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## Contemporary Russian International Relations

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Joshua Burnett  
Political Science Thesis

**Contemporary Russian International Relations**

**Joshua Burnett**

**Political Science 488**

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## **Introduction**

Foreign policy politics and foreign relations are a slow process of changes, dialogues, and disagreements, influenced by relationships that extend as long as history has been recorded. For these reasons, the movement of foreign policies is often characterized as relatively slow, set in long-lasting alliances, friendships, and rivalries. Dramatic shifts in foreign relations are generally a rare and significant event, in response to some major catalyst, which can significantly shift commonly accepted associations between nations. The nature of foreign policy as a slow change then makes nations such as Russia a fascinating case to study. Russia has had a political and cultural history no more volatile than most European countries, but the most dramatic events have happened within a more relatively contemporary time period. The recent volatility in history has meant that Russia has suffered from somewhat dramatic shifts in policy goals, as its government, economy, and social structures have collapsed and been entirely rebuilt.

The other aspect of Russia that makes it an interesting study in foreign policy study is the widely regarded status as a world superpower. Before the revolution, Russia was a relatively backwards nation in terms of technology and industry. One focal point of the revolution was industrializing and modernizing Russia, even if it came at a major cost to the population and predominantly rural industries. Thus, the USSR was able to maintain an outside image to the world as a serious competitor to the US and other western nations, through their technological achievements and war industries. Even despite the ruinous Soviet economy, Russia re-emerged after the fall as a powerful nation, politically and economically.

As a general tendency, more powerful nations have a strong tendency to be more involved in foreign events and politics. Russia was no exception to this rule, and even with the

precarious post-Soviet economy, political and economic leaders inserted themselves in issues globally. Russia's tumultuous history, which has caused multiple instances of dramatic shifts in foreign relations, has only magnified Russia's foreign policy choices. In particular, I am looking at the relationship between the United States and contemporary Russia. The two nations had relatively little interaction before the Russian Revolution, and the US-USSR relationship can be broadly summarized as antagonistic. The fall of the USSR was widely seen as a major success in the United States, and a chance to normalize relations with the other 'major' superpower in the world. Since then, the relationship between the two nations can in many cases be described as having a rocky evolution, marred by disagreements in critical areas. Many in the US still seem to regard Russia as a foreign, dangerous power across the world, despite the successes of early diplomacy with post-USSR state.

In this thesis, I will be reviewing the history of the relationship between contemporary Russia and the United States, primarily through the context of their foreign policy agreements and disagreements in the series of wars and conflicts that have occurred since the fall of the Soviet Union. I will be using statements and information taken from the political leadership of the nations and statements by diplomats and representatives to the United Nations Security Council, as representatives of the respective countries, as primary evidence of policy positions and goals. I intend to define and summarize the development of the relationship between the two nations throughout the stages of the past two decades, and to further analyze the primary factors leading to the current situation of Russian-US relations. In particular, the question of whether the transition of Russia as the 'far-away enemy' power of the United States was inevitable, based on geographical and political interests, or whether the defining single leadership of Vladimir Putin,

the long-serving president of Russia, affected or significantly altered the course of US-Russian relations.

## **Legacy of the Soviet Union**

In any discussion on modern Russia, an understanding of the preceding Soviet state, and the causes for its collapse, is essential. The Soviet Union emerged from a significant trauma in Russia's past, coming out of the abuses of Imperial Russia and the desperation of the large working class. Though over two decades past, Soviet Russia is more than recent enough to still exist in any modern political discussion on Russia. Soviet Russia existed for such a long period in history, that the effects it bore on Russian culture and significant and still relevant to contemporary Russia today.

The Soviet Union was created after a series of revolutions in 1917, replacing the Imperial Russian Tsarist regime. The revolutions were inspired by a long series of perceived failings of the lower classes of society, combined with the rise of communist philosophies of thought, particularly within the lower working and peasant classes. Russian social culture had been suffering for a long time, stuck in an archaic class-based monarchical society. Despite attempts at reforms, the lower classes faced exceptionally cruel and repressive treatment from the upper noble classes of society. This manifested in extremely poor and hostile work conditions, especially in the newly emerging industrial economy in the cities.

Tsar Nicholas was seen as failing in any sort of reform, social, economical or political, responsible for the poor standard of living, economic stagnation and food shortages in the empire. Additionally, the Tsar was seen as personally weak, after a series of military defeats in the Russo-Japanese war and the First World War. In an attempt to bolster support for the war, Tsar Nicholas assumed the position of Commander-in-Chief from his generals, leaving the capital to go directly command the military. Tsar Nicholas proved to be a poor commander, but

insisted on his input and interference in strategy planning, turning his military commanders against him. Domestically, the population came to associate Nicholas with the war personally, contributing to his unpopularity. The governance of the realm in his absence was left to his wife, the German Tsarina Alexandra Fyodorovna, as well as her personal adviser, Grigori Rasputin, and Nicholas's council of ministers. Ultimate authority was left to the Tsarina, however, who was unpopular with the public due to her heritage and the war.

The discontent culminated in the February revolution in 1917. It began with mass protests throughout February, leading into early March. By March, a significant majority of industries had shut down, with constant protests against the government and the war. The military in Petrograd initially were used for crowd control, and skirmishes with the crowds did occur, but in the early stages there were little to no fatalities. By mid-March the military regiments were showing signs of defecting to support the population, and military commanders were advising the Tsar to abdicate. He did so on March 15<sup>th</sup>, followed by his brother and successor on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Instead, a provisional government was formed in Petrograd, primarily comprised of center-left aristocrats. Rivaling the provisional government was the Petrograd Soviet, a city council made of the workers and military representatives of the state. These two bodies both claimed the right to represent and govern Russia, but agreed to a limited dual-power government.

The dual-power government lasted for only seven months, ending in the October Revolution of 1917. The Petrograd Soviet, under Bolshevik leadership, led an armed insurrection, taking most centers of power in the city nearly bloodlessly, and finally capturing the poorly-defended Winter Palace. Within days, Bolsheviks had formed an official Congress,

ratifying the revolution, arresting rival party members, and began the process of nationalizing and redistributing land and services in Russia. However, resistance to the Bolsheviks continued, and a loosely-organized group of anti-Bolshevik powers, including Mensheviks, nationalists, and various conglomerations of right-wing, wealthy land owners, emerged in the form of the White Army. The White Army fought against the newly-formed Bolshevik Red Army from late 1917 until 1923, throughout the Russian countryside and in the many newly-created Soviet Caucasus republics.

Near the end of the civil war, the new Soviet government met with the governments of the newly forming Soviet republics, eventually forming and approving the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Early economic plans were set for 10-to 15-year periods, and focused on the total industrialization and electrification of the country. The Soviet state pushed for a high level of industrialization, supporting the lower classes and creating work for everyone in the state. Additionally, the government allowed for a limited, regulated capitalist market in certain industries under the New Economic Policy at this time, as a way to ease the transition of the economy.

In the late 1920's, Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Bolshevik party, and the Soviet Russian state. His rise to power marks a vast transition from the limited idealistic socialism of Lenin and Trotsky, and the beginning of a vastly increased central state. Stalin instituted Five-Year Plans to replace the New Economic Policy, reversing any private industries, and emphasizing an intense industrialization throughout the country. In the countryside, farms were collectivized, attempting to consolidate agricultural land and supplies, believing that it would increase agricultural outputs and end the periodic food shortages.

Stalin also saw the tremendous expansion of the police and security side of the Soviet state. Early in the 1920's, Stalin reformed the state police services under the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, an encompassing organization for the Russian homeland territory. In the next decade, the role of the NKVD slowly expanded, until in 1934 it was officially made the security force of the entire Soviet Union, rather than just Russia. It took control of all regular police forces, as well as the detention centers throughout the union. The greatest example of Stalin's expansion and use of the secret police comes in 1940, in which the NKVD is used as a foreign espionage tool, when they are given approval to assassinate Leon Trotsky in Mexico City. The decades of Stalin rule in Soviet Russia before World War II became the iconic, defining image of USSR domestic life worldwide. Stalin created a system of living in which the government drove society by fear and paranoia, where the secret police of Russia had tremendous amounts of power and jurisdiction, and were ordered to use it against millions of people<sup>1</sup>. Stalin's regime was highlighted by the paranoia and fear of these forces within Russia.

The other defining feature of Stalin's Soviet Union was the immense economic burden placed upon the population, and the relative failures of the agricultural sector of the economy. Collectivization of farms throughout the nation meant that there was little to no personal security for the farmers and country workers to survive off, and high production quotas often led to a severe lack of resources being rewarded to farming communities. The overall affect of collectivization was devastating to Russia, leading to massive famines throughout the countryside. The outbreak of World War II and the invasion of the Soviet Union only served to

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1 Galeotti, Mark. "Perestroika, Perestroika, Perestroika: Policing Russia in a Time of Change." *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 45, No. 5 (1993). pp. 769-786. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153055>

deepen the crisis, drawing people away from farms into the military and creating additional demand for supplies. Following World War II, the Soviet Union took a more active role internationally, emerging as a superpower opposed to the United States in Eastern Europe. The focus of the nation became high-tech development, at the expense of the other economic sectors, and massive amounts of resources were poured into weapons, technology, and space development to outpace the United States. In this Cold War period, the Soviet Union developed to be the enemy that we often think of today, the threatening red nation pouring money into weapons and wars throughout the world, in an attempt to diminish American influence.

Following Stalin's death, the next leaders of the Soviet Union recognized the damage Stalin had done to much of the economy, and initiated a series of policies seeking to undo that damage and shift the direction of the Soviet Union. The leader immediately following Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, quickly began a process of culling the cult of personality Stalin had built the government upon, and reeling in the repressive political prison system. Following Khrushchev was Leonid Brezhnev, who took the Soviet Union in a similar direction internationally, trying to reverse some of the tensions that had been built up between the USSR and the US. Brezhnev oversaw the SALT agreements, the Helsinki Accords, as well as numerous other policies and agreements designed to halt the intense tensions and military threats between the two nations.

After Brezhnev passed away, there were a series of short-lived leaders who attempted to merely hold the status quo. The next significant leader of the Soviet Union came in 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev was selected to lead the Soviet Union. Throughout his tenure, Gorbachev made significant changes and reforms to every aspect of the Soviet system, attempting to salvage the government and economy from the extreme damage and crisis that had been building for

many decades. Gorbachev is primarily known for the policies of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika', liberal movements intended to restructure the entire political system and economy of Russia, and to radically revert the censorship and oppression ingrained in the government. In the Security Council, the USSR took a very passive role, essentially echoing the stance of the U.S. nearly every issue<sup>2</sup>.

Gorbachev faced significant internal battles from the older members of the government who still wanted to maintain a status quo relationship in the Soviet Union. Hard-line elements of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union believed that what Gorbachev was undertaking was ruinous for the Soviet Union, and eventually attempted a violent coup, successfully taking control of several key institutions for several days, before being captured and arrested by the loyalist elements of the army. The liberalization policies, and the political disunity, brought to the forefront the ethnic tensions in the many soviet republics which had been previously suppressed by the police forces. These problems continued to grow as the republics declared their independence in the coming months, until on December 24, 1991 Gorbachev announced the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, handing all powers to his president, Boris Yeltsin.

The Soviet Union commands a dominant position in Russian memory, dramatically affecting the Russian world view and approach to politics. In a large part, living in the Soviet Union was an immense burden of suffering for many people, which led to a serious

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2 Samuels, G. "Russia Slips into the Soviet Seat." *New Leader*. Vol 75, Issue 2 (February 10, 1992).

<http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/ehost/detail?sid=3fc3a383-012d-49ad-bd2e-f38cfdabafba3%40sessionmgr114&vid=1&hid=121&bdata=JnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#db=aph&AN=9206292134>

disillusionment of the people from trusting the government. The other large affect was in encouraging a hidden interest and passion for Western culture, which was seen as diametrically opposed to the Soviet Union and thus, a much better option than their current lifestyle. At the same time, the Soviet Union created a strong position in the world in the name of the Russian people, something that they became comfortable with and would come to expect in the future. The collapse of the Soviet Union left the nation yearning to reassert themselves in the region and regain influence with the former Soviet republics<sup>3</sup>.

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3 “Still on the Prowl.” *Economist*. Vol. 328, Issue 7826 (August 28, 1993). pp 11-12.

<http://proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9309030061&scope=site>.

## Security Council Vetoes

Here I have a record of all the vetoes used in the Security Council, and descriptions of the topic and language of the draft resolutions. The first number in a resolution title is the year it was proposed, the second number is its reference place number. When recording why a draft resolution failed, I wrote it with the frame of Russia and the United States as the primary actors, who voted opposed to each other, unless otherwise specified.

- ⤴ S/1994/1358 – Yugoslavia/Bosnia trade embargo, vetoed by Russia
- ⤴ S/1995/394 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/1997/18 – International intervention in Guatemala, vetoed by China
- ⤴ S/1997/199 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/1997/241 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/1999/201 – Extending mission in Macedonia, vetoed by China
- ⤴ S/1999/328 – Condemnation of NATO in Kosovo, vetoed by everyone but Belarus, India, and Russia
- ⤴ S/2000/1171 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by Russian, U.S., etc
- ⤴ S/2001/270 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by U.S., Russia abstains
- ⤴ S/2001/1199 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by U.S.
- ⤴ S/2002/712 – Extended mandate in Bosnian peace, vetoed by U.S.
- ⤴ S/2002/1385 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2003/891 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2003/980 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2004/240 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2004/313 – UN intervention in Cyprus, vetoed by Russia
- ⤴ S/2004/783 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2006/508 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2006/878 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2007/14 – International intervention in Myanmar, vetoed by Russia and China
- ⤴ S/2008/447 – Security in Zimbabwe, vetoed by Russia and China
- ⤴ S/2009/310 – UN in Georgia, vetoed by Russia
- ⤴ S/2011/24 – Israel/Palestine, vetoed by the U.S.
- ⤴ S/2011/612 – Syrian intervention, vetoed by Russia and China
- ⤴ S/2012/77 – Syrian intervention, vetoed by Russia and China
- ⤴ S/2012/538 – Syrian intervention, vetoed by Russia and China

In nearly two decades, the veto power has only been used 26 times, giving some indication that nations do have some respect for its' usage. Of those uses, 14 were United States

vetoed on the issues of Israel and Palestine, of which Russia was for on nearly every vote. The record shows that the U.S. has a support for Israel that is absolutely non-negotiable, while Russia has wavered on the issue on more than one occasion. The only comparable use of the Russian veto has been in the recent Syrian conflict, in which Russia and China have blocked every draft resolution giving legitimacy to a foreign intervention in the conflict.

## **Role in the Bosnian Conflict**

The first large-scale conflict to take place after the fall of the Soviet Union was in Eastern Europe, with the civil war breaking out in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The civil war broke out in early 1992, lasting for three years in a conflict eventually involving heavy United Nations and NATO intervention. Bosnia was the first challenge modern Russia faced emerging from the ruins of the Soviet Union. The Russian government, under Boris Yeltsin, was faced with a domestic economic crisis, quieting the remnants of the communist elements in the government, and maintaining a position for Russia in the international order. The Bosnian War presented the first major opportunity for Yeltsin to create a foreign policy that would determine how Russia would face the world and work in the United Nations.

The Bosnian War was a continuation of the violence and instability in the larger Yugoslavian conflicts, rooted in the breakup of the Soviet Federal Yugoslavia Republic. The conflict saw the federated republics composing Yugoslavia fall into civil war, as the primary ethnicities of Croats, Serbs, and Bosnians rebelled against the central government and fought each other for independence. The Serbian faction had rejected bids for an independent Bosnian Muslim state, instead moving for their own independent Bosnian Serbian state, supported by the Serbian state. The Bosniak Serbs organized into the Republika Srpska, while the Muslim Bosniaks organized the official military for the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, allied with the ethnic Croats of the Croatian Defense Council.

Conflict in the Bosnian War in the later years was plagued by what has since been considered atrocities of war, including attempts at ethnic cleansing campaigns and large-scale massacres, which largely became the basis for international intervention by NATO. Motivation

to intervene came from these horrors, particularly in Sarajevo, which was put under siege for four years, inflicting tremendous civilian casualties and immense damage to the city itself, and the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, where more than 8,000 ethnic Bosniaks were killed.

The United Nations was actively involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a humanitarian and peacekeeping basis, based partially on the involvement in the humanitarian missions of the prior nearby Yugoslav conflicts, providing protection to certain key areas for humanitarian aid at the outset of the war. As the war continued, however, and the civilian casualties in Sarajevo grew, a stronger international response was demanded. The U.N. relied on NATO to enforce a no-fly zone in an effort to protect civilians from air strikes and to control the flow of trade and humanitarian relief into Bosnia, and NATO became fully involved in supporting the UN Protection Force in 1994.

Russia, in the early years of the conflict, was generally quiet and malleable in negotiations over the crisis with Western powers. Russia was just re-emerging from the fall of the Soviet Union, and faced the unique position of reinventing its policy and place in the world. Boris Yeltsin emerged as the leader of a Russia intending to take a Western-friendly international policy, and to that end Russia generally echoed the United States sentiments regarding the conflict in Bosnia. To that end, Russia was very cooperative with the U.S. in the early years in forming peace plans and sanctions in Bosnia. Russian U.N. diplomats refrained from using their Security Council veto power, supporting every resolution put forth pressuring the Serbian government in ending the support and war in Bosnia and Herzegovina until very late in the war.

In an effort to work with the Western powers, Yeltsin ignored a tremendous amount of mounting domestic criticism in his pursuit of abandoning Russia's Soviet past. Despite this,

Yeltsin continued to support the U.S. throughout the 1990's, creating and sending newly-trained Russian peacekeeping forces in with U.N. and NATO forces from 1992 onward<sup>4</sup>. Yeltsin's opposition continued to hound him, as seen in the 1993 referendum on confidence in the President<sup>5</sup>. However, as soon as those domestic challenges were met, it was seen that Russian diplomats worked tirelessly with the West to move forward and create a strong response to the Serbian war crimes.

Despite the overall support Russia lent in the Bosnian War, it highlighted what would become an important dispute Russia had in the future with nearly every international intervention – the role and use of air strikes to take sides and cripple a military force. Russian diplomats initially expressed a desire for much tighter control over NATO air strikes in Bosnia, demanding that all strikes be approved by the Security Council<sup>6</sup>. Though this fell through, with the Russians conceding that the secretary-general could order strikes after the initial Security Council consent to the intervention, many Russian government officials continued to express a deep opposition to the use of air strikes in Bosnia.

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4 Masci, David. "U.S.-Russian Relations." *CQ Researcher*. Vol 8, Issue 20 (May 22, 1998).

<http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1998052200> .

5 "Bosnia Boils Over." *National Review*. Vol 45, Issue 9 (May 10, 1993). pp 10-12.

<http://proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9304280016&scope=site>.

6 "Pax Russiana?" *The Economist*. Vol 330, Issue 7851 (Feb 19, 1994). pp57.

[http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA15092582&v=2.1&u=tel\\_a\\_utl&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA15092582&v=2.1&u=tel_a_utl&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w) .

This might be seen reflected, in some part, in the 1994 veto of S/1994/1358<sup>7</sup>, a U.S. resolution aimed at tightening trade embargoes in the region. In a rare use of the veto power in the Security Council, the Russian diplomat was the only opposition to the draft resolution. His statement in the meeting reflects the cultural Russian support for the ethnic Serbs conflicting with the political support given to the Bosnian war. He reflects on how tightening restrictions could only lead to a, “tightening of screws” movement, increasing the support for the Bosnian Serbs. Instead, he talks about how a more positive approach should be taken, referencing some other economic agreements that had been made recently in Croatia. This mirrors the attitude Russia had began taking earlier that year, when they became the mediator in a set of negotiations to withdraw Serbian heavy weapons from around Sarajevo. In what was originally a NATO ultimatum to the Serbian government, the Russian diplomats convinced the Serbian government to accept, with the supervision of Russian peacekeepers. This diplomatic success was a tremendous triumph for Yeltsin, which entrenched their position as a critical part of the success in Bosnia.

The Bosnian conflict was the first test of the new Russia in the international community. Boris Yeltsin was faced with a barely-coherent government struggling to restructure the Russian government and economy. But even more so, Russia was faced with the challenge of finding a place in and adapting to the international order, and how they might fill the void in the international community that the Soviet Union left. The position Russia found itself in was a fortuitous one, making itself a central partner with NATO in the conflict, in which their support

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7 S/1994/1358. Draft Resolution. United Nations Security Council. 2 December 1994.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/1994/1358](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1994/1358).

was necessary in the Security Council to move forward. Russian support of the initial moves to contain the Bosnian War were met with welcome in the international community, and Russia used their ties to the region to make their support critical to the success of the intervention.

## **Role in the Kosovo Conflict**

Several years later, the Yugoslavian conflict again flared up, now in the autonomous republic of Kosovo in Yugoslavia. The Kosovo conflict saw much more decisive international action than any previous Yugoslav war did, with the war lasting only one year, ending only three months after NATO involvement. The war was initially started by the Kosovo Liberation Army, a group within Kosovo who had been waging a small-scale guerrilla war against Serbian authorities since the mid-1990's. In 1998, the KLA enhanced their operations, heavily targeting Yugoslavian officials and authorities. Yugoslavia responded with an increased military force, targeting KLA members and sympathizers, in a rush of attacks across Kosovo.

The reaction from Russia was drastically different in 1998 than the policy they had carried out in the earlier Yugoslav wars. Where in the Bosnian wars, Russia had been extremely open towards Western cooperation, as the Kosovo conflict flared, Russia expressed severe opposition to the rhetoric of the U.S. and NATO. Russia submitted a resolution in early 1999 demanding an immediate end to the NATO intervention, which was immediately struck down. In meeting notes, the Russian diplomat consistently reiterates the illegal and irresponsible nature of the intervention. The reaction summarizes how the Russian view of international interventions evolved, in what can be seen as a great respect for international institutions and laws in place.

From the very outset, Russia viewed the Kosovo War as a purely internal affair of Yugoslavia, and not a legitimate international incident. The Russian delegate in the Security Council, upon the first meeting to discuss a resolution, said of it, "...the situation in Kosovo, despite its complexity, does not constitute a threat to regional, much less international peace and

security<sup>8</sup>.” With that specific provision in mind, Russian negotiations in the beginning of the Kosovo War were intended on easing tensions and containing the issue to be solved locally by the Yugoslavian authorities. Russia continued to treat the KLA as a terrorist organization in violation of international laws, as NATO began to support the KLA cause. In a meeting much later that year, the Russian diplomat says, “In violation of Security Council resolution 1160 (1998), material and financial support from abroad continues to be provided to Kosovo extremists, first and foremost from the territory of Albania, which is seriously destabilizing the situation and provoking tensions in Kosovo.<sup>9</sup>” Russia never even began to take the first logical step towards an intervention the way NATO did in finding support for a freedom movement, instead condemning the KLA for terrorist activities and Albania for enabling weapons shipments to the rebels.

The strong opposition to the Kosovo conflict, when Russia had just so recently supported the Bosnian War intervention, stems more so from the nature of the intervention. In intervening in Bosnia, the international community followed the 'proper' steps in going through the Security Council, setting clearly-defined goals, attempting to keep the focus on protecting civilians, rather than favoring one single army. Russia showed a good deal of support for this because it was a controlled operation, which had input by every nation involved and transparency through the UN. Russia had success in working institutionally through the United Nations to influence the

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8 S/PV.3868. United Nations Security Council. 31 March 1998.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.3868](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.3868) .

9 S/PV.3930. United Nations Security Council. 23 September 1998.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.3930](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.3930) .

Bosnian conflict, and seemed to put a good deal of influence into the concept of internationally, legally justified actions.

On the other hand, the Kosovo conflict played out in a completely opposite manner. The NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo was entirely undertaken by NATO forces, had very little other international input, and was operating outside of the UN or Security Council mandate<sup>10</sup>. The NATO campaign made clear hostile strikes on a single military group, directly supporting and supplying the other group claiming a humanitarian mission. The Kosovo War showed, in Russia's eyes, that the West was willing to ignore institutional tradition and law in order to force their will upon the world.

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10 Lynch, Dov. "Russia Faces Europe." *Chaillot Papers*. Num 60 (May 2003).

<http://www.ciaonet.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/wps/lyd03/lyd03.pdf> .

## **Role in the Iraq War on Terror**

The election of a new president in Russia, Vladimir Putin replacing Boris Yeltsin, promised a new chance for Russia and the U.S. to create an international partnership. The Russian-U.S. relationship had suffered tremendously in the years before with the Kosovo War, there was little to suggest any improvements would be made. Putin was a sort of anomalous entity, a long-term player in Russian politics, but had spent little time in the spotlight until being raised to acting President in 1999. Early meetings between President Bush and Putin seemed promising, with the two apparently becoming quite friendly over the course of several meetings. It was the hope of many that this could lead to a new thaw in Russian-U.S. relations, rather than moving down towards a new modern Cold War.

After September 11, it seemed like the relationship could only go up. Putin was the first foreign leader to correspond with President Bush, and became a key ally for the next few months in providing intelligence and support to the U.S. military as they explored what options were available in attacking terror groups. Russia was strongly supportive of U.S. interests in Afghanistan, providing information Russia had from their experience in the nation, as well as access to military facilities in the neighboring former Soviet states, such as Uzbekistan<sup>11</sup>. The concept of a global War on Terror certainly held the same appeal for Russia that it held for the United States at the time. Russia has had an ongoing terror problem since the breakup of the Soviet Union, primarily focused in the Muslim territory of Chechnya. The U.S. has, from time

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11 Masci, David. "U.S.-Russia Relations." *CQ Researcher*. Vol 12, Issue 2 (Jan 18, 2002).

<http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2002011800>.

to time, criticized the Russian leadership of their treatment and responses of the Chechen people, which has generally elicited a strong military response. The U.S. becoming deeply involved in the home territories of Muslim extremism in the Middle East could, in Russia's eyes, garner some international support for their own fight against Islamic terrorism.

However, the promising relationship based off a fight against religious extremist terrorism quickly turned sour, when President Bush chose instead to focus his efforts on an invasion in the nearby nation of Iraq<sup>12</sup>. The United States pursued a unilateral invasion of a sovereign nation, flaunting in the eyes of Russia international law and bypassing the UN. The relationship between the U.S. and Russia is often characterized as negative, and often many people say that the Russian position is anti-American in the international realm. Yet, less than a decade before the controversial War in Iraq, Russia had undergone a relatively successful international strategy supporting the U.S. leadership, via the U.N., in quelling the conflict in Bosnia. Using UN resources and strong international discussion and negotiations, Russia was able to actively contribute and support the mission in Bosnia. In Kosovo, the U.S. led a more unilateral mission through NATO, based upon a very quick, hard strike, bypassing the institutions that Russia had worked to include themselves in. In Russia's eyes, this repeated again in Iraq, in which the U.S. acted 'unfairly' and unilaterally, bypassing any international restraints or discussions to enforce its will upon the world.

The Iraq War continued a trend that began in Kosovo in ways, from the Russian perspective, of the United States becoming an increasingly unreliable, unilateralist state and

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12 Flamini, Roland. "Dealing with the 'New' Russia." *CQ Researcher*. Vol 18, Issue 21 (June 6, 2008).

<http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2008060600> .

forgoing international cooperation. This led to a self-reinforcing cycle in Russian international policy, where Russia increasingly emphasizes the primacy of international law through the Security Council as a response to some perceived breach by the United States. At the same time, they pursue a relationship with the United States in order to avoid confrontation and reinforce the U.S. presence in the U.N. Within the Security Council, Russia made every effort to push the issue of Iraq into a debate on national sovereignty and, “allow the Iraqi security forces to assume full responsibility for maintaining long-term stability and security in the country, permitting the multinational force to fulfill its mandate and fully to withdraw from Iraq<sup>13</sup>.” In the end, though, Russia ended up even further distanced from the United States, bitter over the U.S. insistence on forcing itself into conflict so near to Russia's territory with weak legal justifications.

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13 S/PV/5300. United Nations Security Council. 8 November 2005.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.5300](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.5300)

## **Role in the Arab Spring**

### **A. Tunisia and Egypt**

In early 2011, the northern African nations became the unexpected stage of a dramatic series of protests, which surprised the world in both their rapidity and intensity. As protests ended in one country, the spark spread across borders, touching every country in North Africa and into the Arabian Peninsula. The reactions by the various powers worldwide were varied and inconsistent from many nations in response to each new uprising. In some states, international powers have advocated for remaining neutral and uninvolved, while later pushing for action in later revolutions, or vice versa. The interplay, cooperation, or lack thereof, between Russia and the United States can be very telling of their evolving relationship and conflicts of interest.

Despite the widespread and inflammatory nature of these revolts, international action has, so far, only predominantly undertaken in a single country. In Libya, a month after the revolution had broken out and a distinct rebel army had organized, the UN Security Council approved actions to enter the conflict in the interest of protecting civilian lives. In Syria, action has been talked about, but no official moves have been passed to intervene in any way. Syria has proven to be the greatest pressure point dividing Russia and the U.S., who have had disagreements throughout on the use of military intervention in the Middle East. The use of military force has seemed to be the most defining feature of the argument between the two, which began hesitantly in Libya, and has stalemated in Syria.

The early events of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, and followed a month later by Egypt, were met with mostly similar reactions by the United States and Russia. These two nations are

often grouped together as the first two major, remembered uprisings, because of their similarity in time-lines and outcomes. In Tunisia, the wave of increasingly violent protests led to the overthrow of President Ben Ali, as well as the dissolution of the former ruling party and elections of a new government. In Egypt, the revolution had a very similar path of protests, with some moderate early violence, which was eventually tempered by the government. This was, of course, too little too late, and the protests were not satisfied until President Mubarak resigned, handing over power to the military during the transition and reformation of the government.

The response from Russia was very much in line with the Western response, emphasizing the governments' responsibility to a peaceful response and a need to listen to the people. At times, the Russian administration did hint at an underlying fear, perhaps seeing some similarities between the movements in Africa, and the relationship with their own population. President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin often urged for a cautious, peacefully restrained approach by both the government and the military. However, the overall rhetoric was supportive of the movement, agreeing with the U.S. on the direction and message that the protesters had taken up. The Russian administration appeared, in the early stages of the Arab Spring, to be supportive of the West and the movement towards democracy in the region.

Russian administrative rhetoric during the period of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions signaled a cooperative willingness to work along the goals of the West. The Tunisian revolution seemed an innocent and optimistic enough venture, a popular uprising entirely organic and not influenced by Western powers. Dmitry Medvedev noted as much, saying that, "I think that what happened in Tunisia was a big lesson for governments all around the world...When governments fail to keep with social change and fail to meet people's hopes, disorganization and

chaos follow, sadly.<sup>14</sup>” Russia has little invested in Tunisia, and the previous Egyptian regime has been backed by the US for years, a loss Russia would hardly weep over. The opportunity to improve the relationship with the US, a slow, but steady process over the past few years, outweighed the costs the movement could incur in either country for Russia.

In Egypt, the Russian government kept overall the same underlying cooperation with the West, though started showing signs of hesitation as the Arab Spring blazed through the entire region. Perhaps seeing signs of a more violent, extreme outcome, Russian officials consistently took a more cautious tone. It was speculated that the most prominent events in the Arab Spring, Tunisia and Egypt, were beginning to resemble the Color Revolutions less than a decade prior. Despite any apprehensions that may have been developing, President Medvedev continued to speak with support of the movement, urging, “that democratic processes in Egypt will be fully restored and all legitimate electoral procedures will be applied to this effect...A strong, democratic Egypt is an important factor in continuing the peace process in the Middle East.”<sup>15</sup> Medvedev continued to indicate that political change in the Arab world was, at least in the current circumstances, acceptable.

## **B. Libya**

The next major event in the Arab Spring came in February, in Libya, where protests turned violent and the protesters quickly turned into a rebelling population. The world turned a

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14 “Dmitry Medvedev addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos.” Kremlin. January 26, 2011.

<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/1684>.

15 “Statement by the President of Russia on the situation in Egypt.” Kremlin. February 12, 2011.

<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/1768>.

much more serious eye to these attacks, giving rise to warnings and debates in the international forum about what should, or could, be done. As rebels captured several critical points, and the military retaliation increased exponentially, the United Nations managed to secure the abstention of China and Russia, and thus the passage of a resolution, allowing for a no-fly zone and intervention in Libya to protect the peaceful citizens and protesters from the military. With this in place, the NATO-led forces were able to provide assistance preventing the Libyan military from using aircraft to attack rebel forces, and justified many attacks on military targets to weaken the regime. This ended in the eventual capture and death of Muammar Gaddafi, and the restructuring of the government by the rebel forces.

Libya showed the first public signs of a break between Russia and the U.S. in this string of events. Early on, as before, Russian officials had the same statements as every nation, condemning the excessive and rapid use of force against peaceful protesters. A little over a week after the revolution first began in Libya, the first resolution in the Security Council was brought to a vote and passed unanimously. The resolution, S/RES/1970 (2011), condemned the Libyan administration harshly, imposing travel and asset bans on the Libyan leaders, and referring the entire situation to the International Criminal Court.

In a statement on the resolution, the Russian representative to the Security Council, Vitaly Churkin, spoke strongly in support of the resolution. However, he did not only support the measures the resolution took, but specifically highlighted what the limits to the resolution were. He advanced the principle that, “A settlement of the situation of Libya is possible only through political means...However, [the resolution] does not enjoin sanctions, even indirect, for forceful

interference in Libya's affairs, which could make the situation worse.<sup>16</sup>” Here, Russia had set the boundaries they were willing to go up to with the West in handling the rapidly worsening crisis in Libya. The representative made it clear that Russia was staunchly opposed to direct intervention in Libya, hinting at the primary argument they would later make, that intervention would only serve to worsen and prolong the conflict.

Some weeks into the conflict, however, it became clear that the Libyan regime had no intention of backing down. The question of more stringent measures was raised, going as far as direct military intervention. On March 17, the resolution S/RES/1973 (2011), authorizing all necessary means to protect human life, a no-fly zone, and even further asset freezes was put forth to the Security Council. The resolution passed with 10 votes for and 5 abstentions, Russia and China among the abstentions. The Russian representative offered severe criticism of the resolution and the Security Council during the drafting process, claiming that the resolution was, “morphing before our very eyes, transcending the initial concept as stated by the League of Arab States.<sup>17</sup>” The League of Arab States initially approached the Security Council asking for a no-fly zone in order to protect citizens, as the previous resolution 1970 (2011) had not been observed. Mr. Churkin claimed that drafting was done in a non-standard way, ignoring a great many questions on the limits of force and rules of engagement, which, “could potentially open the door to large-scale military intervention.”

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16 S/RES/1970 (2011). *Peace and Security in Africa*. United Nations Security Council. 26 February 2011.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1970\(2011\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1970(2011)).

17 S/PV.6498. *The Situation in Libya*. United Nations Security Council. 17 March 2011.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6498](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6498).

At the end of the vote, however, Russia merely abstained from the vote, allowing its adoption and the beginning of the NATO intervention in Libya. Despite serious criticism, even before the resolution had been drafted, it appeared that Russia was more intent on making a relationship with the United States work. Russian policy on the issue became a twisted, confusing maze, however, as Medvedev and other officials increasingly spoke against the intervention. Medvedev continued to warn of another muddled, drawn-out war, which would influence even more extremism in the years to come. At other times, he directly criticized the actions undertaken, speaking to the direct collateral damage, “killing civilians and destroying infrastructure.”<sup>18</sup> The abrupt shift from the hesitant abstention to harsh criticism speaks to the uncertain direction of Russian foreign policy. Mr. Churkin repeats this allegation in a meeting later on May 4, in response to the ICC investigation in Libya. The question the Russian administration needed to answer was to prioritize further relations with the United States, or limiting the direct influence of the US in the fledgling Arab Spring movements.

The most telling episode of the conflict in handling the Arab Spring and US relations occurred only several days later. On March 21, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin issued a statement comparing the resolution to a medieval call to a crusade. This was followed barely two hours later by President Medvedev, who directly contradicted the earlier remarks, stating that, “It is absolutely inexcusable to use expressions that, in effect, lead to a clash of civilizations, such as 'crusades,' and so on. That is unacceptable.”<sup>19</sup> Medvedev made clear his

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18 “Russia steps up criticism of NATO Libya campaign.” Reuters. May 20, 2011.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/20/us-russia-libya-idUSTRE74J5K820110520>.

19 Weir, Fred. “Medvedev slams Putin's 'inexcusable' Libya 'crusade' comments.” Christian Science Monitor.

priority to continue dismantling tensions with the United States. Though some observers maintained that the event was merely a show to please domestic audiences while at the same time maintaining international relationships, Medvedev continued to show support of the intervention to remove Gaddafi, even offering Russian support and mediation at the G-8 Summit.

Following this event, Russian attitudes in regards to the Libyan intervention tended to realign around Medvedev's stance. Criticism from the administration of the intervention quieted, limited mostly to brief statements in Security Council meetings while discussing the how to proceed once the damage had been done, stressing the need to undue the no-fly zone, restrictions, and sanctions that had been levied in earlier resolutions. For all intents and purposes, President Medvedev had seemed to go against the early opposition to influencing, in any regard, the Arab Spring, in order to preserve the relationship that he and Obama had worked to build since their respective elections.

The overall tone of the US-Russian relationship throughout the Libyan conflict seemed to be confused, but hopeful. Russia had initially seemed to draw a line in the sand, but was willing to push it back further in abstaining from the no-fly zone resolution, conceding to the Western desires to intervene. The message became muddled by an onslaught of criticism by Medvedev, followed by a complete reversal while shutting down the statements by Prime Minister Putin. This exchange was particularly indicative of the past and future foreign policy of Russia, because it came directly from Putin at a time where he did not have the proper authority to issue policy. Foreign policy is an area typically falling to the president, not the prime minister, of Russia, a

position that Putin formerly held, and intended to seek again in 2012. The premature statement was indicative of the latter years in his presidency between Russia and the United States, and could be indicative of his approach in the near future.

## **C. Syria**

The most dramatic act of the Arab Spring began in late January, and the fires of those early protests continue to burn today. In Syria, protests were met with extreme force from authorities, escalating into a complete civil war. Reports from Syria have indicated violence on a much more intense scale than in other revolutions. Protesting has stopped entirely in the country, replaced by drawn out armed combat, military sieges, and aerial bombardments of opposition cities. Syria remains in a state of civil war today, with constant conflict between the rebel Free Syrian Army and Syrian Armed Forces.

This conflict, by far, has been the biggest point of contention in the international community. In a civil war that has been seemed to escalate to the most extreme, it has frustrated many that the divide occurred most deeply between Russia and the United States. Going even further than preventing military action in Syria, Russia has opposed any action that would restrict Syria in any way, including asset freezes and sanctions<sup>20</sup>. Turning completely from the sympathetic abstention in Libya, Russia has outright opposed the legitimacy of the opposition movement. This has essentially frozen any legitimate, United Nations sanctioned action that could be carried out to aid the Syrian opposition.

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20 Katz, Mark. "Russia and the Arab Spring." Middle East Institute. April 3, 2012.

<http://www.mei.edu/content/russia-and-arab-spring>.

Russia made no attempts to cooperate, compromise, or make any concessions with the West in dealing with Syria. In the Spring following the start of conflict, President Medvedev and the Foreign Minister Lavrov both made statements warning against international interference in Syria. It was stated, time and again, that Russia would not support so much as sanctions on the Syrian regime, let alone a full regime change. Though this language is somewhat repeated from the initial reactions to the Libyan intervention, Russian officials had not come out so bluntly before against Libya. The early reactions to Syria marked a much stronger, pronounced reaction from Russia, who would not be so appeasing.

By August, the Security Council had managed only to produce a presidential Statement calling on a ceasefire from both sides of the conflict. The next statement by the Security Council did not come until late January of the next year, in a meeting with the representative from the League of Arab Nations to report on the situation in Syria. In it, the Russian representative spoke to what he called, “a crucial moment, which is perhaps the last opportunity to break the vicious circle of violence....<sup>21</sup>” Churkin recalled the presidential statement, claiming that it was the key to resolving the Syrian crisis, already having been accepted months earlier by the Security Council. He goes on to define the two important criteria laid out in the statement; the end of violence by both sides, and the necessity of an inclusive, Syrian-led process to resolve the dispute. Only by these criteria, by encouraging dialogue, can a true resolution be reached, rather than any form of forceful intrusion. Churkin says that Russia has led the drive to peace on that belief, in cooperation with the League of Arab Nations monitoring in Syria.

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21 S/PV.6710. *Middle East Situation – Syria*. United Nations Security Council. 31 January 2012.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6710](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6710).

Russia's extreme opposition to aid given to the Syrian rebels can be traced back to the fear of extremist involvement subverting the rebel movements. Churkin points to the winter reports from the League of Arab Nations observer reports, showing evidence that some armed nongovernmental forces were attacking security and peaceful protesters alike, and that violent assault, beatings, and looting rose in cities under rebel control. Russian official statements consistently lined up with this view, refusing to even acknowledge large parts of the Syrian resistance as a legitimate movement. This, coupled with the resistance to even more Western influence in Russia's backyard, created a situation in which nearly no agreement or progress could be made in moving Syria towards peace.

Days later, the Security Council convened again to discuss the proposed resolution based on the prior presidential statement. The resolution uses very similar language to the presidential statement, and indeed in the following discussion most representatives brought this up in their statements when the resolution failed to a Russian and Chinese veto. The Russian statement to the council reflected their fear of a second Libya, rather than any actual language or intent in the draft resolution. Mr. Churkin said to the council, after the vote, that, "some influential members of the international community...have undermined any possibility of a political settlement, calling for regime change, encouraging the opposition towards power, indulging in provocation and nurturing the armed struggle."<sup>22</sup> Comparing the draft resolution the presidential statement, which Russia had previously supported in a unanimous vote, reveals that very little had changed in the text.

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22 S/PV.6711. *Middle East Situation – Syria*. United Nations Security Council. 4 February 2012.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6711](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6711).

In Syria, Russia's latent fears and reservations about the Arab Spring, and about US interests in the region, came to the forefront. After Libya, Russia clearly felt cheated by the US in lending direct support to the rebel forces, exceeding the Security Council mandate, which Russia had explicitly stated was a concern with the broad wording. Despite Medvedev backtracking somewhat afterward, Russia's position on direct intervention, especially giving direct aid to a relatively unknown rebel force, was made very clear. Russia, more or less willingly, went along without blocking the Libya intervention, and they perceived the US as betraying the goodwill of their abstention and further undermining state sovereignty in Libya, something they would not allow to happen again.

Russia has cause to be wary of Western-supported revolutions based on recent history in addition to Libya. The mid-2000's saw a series of revolutions in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, commonly referred to as the Color Revolutions. Yugoslavia was the first of these, in 2000, when a peaceful protest movement overthrew Slobodan Milosevic. Then, in 2003, Georgian protests erupted following a suspect parliamentary election. The Rose Revolution, as it was termed, ended with the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze, replaced by Mikhail Saakashvili. In 2004, a series of protests occurred in response to the presidential election, accused of massive fraud and corruption. Again, this led to the annulment of the results, and the victory of the opposition in the repeat elections. In 2005, the Tulip revolution kicked off in Kyrgyzstan, following the 2005 parliamentary elections. The early stages of this revolution saw a marked increase in violence, as opposed to the other nonviolent revolutions, ending with the resignation of President Askar Akayev.

Though Russia is keen to build up better relations with the United States, the propensity

for US-backed revolutions to have an anti-Russian slant has not been ignored over the years.

The Color Revolutions were all vocally supported by the United States, each occurring in nations that formerly had very close relations with Russia, against regimes that were strongly supported by Russia. The Russian administration could possibly draw parallels between the previous Color Revolutions, and these new Arab Spring revolutions. The Color Revolutions were a reminder to Russians that stability can often be an illusion, and rapid changes can occur nearly anywhere.

Though Russia may not admit it, they have similar social and civic inequalities and unrest brewing in their own youth, and the dangers of the color revolution, and more recently the Arab Spring, offers a supportive vision for the restive groups. However, Russia had also learned much from the Color Revolutions, and they would use that experience to dull the effects of the Arab Spring in their own borders<sup>23</sup>.

Additionally, Russia is always wary of the revolutionary playground in its backyard in Chechnya. A region plagued by instability for years, Chechnya has been tamed in the past decade to some degree, though still suffers occasional violence<sup>24</sup>. Chechnya is a predominantly Muslim district in the North Caucasus region of Russia, which has been a hotbed for revolutionary activity for centuries in Russia. During nearly every turbulent point in Russia's

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23 Zikibayeva, Aigerim. "What Does the Arab Spring Mean for Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. September 2011.

[http://csis.org/files/publication/110912\\_Zikibayeva\\_ArabSpring\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110912_Zikibayeva_ArabSpring_Web.pdf).

24 Cooper, Mary. "Russia's Political Future." *CQ Researcher*. 6.17 (1996): p.385-408.

<http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrr1996050300&type=hitlist&num=0>.

history, the Chechen people have used the momentary instability as a chance to break away to sovereignty. The Muslim Chechens, ethnically more similar to Turks from the Ottoman Empire, have long felt ill at ease with the more European Christian Russians. The relationship between Russia and Chechnya can show some insight into the troubling nature of the Arab Spring, and the Western support, to Russia.

With the Russian troubles in Chechnya in mind, it is easy to see why a mass populist Muslim-centric uprising in a nearby region is deeply troubling to Russia. Chechnya has long taken advantage of regional instability to bolster its' own position. A wildfire revolutionary movement in the Muslim Arab world could easily spread through Central Asia and into the Caucasus, reigniting the Chechen desire for independence. Thus the imperative of the Russian government, in the early days of the Arab Spring, to stress that the movements can only remain legitimate and relevant for as long as they remain peaceful. A strong message of peaceful reform from the Arab Spring could translate through to Chechen observers, as well as paint Russia in a more favorable light, the sympathetic nation yearning for peaceful negotiations.

The Arab Spring itself, however, may not be the only perceived threat to Russia's governance over Chechnya. Russia did not oppose the Arab Spring movements, suggesting that some wave of revolutionary fervor is unlikely, in their eyes, to prolong for so long and so far as to reach, and significantly impact, Chechnya. Instead, Russia was somewhat supportive, or at least quiet on the matter, until strong Western support was voiced, especially in the possibilities of intervention. Russia has seen the results of Western supported revolutions in the past, during the Color Revolutions, and then in Libya. Western support, even merely diplomatic, is consistently one of the most legitimizing forces in the world. When the US voices support for a

movement, or a leader, or a population, much of the world tends to echo that support, and the opposing force tends to suffer from the diplomatic and economic repercussions of opposing the US. Attempting to distance the US from supporting a revolution so near the Caucasus is the Russian reaction to the fear that the US may eventually come to see the Chechen people in a state of repression, needing humanitarian assistance.

In trying to spread doubt about the Libyan and Syrian revolutionaries, painting them as terrorists in disguise, Russia is doing similar to what occurred early on in the War on Terror to dissuade the West. When global terrorism became the enemy of the international community, following the US lead after September 11, Russia accelerated a program intended to make the image of the Chechen conflict fit the image of terrorism globally<sup>25</sup>. Russian officials said there was no war in Chechnya any longer, and that conflict was against unlawful terrorist elements, transferring authority of the conflict and region to the Ministry of the Interior. Russia has acknowledged the dangers of Western support for a protest movement, and responds by delegitimizing the movement, painting it as the symbol of evil that the world has fought against for over a decade now.

Russia's opposition to direct intervention is not entirely ideologically based, however. Assad is a long-time ally of the Russian administration, in a region that is both unstable and has little love for Russia. Russia has been known to offer some little support for Iran, but that is more in opposition to US interests in the Middle East and Central Asia, rather than any real

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25 Danilov, Dmitry, Sergei Karaganov, Dov Lynch, Alexey Puskov, Dmitry Trenin, and Andrei Zagorski. "What Russia Sees." *Chaillot Paper*. 74 (2005): p. 16. October 16, 2012.

<http://www.ciaonet.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/wps/lyd06/lyd06.pdf>.

relationship between the regimes. Instead, Russia has shown a real, consistent support for Assad in Syria over the years. Russia has enjoyed supplying a majority of the Syrian military with modern arms and weaponry over the years. Additionally, the Syrian port city of Tartus has been host to a naval base since the Soviet-era, and has undergone renovations since the fall of the Soviet Union to support an expanded, modern Russian fleet. Russian energy and infrastructure companies have a significant presence in Syria, especially in natural gas facility and pipeline construction. Russia's relationship with Syria has been long and prosperous, both economically and strategically in location.

The unexpected explosion of the Arab Spring delivered a certain strain early on to the relationship between the United States and Russia, which has developed now into a relatively serious fallout between the two. Russia did make efforts to align with the West early on, voicing similar support and encouragement for democratic movements in Tunisia and Egypt. Russia had little to lose with the previous administrations in these countries, and much to gain in good will with the United States. A relatively peaceful movement in the region posed little risk to Russian interests, and enabled Russia to show a pro-democracy, pro-populist voice in the international stage.

As the Arab Spring spread to Libya, Russia became more conservative, more withdrawn in their support. Russia began to speak about the relatively unknown makeup of the rebels, the long-term impact of fighting, and overall dropped the growing relationship with the US over the region. Russia was clearly resistant to the idea of real, definite involvement by the West in the region, but Medvedev, at least, was willing to see past this and support the United States in Libya. Syria, however, became the point at which no Russian government would cross with the

United States thus far. The past decade has shown Russia how little control it can have once US-led powers intervene and support a revolution, and Russia had learned in Libya that it cannot simply expect any consolation from the US for the support and concession in policy in Libya. The gains that Russia might expect to see in relations with the US no longer outweighed the loss of a strategic and economic ally, or the loss of domestic 'prestige' in backing down to the US. Syria became the breaking point of the relationship of the initially optimistic Arab Spring.

## **Putin's Russia**

The important question posed at the start of this, whether Vladimir Putin was significant in shifting Russian policy to oppose the United States so vehemently in recent years, remains an important one. Certainly, Putin has built a cult of personality around him, not unlike past Soviet leaders Stalin and Lenin did, as a primary way to build influence domestically and internationally. Putin's term as President of Russia for over a decade seems to suggest that he has been a driving force in Russian politics and shows no signs of abandoning that seat. Putin clearly has a grasp over much of Russian political life, remaining an enormously popular figure despite his long term and unpopular social issue positions.

Yet, the premise that Vladimir Putin has led Russia down an anti-Western policy path implies that Russia had a significant turn in relations previously with the West. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced a huge surge of pro-Western feelings, hope and desire to emulate the success that was opposed to the misery that had been life in the Soviet Union. This expressed itself in the opening of Western business in Russia, in the international politics of Russia, and in the welcoming of the U.S. support and the IMF in aiding to restructure the Russian economy. Russia, under guidance of the IMF and support from the United States, as to undergo a 'shock-therapy' treatment to spur economic development in Russia, along with the rapid privatization of what had been Soviet Union resources and industries. However, rather than bring about a new age of prosperity in Russia, which could not sustain the new economy, Russia dove into a new recession, as the elite of Russia bought into the oil and energy resources, forming a new oligarchy class.

The failures of the economic restructuring spurred a new wave of anti-Americanism in

Russia in the mid-to late-1990's, near the end of the second term of president Boris Yeltsin.

Internationally, Russia began to disagree more publicly with the U.S. near the end of the Bosnian War, and very strongly throughout the Kosovo War. Russia was never on track to be an unconditional partner with the West in international politics, due to the vast differences in views on what the role and limits in international interventions should be. Domestically, Boris Yeltsin was facing dramatically intensifying opposition to both his international policy and economic policies. Strong American support in Russia had begun to die off long before Vladimir Putin took office.

Furthermore, the early years of Vladimir Putin were highlighted by optimism of the relationship between the U.S. and Russia. Bonding over the threat of international terror, some observers had gone as far as to claim that the possibility of Russia entering into NATO was not a far-off possibility. Vladimir Putin and George Bush met on many occasions before the War in Iraq began, both in American and worldwide, building rapport between the two leaders on which to set the beginnings of an international alliance. Russia was still heavily influenced by Western values, developing values along similar lines of Japan, based in a separate history but with similar overall goals internationally.

The divide between Putin's Russia and the U.S. came with the onset of the invasion in Iraq, which cut through the respect Russia had built for the institutional powers of the Security Council. Russia under Yeltsin had made a clear statement that international interventions should occur under tight limits, regulated and approved by the international community through the Security Council. Bosnia was such a conflict, which Russia played a part in because of the U.N. involvement, while Kosovo was a much more unilateral, one-sided activity by NATO. The Iraq

war clearly favored the direction of the latter, as the U.S. engaged in fighting even with their allies in NATO, recklessly moving ahead despite international cries.

When Boris Yeltsin left office suddenly, Putin was the man left to take over as Acting President. He had been working in government for many years prior, steadily advancing through the ranks of Yeltsin's government until he was the second in charge. He was known as having served in the KGB prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, known as a strong politician, but in general was not a widely-known figure before becoming president. However, he quickly became known as a very strong leader, generally uncompromising in his positions, as opposed to Boris Yeltsin, who was generally unpopular and seen as having compromised Russia for Western interests. The tradition of democracy was still not extraordinarily strong in the 2000 elections, and only one primary political party existed opposed to the remnants of the Communist party, the same party that had supported Boris Yeltsin, now supporting his successor Putin.

Domestically, Putin has portrayed a very strong image, that of an ex-soldier defending Russia from foreign threats and raising her up into prominence in the world. He has, in ways, stepped into a cliché 'alpha leader' role, filling the gap left by Yeltsin. At the turn of the century, Russia was left in disorder, the first president suddenly stepping down, in the midst of an economic crisis. In taking control of Russia, Putin took control of a nation that was quickly losing its place in the world, and restored order to a collapsing government. He responded strongly to the secession movement in Chechnya, ending outright conflict and stifling terrorist movements. Putin inspired a cult of personality around himself, appearing as the strong leader that Russians wanted to project their nation as to the world.

Putin's personality, however, did not definitely cause a divide between the United States

and Russia. Putin is a strong leader with an equally strong personality, a possible flair for dramatic media stunts, who healed a fracturing government. However, his policies have not been unique or novel to Russia. His early presidency was a period of bright hope in U.S.-Russian relations, and the divide that split the two was built on a fracture that can be traced back to the Bosnian War, if not further. The Russian people have held very dearly to their opposition to international interventions in general, and especially to unilateral interventions without a proper discussion and consensus by the international community. Though Putin has surely in some ways influenced Russian politics in ways a competitor may not have through his powerful personality, it is more true that the general tendency of Russian international policy in the past two decades has always been directed by this principle, which remains largely in opposition with the American view of attacking threats as they appear worldwide.

## **Summary, Conclusions and the Future**

Foreign policy and international relations often remain steeped and steered by cultural bias and history more so than any sort of rational pragmatic guide. Thus, when a nation such as Russia has a usurpation of power with the intents of 'resetting' its own culture, the foreign policy shifts that occur are unusually dramatic. The overthrow of the empire into the Soviet Union, a state that attempted to make everyone equal and erase differences in society, followed by the dissolution into the modern capitalist state of Russia, partially driven by its history, partially by the new Western cultural ideals, created a fascinating situation in which a powerful state on the brink of collapse had to adapt into a new global institution and find where its priorities in international policies lay. The foremost issue that lay before contemporary Russia was what the relationship would be with the former greatest enemy-turned cultural ideal, the United States. The evolution of Russian international policy in defining how they view the United States, how much to rely on the United States, and what their role is in the world compared to the United States is a tremendously interesting story.

Contemporary Russia was not strongly involved in the world for the first few years following the fall of the Soviet Union. Wrestling with a series of economic crises, the rise of the elite oligarchy, and the rebellion movements in Chechnya, Russia remained inwardly focused as they tried to stabilize their new government. When they did act on the world stage, it was often very compliant with the West in many cases. The first major foray of Russia back into international relations was in the Bosnian War, in which no-one could deny the atrocities occurring, and NATO was appropriately ordered through the U.N. Security Council to act in defending civilian populations. Because of the focus of acting through the Security Council,

Russia was enabled to influence and take part in the negotiations and actions, building a solid early support base with the U.S. and NATO operations.

The end of the Bosnian War saw some minor disputes between Russia and the U.S. over the extent of force, particularly air strikes, was in international interventions. This dispute carried over the next few years into the Kosovo War, in which NATO led a strong unilateral strike to aid the resistance movement in Kosovo. Russia was dramatically opposed to this, calling the entire operation illegal and unjustifiable in the Security Council. Here Russia demonstrated a dramatic divergence of policy from the West: Russia agreed with the general idea of intervening to save civilian lives, but strongly resisted the idea of acting in direct support of one side or another in a conflict.

The difference between the Russian and U.S. role of interventions only became more pronounced when the U.S. entered Iraq unilaterally in 2003. Just prior, the two had been building a strong support network to combat international terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan. However, the U.S. switch of focus onto Iraq drove a deep wedge between Russia and America, from which point the relationship between the two has never really recovered. From that point on, it seemed to Russia that the U.S. had taken up a role in which they could dismiss the idea of international law, pass by the institutions created to moderate and resolve conflicts, and force their 'justice' wherever a threat was found or manufactured.

The eruption of the Arab Spring was a series of novel events which no-one in the world was truly prepared for, and created a novel situation for the United States and Russia to respond to. Tentative support for the civil protests in Russia for the first acts in Tunisia and Egypt was matched and surpassed by support in America for what appeared to be a pro-freedom movement.

However, as the movement spread into Libya and developed into the worlds' worst fears, a bloody civil war, a debate similar to those of the past in Bosnia and Kosovo appeared again. Russia, perhaps encouraged by the restrained of NATO in waiting for proper Security Council authorization, tentatively agreed to support an intervention on the strict terms of protecting the civilian population. Russia quickly cried out betrayal, however, as the NATO operation began striking directly at Gaddafi's army, clearing the way for the rebel freedom fighters to take positions of power within the country.

Bashar al-Assad remained a supporter of the Russian government for many years, and Russia counted the Syrian government among its close allies in the region. Thus, when the Arab Spring appeared to come to Syria in the bloodiest fashion possible, it became a worst-case scenario for Russia. In Bosnia, Russia had supported NATO, despite the close cultural ties and support for the native Serbian population. Now, history had repeated, and Russia was faced with a close ally threatened by the world, and Russia decided not to take the same risks in supporting a 'limited' mission like it had in Libya. Though perhaps knowing Assad is in the wrong, Russia has on principle stood against any type of foreign intervention in the country, believing that after Libya, the West cannot be trusted to restrain itself in any war situation.

The story weaved by contemporary Russia's involvement in the global community is one of a nation struggling to find relevance in the world by making the Western alliances play by the rules they initially set up in the Security Council. In every case of dramatic international incidents, Russia has consistently stood by the same principle that whatever action is taken must be justifiable in the Security Council, and must involve the negotiation and consent of the global community. Russia has remained staunchly opposed to the idea of one nation or alliance

projecting its force upon the world, dismissing the will or sovereignty of the other regional powers in the world. The Russian international policy has been relatively clearly defined since their first foray into world politics, and remained relatively consistent throughout the past two decades, regardless of the current president or domestic situation.

Looking forward into the future is never a clear or reliable occupation, but once a general tendency or policy orientation has been determined it cannot hurt to speculate in what way that policy will guide a nation moving forward. The most obvious stage to speculate on is in Syria, where the civil war continues despite the relative lack of media coverage. Russia has, to this point, shown no signs of relenting in opposition to a NATO-led intervention in the region. In Russia's view, they have learned from Libya that any lines set can be broken with no consequences by NATO, and so they cannot allow action in a situation where it is important to their interests.

Beyond Syria, many other of the international issues would seem to hinge on the same issue. A predominant focus of American foreign policy often seems to be seeking out threats and eliminating those threats once they have become a large-scale humanitarian crisis. The other common 'enemies' in America today are Iran and North Korea, both nations who have been decried for their human rights abuses. Russia has shown moderate support for Iran in the past years, as the U.S. grows increasingly more threatening in regards to their nuclear program. Iran seems to offer the same type of scenario that Syria currently is playing out – a nearby state with good relations to Russia, and a humanitarian dispute with underlying weapons and security threats to the Western world. It is difficult to see a situation occurring in which Russia does not back the sovereignty of Iran just as it has in Syria.

In North Korea, Russia has played a similar role along with China in acting as the nations' only benefactor world power in the international community. Russia shows the same signs of putting the national sovereignty above all else, and an adamant refusal to accept increasingly harsher constraints on the nation. In terms of general foreign policy goals, Russia has been much more unforgiving in the past few years of U.S. foreign policy, and it is difficult to see this changing dramatically. U.S. policy of unilateral action has, in recent years, evolved with the advent of drone strikes, particularly in Pakistan, taking action against individual targets from relative safety with almost no contact or recognition of the host country. This development is naturally opposed by Russia, as well as Pakistan, the frequent victim of drone strikes. The U.S. government have indicated that they will continue using these forms of low-risk attacks, which will continue to put the U.S. and Russia at odds in the international community.

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