changing, as are international institutions, technologies, the resource base for economic development, and the cultural and civilizational landscape.

The modern world is at a crossroads. The current trend towards conflict may intensify, undermining the achievements of globalization, or the globalization trend may take hold, rendering the cost of conflicts unacceptably high.

It is in Russia's best interests to help make sure that it is the latter scenario that unfolds. Russia is a major center of global politics. Efforts to facilitate the resolution of conflicts and help create a comfortable, democratic, controllable, and safe international environment without boundaries and divisions should form the core of Russia's global positioning.

THESIS 2

The key property of the changing balance of power is the creation of a polycentric world. The United States' political, military, and economic might is slowly declining, even though it will remain a superpower in the foreseeable future, as one of the leading states with a high margin of strength and leadership in the Western world.

China's military and economic potential is growing. The Chinese economy is likewise undergoing fundamental transformations. China is becoming one of the world's centers of innovation. Its role in the Asia-Pacific is growing considerably. At the same time, the potential of South Korea and particularly of Japan, both key allies of the United States in the Asia-Pacific, is increasing.

The European Union plays an active part in the global economy. Its political clout may grow in the future despite the difficulties of European integration. The EU will remain one of the centers of global innovation.

India commands significant long-term potential. Its economic growth and impressive internal developmental transformations will inevitably boost the country's military and political role in the international sphere.

Russia retains serious military and political potential. Even though its economy is not comparable to any of the aforementioned centers of power, it is capable of taking on a game-changing role in Europe, the Arctic, the Asia-Pacific, Central Asia and the Middle East.

The dynamic transformations to the balance of power are fraught with conflicts between the key players on their way out and those on their way in. The contradictions between China and the United States could potentially become systemically important to international relations in the next several decades.

Nevertheless, an open conflict between China and the United States is not a foregone conclusion. The political contradictions between the two countries coexist with a high level of bilateral economic cooperation. Washington and Beijing could work out a mutually beneficial formula for interaction.

It should not be a fundamental premise of Russia's foreign policy to count on the inevitable "chaotization" of international relations.

One of the key characteristics of the modern world order is that the majority of countries are gradually departing from the classical concept of political and military alliances based on mutual obligations. Despite the fact that the existing blocs (first and foremost NATO) will live on and possibly even strengthen their role, coalitions and alliances of convenience will become a widespread form of interaction in the short to the medium term. Such associations will be aimed at tackling specific challenges to the interests of their participants, and will address a limited number of specific problems.

At the same time, the participation of two or more countries in such a coalition does not rule out the possibility of their having diverging interests or even confrontations on other international topics. Russia could initiate such coalitions and become an active party to them by conducting a flexible and pragmatic foreign policy.

THESIS 3

Global and regional governance institutions are experiencing serious transformations as well. The UN has managed to retain its status as the key legitimate multilateral global institution. However, its influence is becoming increasingly limited by disagreements among the permanent members of the Security Council, as well as by precedents of unilateral use of military force circumventing the international law, and attempts to label the organization's role as something out-dated and belonging to the Cold War era. Nevertheless, there is not a single institution that will be able, in the foreseeable future, to become an alternative to the UN. It is in Russia's best interests, therefore, to actively strengthen the UN's role in tackling international problems.

The role of informal associations is rather noticeable in global governance. Russia's participation in the establishment of the G20 and BRICS is a significant foreign political resource for the country. Nevertheless, the weight that these institutions carry when it comes to addressing global problems has so far been limited.

The role of regional integration institutions and projects is similarly growing. The EU, despite its internal problems, is the most successful example of profound economic and political integration. The United States has until recently been attempting to create new associations. Although Washington is currently subjecting this policy to a radical revision, in the long term, the United States will make serious effort to create American-centric institutions and organizations. China is also forming new structures and processes such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Belt and Road Initiative. Russia is a prominent participant in the Eurasian economic integration process, and also supports the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Nevertheless, economic integration projects tend to get politicized: they are being influenced by political contradictions among the major countries. This complicates cooperation between regional integration institutions, restricting their inclusiveness and openness.

The Euro-Atlantic region still leads the pack in terms of development of regional political institutions. However, these institutions have so far failed to solve the problem of boundaries in Europe. Negative trends include the development and expansion of NATO, the declining role of the OSCE, Russia's marginalization as applied to Euro-Atlantic security, and the forming of an asymmetric multi-polarity in Europe.

Overall, the institutional system of global and regional political governance has been lagging behind the achievements of economic globalization. This could

result in globalization being undermined, and it also creates fertile ground for political discord among the leading centers of power.

THESIS 4

The transformation of the international environment is accompanied by a technological revolution in a number of fields. Developments related to the internet and mobile devices have resulted in the emergence of an entirely new global information space. This creates broad opportunities for the management of complex systems, but at the same time it breeds new risks. The digital environment is turning into an arena for political competition, in the absence of any significant international rules that would regulate it. The flip side of technological development is the increasing vulnerability and fragility of the modern world.

The nascent energy revolution, with its renewable energy sources, the introduction of electric car engines, shale oil and gas production and so on, poses a challenge to those countries which are dependent on energy exports. Russia is one such country.

The role of new healthcare technologies, environmentally friendly materials, and products is prominent within the overall technological progress. Further development of life quality technologies will be a major trend in the coming decades. However, despite the broad availability of information and communications technologies, it is in this particular sphere that we should expect to find the greatest distance between developed and developing countries.

Defense is also experiencing a technological revolution. The emergence of new weapons systems, the militarization of space and of the digital environment, the availability of precision munitions and weapons based on new physical principles are all creating a new environment for strategic stability. Revised arms control regimes are required to match the new technical challenges.

In the next several decades, consumer demand is to undergo global changes related to the growing quality of life in Asia. This will open up broad growth opportunities to the world economy, in which Russia can and must carve a structural niche.

The resource potential of economic growth and the limits of anthropogenic intervention with the environment remain a global strategic challenge. Russia's natural resources and ecological potential promote the country as one of the key potential actors.

Over the past two decades, Russia has partially managed to absorb the results of global scientific and technological advances. Nevertheless, Russia's role in innovative development is shrinking, which poses a serious challenge to the country's future. Russia's global positioning needs to be closely linked to the task of retaining and developing its scientific and technical potential.

THESIS 5

The cultural and civilizational dynamics of the modern world are changing. Mass migrations have increased the ethnic diversity of societies, fostering an unprecedented convergence of cultures.

At the same time, interreligious differences are becoming more pronounced. International terrorist organizations are actively promoting radical religious doctrines, involving Muslim youth in their orbit. Radical Islamism, which has nothing in common with Islam as a world faith, is turning into the most dangerous ideology. It is also a very widespread ideology, reaching out far beyond the borders of the Greater Middle East. Radical Islamism is seeping into Central Asian countries and Russia's North Caucasus, turning into a key long-term challenge to Russia's security.

The success of radical Islamism is hijacking the crisis of the secular state models in a number of countries. This crisis gives the radicals fertile ground for promoting their ideas and their perception of a just social order. At the same time, the model of multiculturalism in Europe has demonstrated its vulnerability. EU countries have turned into a prominent target for terrorists, with the Islamic population of the EU and the former Soviet countries serving as a cadre pool for the radicals.

Radical Islamism is a common threat. There is, however, no proper coordination of efforts among the main centers of power when it comes to offering resistance to terrorists. The perception of Islamism as a here-and-now problem, one that could be solved militarily or through the democratization of society, is a strategic mistake on the part of Russia's foreign partners. The problem does not boil down to terrorism alone. This is a worldview challenge to basic human values, to the ideas of humanism and enlightenment. The ability of globalization to counter this challenge will be a test for its model of values.

Russia might want to position itself as a mediator in intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue, while acting as an active participant in the global fight on terrorism and radicalism.

2.

Russia Today: The Goals and Objectives of Global Positioning

THESIS 6

Russia is one of the mightiest powers in the world today. It has managed to overcome the threat of disintegration and the most difficult political consequences of the collapse of the USSR. The country conducts an active foreign policy, and is consistent in protecting its interests abroad.

In the medium term, Russia will continue to be one of the strongest military powers in the world. Russia is also a nuclear power. As a result of military reform, the country has a compact, mobile, and well-equipped army. The Russian defense industry's capacity to meet the needs of the country's armed forces is nearing 100%. Direct military aggression against Russia is highly unlikely, even despite the numerical superiority of neighbouring countries and alliances. Nevertheless, the armed forces require further renovation and perfection to embrace technical and command-and-control innovations.

An important resource of Russia's foreign policy is its ability to play an active part in several regions at once: in the Euro-Atlantic region, the Asia Pacific, the Greater Middle East, Central Asia and the Arctic. Russia is also an established, active player in a number of functional areas. These include nuclear non-proliferation, arms control, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, cyber security, food security, space exploration, resource security, etc. Russia is an active mediator for a number of international conflicts and problems (the Iranian nuclear programme, the Middle Eastern settlement, etc.).

A valuable foreign political asset for Russia is its educated multicultural and multi-confessional society, which has centuries of history living side-by-side with many different peoples. Russian is one of the world's most used languages, and the Russian-speaking diaspora is among the world's largest.

Despite the existence of serious problems, Russia's economic potential and domestic market enable it to play a significant role in the Eurasian economic integration processes. Russia is an attractive country for education and labour migration, although this potential does need to be developed seriously.

THESIS 7

At the same time, Russia is lagging behind in a number of critical areas.

This backwardness undermines Russia's sovereignty, restricts its foreign policy potential and limits the available foreign political arsenal to a narrow choice of instruments. Overcoming this is a strategic task that is critical to Russia's global positioning.

The country's economy requires modernization. The weak diversification of exports, the high share of raw materials in those exports, and the country's growing dependence on imports of machinery and technologies are chronic problems facing the Russian economy. High energy prices have only exacerbated these tendencies. Transport infrastructure remains the weakest link: the density and quality of roads, the availability (or unavailability) of modern port terminals all play a part. Even though the situation is gradually changing for the better, much effort needs to be invested in further infrastructure development.

The country's backwardness is also manifested in the quality of state governance institutions. The level of corruption in Russia remains extremely high. With such corrupt structures, the country's openness to globalization and to the world in general may result in it being relegated to a raw-materials status. The country's economy is overly regulated. Institutional defects prevent further development of domestic business and kill potential investment. Russia still faces the problem of creating a comfortable system for entrepreneurs. The government remains overly regulated.

Human capital development is stagnating as well. The threat of depopulation persists. Russia's birth rate is consistent with that of European countries, but it has an abnormally high mortality rate. The education level, which is still rated fairly high globally, is being diluted through talent flight. With taxes as high as they are, healthcare, education and other public services become increasingly less available. Some of the negative trends have been overcome, but the risks of human capital becoming degraded remain high.

The underdevelopment of the Russian economy and governance institutions poses a much more significant threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity than any realistic military threats that Russia is already well protected from. A favourable international environment needs to be created in order to tackle these problems

It is impossible to overcome this underdevelopment in isolation from the increasingly more globalized outside world.

THESIS 8

Clashes with the West as the whole are one of the important characteristics of Russia's contemporary foreign policy. The Ukrainian crisis has resulted in a cascading aggravation of differences that had been mounting in Russia's relations with its Western partners since the 1990s. Russia managed to overcome an attempt at diplomatic isolation, adjust to the sanctions regime, strengthen its relations with China and other strategic partners, and play an active part in the Syrian conflict.

At the same time, confrontation with the West will harm Russia in the long term.

This increases the risk of the country being dragged into an exhausting arms race. It also limits the country's opportunities in terms of attracting investments. It narrows the country's business opportunities abroad, including outside the Euro-Atlantic region. Pockets of instability remain in Ukraine near the Russian state border. This complicates coordination in addressing common global problems and challenges to security. Difficulties emerge in the Eurasian economic integration process. The country is suffering reputational losses due to the media war that has been unleashed.

The conflict with the West forces Russia to choose between sovereignty and security on the one hand and its participation in global cross-border activity on the other. In the paradigm that has emerged lately, addressing security issues is detrimental to Russia's participation in globalization processes. The reverse is also true: foreign partners often condition Russia's participation in major international projects on certain political concessions it has to make. This paradigm does nothing to address the problem of Russia's backwardness, which is the key threat to the country's sovereignty.

Russia faces the urgent need to solve the dilemma between sovereignty and globalization, find an optimal formula for gaining benefits from globalization in the interests of its own development while retaining room for broad foreign political manoeuvre and for protecting its security interests.

THESIS 9

Participation in globalisation, and pursuing a foreign policy in the interest of the country's development, while preserving strategic security independence, is the key goal of Russia's global positioning. To achieve this goal, several interconnected tasks must be completed.

1

THE FIRST TASK is qualitative changes to policies in the post-Soviet space; these changes could be effected through establishing attractive institutions of economic integration and collective security, going beyond the "post-Soviet" paradigm through cooperation with out-of-the-region partners, overcoming constraint lines and settling conflicts within the post-Soviet space.

2

THE SECOND TASK is utilizing and actively developing non-western areas of economic and political cooperation. There is an imbalance between the high levels of political confidence and relatively weak economic collaboration in relations with China and India, the country's key strategic partners. The same is true with regard to several other partners. Qualitative enhancement of economic foundations of these relations is required, using the growth energy of the new development centers in Asia in the interests of overcoming underdevelopment.

3

THE THIRD TASK is the consistent achievement of compromises in resolving key political problems in relations with the West, which includes preventing an arms race, solving the security issues, engaging in selective cooperation on common problems with prospective expansion of cooperation areas, and changing the spirit of relations between Russia and the West from confrontational to mutually beneficial cooperation in a polycentric world.

4

THE FOURTH TASK is to move toward strengthening global governance institutions under the condition that the UN retains its pivotal role, press for UN reform and for the organization to be adapted to the new reality by proposing Russia's own initiatives in cooperation with foreign partners. It is in Russia's interests to promote the concept of global benefits and global resource security.

5

THE FIFTH TASK is tying foreign policy closely to the tasks of internal development, which involves diversifying foreign policy instruments, the broader involvement of Russia's regions, businesses, universities, non-commercial organisations in international cooperation, and creating a comfortable domestic environment for highly qualified migrants and investors.

ТЕЗИС 10

Russia's positioning in the world should avoid two extreme alternatives:

The first alternative is Russia's self-isolation, militarization of the economy and society, and rigid centralization against the background of Russia's involvement in further conflicts.

This scenario excludes Russia from globalization processes, and places it in a marginal and peripheral position. This would result in the overstrain and increasing underdevelopment. In the long-term, militarization will undermine Russia's military potential: equipping the army with cutting-edge weapons requires a developed economy and a solid technological foundation. Creating such a foundation in a closed country and society appears to be impossible. The "Russia as a fortress" scenario could offer a tactical advantage, but strategically, it will inevitably lead to the gravest of shocks, since it is essentially a model of passive responses to crises.

The second alternative is a chaotic retreat, with unilateral concessions and capitulations forced by sharply escalated domestic problems and a crisis of statehood.

In this case, international marginalization is also unavoidable due to the country's lost potential. In this scenario, weak economy and institutions cannot be compensated for, even with military and political power.

Both these alternatives are interrelated. The militarization and enslavement of society may exacerbate domestic problems and lead to subsequent geopolitical retreat. Conversely, the threat of Russia descending into chaos may lead to an attempt to install order at any cost.

Both of these alternatives are fraught with catastrophe for Russia.

Russia needs a pragmatic balanced foreign policy in the interests of the state and the development of society.

3.

Russia's Positioning in the CIS

THESIS 11

The number of opportunities and threats that Russia faces in the CIS makes it a priority area in Russia's foreign policy.

Russia and the CIS countries have a certain cultural commonality and a common linguistic space, as well as infrastructural connections and a wide range of opportunities for economic integration. Russia and the former Soviet states face similar tasks of modernization and development.

Nevertheless, these opportunities are largely lost in relations with certain republics. In some cases, Russia is positioned as an enemy for the purpose, among others, of national consolidation and legitimization of the current political regimes.

Several former Soviet states possess fragile or vulnerable statehood, which is manifested in open or frozen conflicts, sharp social antagonisms, corrupt state institutions, a peripheral economy or the dependence of the economy on the current state of affairs. Many of Russia's neighbouring states have undergone internal troubles, "color revolutions," and attempted coups d'état. These threats are of concern to Russia. However, unlike its neighbours, Russia has far greater weight and safety margin, and in the last fifteen years, Russia demonstrated the will to strengthen its statehood.

The post-Soviet space has become a competition area for Russia and the bodies of the West (the EU and NATO). This competition peaked with the Ukrainian crisis. Imposed on domestic social conflicts and vulnerability, such competition is dangerous for the stability in the CIS. Thus far, Russia has managed to keep the expansion of the western bodies into the post-Soviet space at bay. However, the problem of competition itself has not been radically resolved. Integration into western bodies or close cooperation with them will remain a long-term attractive project for the CIS countries. Russia too is interested in cooperation with the West on an entire range of issues.

Russia needs a reasonable, consistent and attractive project for the post-Soviet space. This project cannot and should not be based on neo-imperial foundations or a rigid confrontation with the West. Such an approach needs to be given an opportunity for an advanced interaction with both western and eastern initiatives.

The initiative of joining China's "One Belt, One Road" project and the Eurasian Economic Union demonstrates that it is possible, in principle, to neutralize differences by prospectively establishing a stable regional system of international relations.

THESIS 12

The Ukrainian question will remain a long-term priority in politics and policies both in Russia and the CIS. The Ukrainian crisis was provoked by an accumulation of domestic factors: a corrupt state, an impoverished society, and attempts to restrict people's rights and freedoms. Outside forces also influenced the Ukrainian revolution, although, compared to domestic political factors, their role should not be overestimated.

Russia and the West failed to jointly create conditions for overcoming the crisis. The Ukrainian crisis encompassed within itself the entire range of problems in relations between Russia and the West that have been accumulating since the 1990s – the lack of mutual confidence, eroding weapons control regimes, different views on the "color revolutions" and changes of political regimes, NATO expansion, and the zero-sum game in the post-Soviet space

In the course of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia reunited with Crimea, solved the Black Sea Fleet problem, and put a long-term block on Ukraine's membership in NATO.

At the same time, it spawned an entire range of new and very serious problems. For Ukraine, Russia is a strategic enemy. This enmity is entrenched at the level of political ideology and in the mind of the public. For Russia, Ukraine is lost as a partner for a long time. Kiev will consistently build military and political relations with western bodies while not being a NATO member. A military conflict is smouldering close to Russia's borders. The Ukrainian question exacerbated relations with the West, damaging trade, spawning an arms race, and shutting down many areas of cooperation that are of interest to Russia..

All of these factors hold risks for Russia, and so it is necessary to take gradual steps to resolve the Donbass conflict. A one-time deal on Ukraine is impossible, as the problem requires both a dialogue with Kiev and arrangements with the West. Diplomats are facing a lengthy, gradual and bumpy settlement process. A quick solution will be prevented both by intra-Ukrainian factors and contradictions among outside forces.

The Minsk agreements will hardly be carried out in full, and sooner or later they may require revision. Diplomats should concentrate on carrying out those provisions of the Minsk Agreements that would promote the peace process and be acceptable for all the parties. Holding generally recognized elections in the conflict area is an attainable goal.

A comprehensive solution to the problem will require the antagonisms produced by the Ukrainian crisis itself to be resolved and its root causes dealt with.

The Ukrainian question cannot be resolved without a substantial reconstruction of Europe's security system, the creation of effective inclusive institutions, and the removal of separating lines.

THEESIS 13

The emergence of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is a qualitative step forward in establishing mutually beneficial and equal integration structures in the post-Soviet space. The de-politicization of economic integration is a major achievement. Russia should continue the course set for creating the economic foundation of the union while avoiding political clashes.

The EAEU is a young integration union. Much work needs to be done to harmonize the legislation of the member states, create common spaces, and raise the Union's effectiveness. The experience of European integration may prove useful and relevant in this work.

The Eurasian Economic Union has significant potential for international cooperation. The positive experience of a free trade zone with Vietnam should be further developed, and partner ties with other countries and integration blocs should be stimulated. A special place within those ties should be accorded to the project of integrating the EAEU and China's "One Belt, One Road" project. The EAEU should seek recognition as an equal partner by the EU and move forward with depoliticizing the EU–EAEU dialogue.

As integration in the slated cooperation areas deepens, the responsibilities and benefits of the Union should also be gradually broadened. Harmonizing higher education standards of the EAEU member countries and training the labour force for the Union's economies are possible examples of expansion

THEESIS 14

Russia and the CIS countries face common security challenges, which makes the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) relevant as the leading military political institution in the post-Soviet space.

The threat of terrorism and radical Islamism is a key problem of the CSTO countries. The principal

risks lie in Central Asia. The overall exacerbation of the situation in the Middle East has a negative impact on the stability of Central Asia.

Russia should assist the development of the CSTO's potential, strengthen rapid response forces and improve the anti-terrorist component. Other cooperation areas within the CSTO are also important, including developing a joint aerospace defence system. Russia's military technical cooperation with CSTO members is a contribution to enhancing the sovereignty and statehood of Russia's allies.

Building the CSTO's partnership ties with other security organizations is a promising area. The Russia–NATO dialogue should be supplemented with a CSTO–NATO dialogue.

It would be advisable to build up relations between the CSTO and the SCO. Such a partnership could resolve the issue of security in overland stretches of the “One Belt, One Road” project.

The post-Soviet space has a number of frozen conflicts. Russia should continue to apply efforts to resolve the Karabakh conflict, acting as an intermediary in the Armenia–Azerbaijan dialogue. Also, discussions of the project of resolving the Transnistria issue should be resumed. Furthermore, in order to restore diplomatic ties and normalize relations with Georgia, a return to the visa-free regime and effecting reconciliation between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be pursued.

Russia and Non-Western Countries

THESIS 15

The People's Republic of China is Russia's key global and regional partner. The countries adhere to common stances on a range of global order issues. To extrapolate, the two states consistently advocate for a multi-polar world, Russia shares the idea of economic co-development that is an important component of China's foreign political philosophy. All territorial disputes have been resolved and the border has been demilitarized on both sides. The leaders of the two countries have established trust-based partner relations, and the two governments maintain an intensive dialogue.

The comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries does not entail a military-political alliance. The dynamic relations should not restrict either Russia or China in their partnerships with other countries of the region.

Russia should adhere to careful policies in its approaches to the problem of the South China Sea territories and avoid being drawn into regional conflicts.

Given the western sanctions, Russia's key interest in its relations with China is economic development. Nonetheless, the economic dimension of the bilateral relations lags significantly behind the political dialogue. Growth is mostly restricted by the structure of the Russian economy and the state of its infrastructure. Economic collaboration is dominated by trade, with the investment component being weak. The political will of the leadership of the two countries assists in implementing large-scale joint projects. However, at the same time, it is necessary to create a favourable environment for small and medium-sized business. These problems also manifest themselves in the joining the EAEU and the "One Belt, One Road" project.

The potential for humanitarian cooperation with China remains largely underused. This also requires a favourable environment for educational and cultural exchanges to be created. It would be advisable to introduce policy aimed towards further liberalizing the visa regime. Russian exporters desperately need the knowledge and skills such policy would bring in order to work on the Chinese market.

Progress in relations with China largely depends on the efforts that Russia expends on developing its own economy and reforming its institutions. Overcoming restrictions in this area will have a positive impact on the potential of cooperation with China

THESIS 16

Russia's partnership ties in the Asia Pacific should be diversified. It is necessary to develop the closest possible ties with the countries of Northeast Asia, specifically Japan and South Korea. As in the case of China, partnership with these countries is limited by the structure of the Russian economy, the narrow limits of its exports, and the small market capacity of Russia's Far Eastern regions. It is necessary to consistently remove barriers in bilateral relations, most notably the cumbersome customs procedures, infrastructural restrictions, etc.

Joint regional projects, such as the Asian Energy Ring initiative, are a promising area. Such projects have a positive regional impact and are advantageous for Russia.

Liberalizing the visa regime with South Korea was a major step forward. If the path of further liberalization is followed, Seoul may significantly increase South Korea's appeal for Russian businesses.

The dialogue with Japan on the territorial question should be continued. Russia's diplomats should channel their efforts into minimizing the influence this issue has on economic and humanitarian collaboration between the two countries.

Russia remains an important participant in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. The creation of the regional missile defence system in South Korea and Japan may be one negative consequence of the maintenance of the North Korea's nuclear programme programme, and that will influence the region's strategic stability. Russia's stance on this issue may be coordinated with China, and the dialogue with South Korea, Japan, and the United States is required.

The development of ties with the countries of Southeast Asia remains an underused asset. The idea of a greater Eurasian partnership with ASEAN participation should be brought to fruition. Otherwise, Russia will lose its reputation as an initiator of large international projects

THESIS 17

India has traditionally friendly relations with Russia, as well as major potential for further growth and development. Russia and India have similar approaches to many issues on the global agenda. Both countries closely coordinate their actions in BRICS and the SCO. Significant experience has been accumulated in military-technical cooperation, space exploration, peaceful nuclear development and other areas. Russia–India relations are developing independently of their relations with third countries.

At the same time, the dynamics of Russia's economic collaboration with India is close to stagnation. Russia risks losing its competitive edge in its traditional market niches.

In particular, India is increasing its own scientific and producing potential in weapons production. Leading global companies are fighting for the Indian market.

To compete, Russia will be required to expand cooperation areas and imbue them with new qualities. The legal framework of Russia–India relations needs to be improved; excessive tariff and non-tariff barriers need to be gradually removed; business contacts at the level of small and medium-sized businesses need to be expanded; public institutions and mechanisms for facilitating business communication and altering mutual images in the two countries need to be instituted. Efforts undertaken by governmental bodies to achieve a quality breakthrough will be insufficient. Together with major projects, it is necessary to create an environment that stimulates India's interest in Russian exports and investments into Russia.

Given the significant part that federalism and individual states play in the political and economic life of India, qualitatively new approaches to inter-regional cooperation are required.

THESIS 18

Russia's role in the Middle East and North Africa is increasing. Several countries of the region have experienced grave statehood crises. Civil wars rage on in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan, provoking unprecedented waves of refugees and forcibly displacing persons both within the region and beyond it. Radical Islamic groups are multiplying with the large and passionate youth populations being easy prey for recruitment. The region is politically fragmented and pan-regional security and development institutions are either absent or not working.

The region's security challenges go beyond its borders. They undermine security in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Euro-Atlantic.

When Russia intervened in the Syrian conflict, it had significantly stepped up its military presence in the region. Russia's criticism of the intervention of outside forces in the revolutionary processes in individual states appears justified. At the same time, Russia should go beyond the Syrian problem.

It would be advisable to propose an initiative to establish a pan-regional security system.

Such an initiative should be preliminarily worked out in detail by experts and coordinated with Russia's key partners in the region. Holding a high-level international conference on the security system in the Middle East and North Africa could become a first step in implementing such an initiative.

Creating effective regional institutions with a primary goal of ensuring peace, settling conflicts and fighting radical Islamism should be the strategic goal. Peace in the region is the principal condition for its economic revival.

Russia should actively press to end the civil war in Syria; it should attract regional and out-of-the-region states to contribute constructively.

Fighting radical terrorist groups should remain one of Russia's foreign policy priorities. Russia should press for coordination with the Western coalition in this area, keeping in mind the degree of readiness that the United States and its allies demonstrate for such interaction.

Russia's policy in the Middle East is currently dominated by its military-political agenda, a tactic that needs to change. Russia has the opportunity to increase exports into the region's countries. A systemic inventory of Russia's projects and proposals for the region's countries is required.

The possibilities for economic collaboration are underused. Infrastructural problems prevent the development of promising trade relations, and it would be advisable for Russia, together with its EAEU partners, to carry out an expert assessment of the possibility of establishing new free trade areas with states of the region. Russia should continue the course for establishing a dialogue with Saudi Arabia on oil prices.

It is important to prevent a collapse of the agreement on the Iranian nuclear problem, due, in particular, to the possible changes in the approaches of the United States on the issue.

THESIS 19

Cooperation with Latin American countries remains on the periphery of Russia's interests. Geographical factors and Russia's narrow range of offers in economy and trade influence the situation. The partnership between Russia and Brazil in BRICS is thus far limited to discussing the most general questions and has little influence on bilateral relations.

Russia could expand its presence on the region's markets.

Together with the region's countries, Russia could also propose a global initiative on resource security.

THESIS 20

In the foreseeable future, cooperation with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa will be of low intensity, although historically Russia has built friendly relations with many of these countries.

Russia's African policy should proceed from the notion that the continent's population is growing and the quality of life is improving, and this opens up new opportunities for exporters. A thorough review of projects and proposals for the region's countries is required.

5.

Russia and **the West**

THESIS 21

Russia's relations with the West are at their worst since the Cold War. The West views Russia as the key security challenge, and a destabilizing factor in the European and global order. Moscow views NATO's expansion, the EU's eastern policy, and the disruption of strategic stability (i.e. the U.S. missile defence) as a challenge. Moscow is critical of intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states and of the policies the United States and its allies carry out in the Middle East. The Ukrainian question is the key stumbling block in Russia's relations with the West.

Russia's competition with the West is a long-term factor. A certain confrontational "rut" has formed, and will be extremely difficult to break out of. A quality improvement in relations requires a lengthy and consistent policy of normalization and changes both in Russian and Western approaches.

At the same time, the contradictions between Russia and the West are mostly political. Unlike during the Cold War, there is no acute ideological confrontation. Russia is a market economy and it continues to develop democratic institutions, even if this does not always go entirely smoothly. There are no existential differences between Russia and the West. Moreover, the number of common challenges and threats, including those of radical Islamism, is growing. Exacerbating their contradictions, Russia and the West are losing crucial time needed to counteract common challenges.

The current paradigm of relations is fraught with escalation into a limited or full-fledged military conflict. The consequences such a conflict could have for Europe and the world as a whole could be grievous.

Confrontation with the West would be a loss for Russia. In the near future, the United States, the EU and several other countries will remain the center of economic growth, largely determining the model of globalization. The conflict contributes to Russia's marginalization in international institutions and projects; it is also fraught with major economic losses. Russia is forced to expend energy on excessive military and political competition that distracts the country from the tasks of modernization and development.

At the same time, Russia may not accept a range of western policies, including: the expansion of NATO as an institution that excludes Russia; the disruption of strategic stability due to the missile defence system deployment in Europe; active attempts to change the country's foreign policy through various means, including, among others, the use of economic and political instruments (sanctions and other measures); and double standards and approaches to the political transition in several countries.

Russia needs its own positive strategy for developing long-term relations with the West. Such a strategy has too often been substituted with tactic actions.

The strategy of relations with the West should be oriented toward the following goals:

1. minimizing the risk of an armed conflict;
2. ensuring nuclear and missile strategic stability;
3. step-by-step settlement of conflicts in the post-Soviet space, primarily in Donbass;
4. adapting the European security system to the new reality;
5. seeking mutually beneficial modalities in Russia–NATO relations;
6. step-by-step lifting of mutual sanctions and discriminatory regimes;
7. returning to full-fledged economic cooperation;
8. liberalizing the visa regime and expanding humanitarian cooperation.

THESIS 22

Russia-US relations form the core of the Euro-Atlantic security. The gravest crisis in the Russia-US relations is exacerbated by the low level of economic interdependence. Despite the existing differences, both parties are interested in continuing the dialogue. Principal areas of interaction with the US on security issues should include the following:

1. Cooperation in control and non-proliferation of nuclear missiles, reducing the risk of a nuclear conflict. It is necessary to start developing parameters of a new agreement on reducing strategic nuclear weapons to replace the Prague Treaty after it expires in 2021. Efforts should be made to preserve the agreement on short and medium-range missiles, to press for removing reciprocal recriminations pertaining to its implementation.

2. A strategic security dialogue, removing differences regarding the missile defence in Europe. It should be kept in mind that an alternative to this decision lies in a mutually dangerous arms race in strategic nuclear weapons. A comprehensive approach to strategic stability appears justified, with a dialogue on nuclear weapons that takes into account the state of defence systems.
3. Interaction on cyber security. Joint work together with other interested parties on digital environment control regimes. Prevention of reciprocal hostile incidents in cyber space and of their escalation. Perception of cyber space as a strategic stability factor.
4. Cooperation in space exploration and prevention of its militarisation.
5. Dialogue on conventional weapons control in Europe taking into account new technological realities.

In the foreseeable future, Russia and the US will keep facing difficulties in enhancing economic cooperation. Business will remain under the pressure of mutual sanctions. However, it is necessary to preserve and develop cooperation in those areas that are not regulated by the sanctions. American business is still cutting-edge regarding management techniques and labour productivity. Russia needs to know and use the best approaches to organizing business development environment.

Of utmost importance is preserving broad humanitarian ties, particularly in education and science. Priority task in this area is systematizing work with Russian-speaking science and technology diaspora.

THESIS 23

Long-term, the European Union remains Russia's crucial partner in trade and economy. Russia is an integral part of the European civilisation. At the same time, Russia and the EU are at variance on a whole range of political issues. The Ukrainian crisis put a freeze on cooperation in most areas. The EU has shaped a new doctrinal base for relations with Russia where Russia is defined as a key security challenge.

Nonetheless, there are several opportunities for minimising the damage done by the Ukrainian crisis. These opportunities should be used simultaneously with resolving the Ukrainian question and other political problems.

Russia and the EU should jointly determine the sphere, areas, and expected results of selective cooperation that both sides could be ready for, yet in the current difficult political circumstances.

In a more distant future it will be in Russia's interests to return to the idea of the four common spaces proclaimed by the partners in 2003 in Saint-Petersburg: economic cooperation; freedom, security and justice; external security; science and culture.

It is of utmost importance to preserve the network of humanitarian contacts accumulated over the last decades. Political differences should not put the brakes on the dialog on the visa issues. It makes sense to let experts detail the potential economic benefits and technical requirements for different ways of visa facilitation and substitution of visa with other forms of control.

In the next two decades, Russia's presence on the EU's energy markets will be decreasing due to the politicisation of the cooperation in energy, to the EU seeking alternative suppliers, to innovations in energy. Russia needs to diversify her energy sales markets and the national export as a whole.

Russia should maintain her distance from the political processes within the EU and from supporting either the extreme right or the extreme left. The use of traditionally strong bilateral relations with leading member-states of the EU, as well as gradually resolving the issues with more difficult partners, is expedient.

Russia should put forward her own long-term vision of the Russia–EU relations.

Functional areas and **foreign policy instruments**

THESIS 24

Russia is a member of the key international institutions of global governance; the permanent membership in the UN Security Council is crucial. Russia should care to retain her status under any UN reforms. In collaboration with foreign partners, Russia should actively work on increasing the UN's role in international affairs and on increasing the role and efficiency of UN organisations. Russia could initiate a debate on the prospects of international law. The discussion could be launched by a network of research institutions representing a wide variety of states.

Institutions such as G20 have to be strengthened.

Russia has to develop her niche in the solving of global problems. Such areas as global energy security, food security, cyber-security, cooperation on climate and environmental issues are promising. At the same time Russia has to keep its assets where they are already strong: nuclear non-proliferation, peacekeeping, space exploration, the Arctic research.

THESIS 25

Cooperation in higher education and international scientific and technical cooperation (ISTC) remains Russia's largely underused asset.

Russia requires a comprehensive development program for developing educational export potential of Russia's universities.

Russia's share of the global educational market is extremely small. What is required is the lowering of administrative and visa barriers for students and researchers, developing educational programs in English, training Russian personnel to work with foreign students, marketing Russian educational programs, investing into teaching Russian to foreign applicants and students, investing into a comfortable social educational environment for foreign students.

The regulatory legal framework for developing the ISTC has long been ripe for improvements.

Russia's ISTC concept should be revised to reflect its strategic goals, principles, priority areas, mechanisms for implementation and promotion. Possible measures for developing the ISTC include launching an ISTC information analytical system, investing in international publishing, promoting Russia's interests in cooperation with international non-governmental ISTC organizations, stepping up work with the Russian academic diaspora abroad. Russian embassies should start active work with the academic diaspora.

Increasing revenues from educational and ISTC exports to the level of revenues from exporting weapons or food products should be posited as the strategic goal.

THESIS 26

Migration is a key global problem that needs to be addressed. Russia is an important actor in the international migration agenda, as it receives large numbers of labour migrants. At the same time, the drain of qualified labour and their loss of ties with Russia is a major problem.

Russia requires a comprehensive migration policy aimed at resolving the problem of labour deficit, mitigating consequences of depopulation, ensuring economic growth, and reducing the risks of inter-ethnic conflicts in Russia.

Migration policy should stress the integration of migrants into Russian society. Limiting migration policy to policing and control will reduce Russia's competitive edge in attracting labour resources.

Given the tasks of technological modernization and economic development, measures should be taken immediately to seriously liberalize the visa institution for the highly educated labor force, businesspersons, and investors.

THESIS 27

The Russian diplomatic school deservedly enjoys the reputation of one of the world's most professional. Russia has formed a clockwork mechanism for interagency coordination and crisis response.

However, in the current situation, governmental institutions require modernization, moreover they cannot single handedly assume the entire responsibility for all the areas of international cooperation.

Insufficient activity of non-governmental bodies, businesses, and the Russian regions, a lack of strategic vision and strategic action constitute a weakness in the Russian politics and policies. It is therefore necessary to:

- Qualitatively expand the participation of Russia's businesses in Russia's international ties. This task may be solved by supporting exporters, through large international investment projects, and by supporting the participation of Russian businesses in international business associations.
- Systematize the current economic diplomacy institutions keeping in mind the experience of foreign countries, particularly of Western Europe.
- Provide Russian regions with broader international powers, particularly in economy and trade.
- Increase investments into recently established institutions of expert and public diplomacy, to increase their staffing potential.

Educational standards for diplomats require systemic revision; it is also necessary to develop education programs for non-governmental diplomacy professionals. Traditionally strong linguistic training should be supplemented with a flexible set of interdisciplinary learning and competences. Today's diplomat should be fluent in the key economic, technological, social tendencies, and possess profound knowledge of history, politics, and cultures of individual countries and regions.

THESIS 28

There are major difficulties in using Russia's "soft power" abroad. Russia is in a state of information war with the key global centers of information influence. Information war damages Russia's image, influences investors' decisions, and undermines humanitarian ties. Anti-Russian information campaign should not be expected to lose steam.

It is necessary to consistently decrease the degree of information confrontation in the Russian media, to position them as a source of objective and unbiased information.

Investments into promoting Russian media in foreign languages should be increased, and partnerships with foreign media should be formed.

The system of humanitarian cooperation needs to be developed. What is required is a more closely coordinated cooperation between the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) and Russian and foreign universities, research centers, and non-governmental organizations. Russian language and culture remain a significant resource in Russia's global positioning.



These theses do not cover all the possible areas of Russia's global positioning. However, the issues broached here appear crucial in the period of up to 2024. Russia faces tremendous challenges in her domestic development. Russia's future global role hinges on resolving of those challenges. Creating favourable external conditions for resolving the backlog of problems and for overcoming the underdevelopment problem is the key goal of Russia's global positioning. At the same time, Russia can influence the processes of the global order transformation. Russia bears a major part of the responsibility for the world's future. Russia's flexible and pragmatic policies should help complete the reorganisation of international relations smoothly and prevent a new "era of extremes."





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