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# An Unending Quest for Russia's Place in the World: The Discursive Co-evolution of the Study and Practice of International Relations in Russia

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**Abstract:** The idea of 'Global IR' generated a growing interest in 'national schools' of IR and their contribution to understanding the diversity of international relations. As a part of this discussion, the current study is set to explore what has been presented as Russian IR theory and its utility for understanding Russian foreign policy and international relations. Our contention is that there is still not a Russian 'national school' of IR with a distinct set of concepts and theories, research methods, and standards for assessing its legitimate contributions to global knowledge. Strongly influenced by the theoretical developments in the West, Russian IR has produced a number of conceptual innovations for the study of IR, but its highly ideological and relativist character limits its global appeal. The dominant Russian IR perspectives resonate with the world imagery and foreign policy agenda of the Kremlin administration not because they offer a novel and productive way of studying Russian foreign policy, but because Russian theoretical perspectives have been shaped, by and large, by political rather than academic considerations. To map out the complex theoretical landscape of Russian IR and how it relates to perspectives of Russian foreign policy-makers, this study employs discourse theory to analyse the co-evolution of the study and practice of Russian IR.

**Keywords:** Russia, Russian foreign policy, IR theory, discourse, national schools of IR

## INTRODUCTION

'Global IR and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies' was selected as the convention theme for the 2015 annual meeting of the International

Studies Association (Acharya, 2014). The choice of the theme was motivated by a rising discontent with the ubiquitous presence of ethnocentrism in the field, whose supposedly universal concepts and theories have been criticized for their low applicability to non-Western contexts.<sup>1</sup> International Relations (hereinafter, the term IR will be used in reference to the discipline, and the term international relations in the discussion of the practice) has been looking for answers to these concerns by allowing critical and post-modern approaches to challenge the realist ontology and objectivist epistemology of the mainstream IR scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Together with the post-positivist call for more reflective and contextual knowledge, the post-colonial critique insisting that Western IR theory take the Other seriously as an equal to the Self in terms of setting parameters and boundaries of knowledge produced a growing interest in 'national schools' of IR (see, for example, Acharya, 2011; Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Lebedeva, 2004; Waeber and Tickner, 2009). It also generated an intensifying debate over the question of the 'national schools'' contribution to our understanding of the diversity of international relations and foreign policies in their respective nations and regions (Makarychev and Morozov, 2013).

The question of national schools is pivotal to the discussion of the state of the discipline in Russia, and can also shed light on Russian foreign policy and international relations. In the Russian academia, many embrace a belief in the uniqueness of Russia as a country that operates according to a set of different and unique rules of engagement and therefore cannot be understood through the lens of Western IR theory. Several prominent Russian IR scholars have called for the creation of Russia's own social theory to explain the specificity of the Russian situation (Bogaturov, 2000). The Russian government, too, has long insisted on Russia's great power status and its unique but equal standing in global affairs. In recent years, the Kremlin authorities have tried to define and defend Russia's great power identity by rejecting and downgrading what they view as alien to Russia. The anti-Western and anti-American discourses and policies have been central to this approach. In this view, since neither the US nor Europe fully understands Russia, they should not expect it to follow the political and economic trajectory of the Western nations.

This article therefore sets out to explore what has appeared under the guise of 'Russian' IR theory and to assess its utility for understanding Russian foreign policy and international relations. Our position is that although the discipline of Russian IR has matured in the two decades since the Soviet Union's dissolution, it retains a highly ideological and relativist character that limits its global appeal. The dominant Russian IR perspectives have resonated with the worldview and foreign policy agenda of the Kremlin administration not because they have offered a novel and productive way of studying Russian foreign policy, but because Russia's theoretical

perspectives have been shaped, by and large, by political rather than academic considerations. As we demonstrate in the remainder of the article, in the context of Russia, IR theory and foreign policy have been linked by shared concerns with Russia's place in the world, the creation, from a particular point of view, of a more just and stable global order, and resistance to the Western preeminence in international affairs. From the Russian academic and policy standpoint, new ways of thinking have been needed to counter this perceived Western domination. Russian foreign policy-makers have put forth new assertions on the principles, practices, and institutions that define Western international relations, while Russian IR scholars have endowed these new constructs with epistemological significance, as they saw them as specifically Russian approaches to IR informed by the local situation. Once these ideas and constructs re-enter the foreign policy discourse by being carried over by politicians with academic degrees in IR or those who seek a 'scientific' foundation for their foreign policy decisions, they become 'axiomatized'. In other words, beliefs and imageries about the world developed in academia become the accepted assumptions of foreign policy (May, 1962).

In order to map the complex theoretical landscape of Russian IR and how it relates to perspectives and practices of Russian foreign policy-makers, we employ the theory and analysis of discourse in Russian IR and international relations. Discourse-based approaches have emerged as one of the core elements of post-positivist scholarship and, therefore, are apposite for examining what we claim is the co-evolution of Russia IR theory and foreign policy. Conceptualizing the formative ideas, concepts, and practices in Russian IR and foreign policy as 'discourses' allows them to be compared and for their co-evolution to be traced. Furthermore, discourse analysis, as a method, is well-suited to investigating what we see as the ideological and political underpinnings of Russian IR theory, given that discourse plays a prominent role in the expression and reproduction of ideology with particular regard to the explicit verbal formulation and the persuasive communication of ideological propositions (van Dijk, 2006).

We begin by briefly introducing the discourse perspective and methodology that we use to analyse Russian academic and foreign policy discourses, and this is followed by an overview of the background of Russian IR in juxtaposition to Western IR. Having chosen to classify Russian IR theories along the ideological spectrum that ranges from conservative to liberal, we discuss the interplay and co-evolution of conservative and liberal thinking and practices in Russian foreign policy with the developments in Russian IR theory (in sections three and four). In particular, we focus on Russian political realism and geopolitics as the key theoretical perspectives representing the conservative spectrum of Russian IR theories, and provide an overview of the theoretical constructs and perspectives informed by the assumptions of the liberal IR theories. We then conclude with the synthesis of the study's

findings and some additional reflections on the state of IR in Russia in the concluding remarks.

## **A DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVE ON IR THEORIES AND FOREIGN POLICY**

The interest in language and how it generates, sustains, and represents relationships of power predates modern social science. The art of rhetoric captivated scholars of a wide disciplinary and philosophical scope – from Aristotle and St. Augustine in antiquity to Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a growth in interest in discursive analysis among social scientists that transcended their initial interest in the internal structure of language – i.e. its phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic features – and which instead turned to the examination of its social functions. This ‘linguistic turn’ in social science gave rise to a new understanding of political and social activity as inseparable from the use of language. In other words, ‘the doing of politics’ was now conceived as ‘predominantly constituted in language’ (Chilton and Schaffner, 2002: 3; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In this understanding, discourse does not simply imply what is written or said, as it is sometimes understood this way. Discourses are structures of signification that constitute and reproduce specific power relations as well as specific hierarchies among the discourses and between the signs within the same discourse (Dopita, 2015: 24; Milliken, 1999). It is with this meaning, elaborated below, that this study employs the concept of discourse. We begin this section with a brief discussion of discourse theory and analysis in IR to preface the introduction of methods, sources, and sites of discourses in Russian IR and international relations.

### **The Discursive Turn in IR**

In IR, discourse as a concept and approach has been closely attached to critical theory and post-structuralist and constructivist perspectives. Influenced by, *inter alia*, Habermas’s communicative action theory, a range of critical IR perspectives began re-situating reason and social action in linguistics, thus turning attention to critical discourse analysis in order to examine ways in which social power is reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (van Dijk, 2008). Certain varieties of constructivism share with discourse perspectives a social constructionist orientation to knowledge and, therefore, use discourse analysis to examine how social and political environments are produced and reproduced through speech acts. With the advent of this post-positivist scholarship, IR has seen the emergence of a rich, if heterogeneous, field of discourse approaches to the study of international relations.

To illustrate, for instance, in her seminal article that aims to counter the “marginal and deviant” status of discourse analysis in IR in the 1990s, Jennifer Milliken (1999)

pointed out the diversity of discourse-based theoretical approaches that use a variety of methods such as predicate analysis, genealogy, deconstruction and metaphoric analysis, among many others. Despite their differences, all approaches to discourse share an understanding of discourse as “structures of signification which construct social realities” where “things do not mean (the material world does not convey meaning); rather, people construct the meaning of things, using sign systems (predominantly, but not exclusively linguistic)” (Milliken, 1999: 229). Discourse analysis, therefore, “should be based upon a set of texts by different people presumed (according to the research focus) to be authorized speakers/writers of a dominant discourse or to think and act within alternative discourses” (ibid.: 233).

Building on insights such as these, as well as on the post-structuralist works of Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's ‘Essex School’ of discourse analysis, Lene Hansen (2006) has further emphasized that scholars should pay attention not only to ‘authorized speakers/writers’ of the dominant discourse, but to a wider range of actors, such as “oppositional political parties, the media, academe and popular culture”, that “reinforce and constitute each other” when foreign policy is formulated (Hansen, 2006: 7).

Our empirical work here is based on a similar theoretical premise: Russian foreign policy is a constituted product of discursive practices in Russian IR (academe) and the Russian government (see also Morozov, 1999, who discusses the co-constitution of discourses in the construction of Russia's identity). It is clear that the former is highly dependent on the latter in terms of finances, facilities, accreditation, curriculum approval and so on, while the latter expects the Russian academic community to produce conceptual apparatuses that are utilizable for its foreign policy. Thus, along with Dunn and Neumann (2016), we employ a form of “discourse analysis [that] uses the text as a vehicle for understanding social, political and cultural phenomena”, such as Russian foreign policy, rather than considering the text itself as the object of study. Further, we seek to interrogate into specific ways in which ‘Russian IR’ was constituted in this particular system of meaning-production between Russian IR academics and government officials with regard to Russian foreign policy, and, more specifically, how it is “generated, internalized and/or resisted” (ibid.).

Acknowledging that there are distinct intellectual traditions and analytical frameworks for conceptualizing and employing discourse, we utilize a broad definition of discourse as “the space where human beings make sense of the world, where they attach meaning to the world and where representations of the world become manifest” (Holzscheiter, 2014: 144). This definition highlights the intrinsically social nature of discourse and differentiates it from language. It implies that discourse is not merely the ‘talk’ and, therefore, the opposite of practice. On the contrary, intersubjective meanings are created through communicative and other interactions and are tightly intertwined with practice. Furthermore, discourse theory does not deny



the existence of a material world, but it does refute the assumption that individuals can relate to this world without discourse (ibid., 2014).

Consistently with this definition, we understand academic IR discourse as a key space in which intersubjective meanings about the world, how it should be studied, and how this knowledge should be revealed are created, challenged, and transformed. Similarly, foreign policy discourse is another key space in which intersubjective meanings about the world are created, sustained, challenged and transformed and, in the process, become constitutive of social reality. The meanings, categories, and dispositions that comprise discourse are tightly intertwined with the practices of foreign relations that bear the stamp of these meanings and thus reproduce them (Epstein, 2008). In other words, what is said about the world is intimately tied to what is done about it, which in turn depends on the context of shared meanings.

The space where meanings are created and changed is usually characterized by multiple discourses that offer various intersubjective interpretations of reality that are shared to a greater or lesser degree. To put it differently, there is always a range of possible interpretations of international events, which are contested in the arena of discourse. Although discourse analysis has traditionally focused on the struggle over meaning in international politics, discourses about the 'facts' of international life can also co-evolve and co-constitute each other. Discursive co-constitution refers to the circular and continuous informational influence of one discourse over another or the other discourses, while it is simultaneously being formed by them. In this process, discourses can take on semiotic, symbolic and rhetorical elements from one another and, in so doing, are transformed. While the causality or direction of influences across discourses is ambivalent, the outcome of co-constitution is always "paradigmatic harmony", wherein common understandings emerge across various discourses (Mert, 2013).

There can be different structural conditions that influence the pace and direction of the co-evolution of discourses. In the case of Russia, the unique historical and institutional experiences that are discussed in the following section as well as some events and processes that have come to be seen as particularly significant (the Cold War and its end, the collapse of the USSR, the turbulent transition, the economic crises, etc.) have left a strong legacy affecting the development of contemporary IR, including through the continuous impact of politics on social science.

### **Methods of Study & Sources/Sites of Discourse in Russian IR**

In this examination of Russian IR and international relations, particular discourses are identified and analyzed in the actual language of verbal and written communi-

cations. The statements of political leaders and government representatives as well as publications of academic institutions and state agencies typically appear as texts, or are converted into texts and stored as texts. These texts then become the repositories of thoughts, utterances and statements, which can be discerned by using the various methods of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995).

The most common ways of presenting academic discourse are through textbooks, conference presentations, research articles, lectures, and dissertations. To study Russian academic discourse, we analyse ten IR textbooks designed for university students and instructors and published in Russia between 2002 and 2014. These texts were supplemented with publications from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS),<sup>3</sup> and issues of *International Trends: Journal of International Relations Theory and World Politics*<sup>4</sup> and *Russia in Global Affairs*, a prominent foreign policy journal modeled after *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>5</sup>

We focused on IR texts because, according to the Russian IR scholars, the boundaries and contents of the discipline of Russian IR have been set in the process of writing and teaching them (Torkunov and Mal'gin, 2012). Only a handful of IR textbooks with national significance have been published in Russia in the last two decades. Therefore, the relative significance of each of these texts is considerably higher compared to the impact of individual textbooks from among the far greater numbers of textbooks published in the US. The textbooks analyzed in this study were produced by leading IR scholars working under the auspices of 'elite' institutions offering degrees in IR in Russia: Moscow State University (MGU), St. Petersburg State University (SpGU), the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations (MGIMO), and the Russian High School of Economics.<sup>6</sup> The Russian Ministry of Education recommended all of these texts for use across the Russian Federation in IR programs at various institutions. What is also important to note is that in addition to the textbooks drawing on the expertise within the publishing institution (e.g., the press of MGIMO, etc.), the textbooks' authors consisted of representatives of prominent research centers of the Russian Academy of Science as well. In our analysis of these texts, we focused on identifying those aspects of the IR theory and conceptual apparatus that have been presented as uniquely Russian rather than borrowed from the Western IR sources.

In making decisions about the selection of empirical evidence for the analysis of Russian foreign policy discourse, we analyzed what has been known as 'political discourse from above', which is carried out in real-time by actors who are leading power-holders in a given state when they deliver key addresses to the international community, issue diplomatic correspondence and give public speeches (Fetzer, 2013: 9). According to the 2013 Concept for Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, there are three main agencies participating in the elaboration, formulation and

implementation of Russian foreign policy: the Security Council of the Russian Federation; the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation; and the Russian Government, most prominently the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We collected a database of 155 texts (all in Russian, even in cases where the original speeches were delivered in an international setting) downloaded from the official websites of these foreign policy actors. The fact that these texts were written in the Russian language is important for the purpose of this study, which is to examine domestically cultivated Russian IR perspectives. A sample of texts was analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. The content analysis of the texts was carried out along the main themes derived from the survey of the Russian IR texts. These 'themes' served as codes for organizing, classifying, sorting, and arranging rich text-based data and examining the emerging relationships in the data.

A coding unit consisted of one sentence unless the same theme was developed in the following sentence in a logically continuous way. The coded elements typically did not exceed three sentences. The same sentence (or a string of 2–3 sentences) could be double or triple coded if two or more topics in the author's thought overlapped in the same sentence. For instance, if a speaker mentioned both Russian national interest and Ukraine in the same sentence, then it would be coded with these two themes.

Certain codes that denote commonly used terms in the language of IR, such as 'globalization' or 'international norms', were coded if the speaker specifically mentioned these terms or put them in a somewhat rephrased form. Furthermore, the application of codes corresponding to concepts, such as 'security', 'great power', 'identity', 'peace', and 'world order', was not limited to word-use only, but also included any references that were semantically and thematically linked to the given code. For instance, a code titled 'security' was applied to all sentences that included any references to the speaker's concerns for their country's safety in economic, social, military, or other realms. Also, 'world order' was rarely used by speakers as a term of reference; however, many texts mentioned ideas as to how the relationships between states are or should be patterned on a global scale, and these sentences were coded as 'world order'. Finally, a set of codes that are especially characteristic of Russian IR literature was applied to the texts as well. These include 'Eurasianism', 'geopolitics', and 'polarity'.

To conclude, our approach to the study of Russian IR and international relations is premised on a set of assumptions shared by many poststructuralist and discourse analysis scholars: namely, political and social activity does not exist without the use of language; discourse and practice are co-constitutive; and discourses do not exist in isolation from other discourses, as discourses influence and are influenced by each other. Having thus explored the theoretical and

methodological foundations of discourse analysis, we will proceed to examine how the theoretical propositions developed in the Russian academic community reflect the discourse of the Russian foreign policy makers in the next sections of the study.

### **'RUSSIAN' IR: AN OVERVIEW AND ITS JUXTAPOSITION TO 'WESTERN' IR**

To sort out the co-evolution of Russian IR theory and foreign policy, this section provides a brief overview of the institutional and political context for the development of IR as an area of study in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia and offers a brief comparison of Russian IR with its Western counterpart.

#### **A Brief History**

Unlike Western IR, whose roots are often traced to the post-WWI period,<sup>7</sup> Russian IR is a young field of study. During the early and mid-Soviet era, Russian scholars were banned from engaging in the development of any IR theory critical of the premises of Marxism-Leninism, and IR as a discipline was regarded as a 'bourgeois science'. The situation began changing, albeit slowly, in the late 1960s, and this change was stimulated by a cautious discussion of IR theory and methodology in the monthly publication *World Economy and International Relations*, which was produced by Russia's oldest international relations institute – IMEMO. Also, MGIMO introduced its first course on IR theories around that time, but the works of Western scholars were still marginalized in its curriculum (Kosov, 2012).

Unlike in many Western countries, most research in the USSR was not carried out at the nation's universities, whose primary role was teaching, but at specially established 'scientific research institutes' or NIIs (from the Russian term *nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut*). NIIs were widespread throughout the Soviet Union. The most prestigious ones were constituent parts of the USSR Academy of Science, while others represented the research arms of various government ministries. All of the NIIs specialized in a particular field (e.g., the NII of Philosophy, the NII of Sociology, etc.) or had a specific regional orientation (e.g., the NII of the United States and Canada, the NII of Africa, and the NII of Latin America). The scientists working at these institutes had minimal contact with the university faculties and engaged in mostly 'fundamental' research with limited practical value.<sup>8</sup>

In the aforementioned context, IR was not considered as a distinct field of study with a body of specialized knowledge organized around identifiable theories and concepts with an institutional manifestation. Instead, IR was considered to be a sum of disciplinary perspectives on various aspects of inter-state relations. The interdisciplinary character of Western IR and the fact that other fields of study examine various aspects of its subject matter have also led to a questioning of the

disciplinary identity of IR among Western scholars (Schmidt, 2013). However, the distinctiveness of IR has often been deduced from its unique subject matter, typically defined in terms of politics in the absence of a central authority as well as specific epistemological and methodological assumptions (Schmidt, 2013). Most of the Western IR scholars derive their understanding of IR as a social science from the logical positivist account of science. This dominant tradition calls for an incremental and cumulative progress within IR whereby a greater understanding of the world is obtained by an increasing correspondence between theory and data. Subsequently, an understanding of theory as general propositions set out to explain the relationship between causes and effects, and methodological individualism have typified much of Western, especially American, IR (Acharya and Buzan, 2010).<sup>9</sup>

Both Soviet and post-Soviet IR have lacked the kind of self-reflexivity that has characterized Western IR (albeit unevenly), as well as continuous intellectual traditions informing coherent schools of thought or paradigms characterized by distinct assumptions. They have also been institutionally and theoretically separated from political science (*politologija*), and public policy and administration (*gosydarstvennoe upravlenie*). This understanding of IR and the institutional aspects of the Soviet social studies impaired the emergence of IR as an independent field of research in the Soviet Union and have slowed down its formation in the post-Soviet Russia (Kokoshin and Bogaturov, 2005; Kosov, 2012).

Another well-known aspect of Soviet social sciences was their monopolization by one highly ideological theoretical and methodological approach, and it is commonplace to think of Marxism-Leninism as a dominant perspective in the Soviet social studies. However, the Soviet Union's victory in the Second World War stimulated the development of a realist state-centric orientation in the Soviet social sciences. It is this peculiar symbiosis of Marxism-Leninism with realism that shaped the research practices of the early Soviet IR scholars. It also defined a rather narrow research agenda focusing on the questions of inter-state military and political relations. Modern Russian IR bears a strong legacy of this Marxist-realist thinking.

The effect of the 70 years of ideological censorship of the Soviet social sciences, which was amplified by the paucity of material and intellectual resources in the post-Soviet context, placed Russian IR scholars at a considerable disadvantage vis-à-vis their Western counterparts. The senior generation of Russian political scientists and IR scholars, who spent their formative years under and built their academic reputation during the Soviet era, had to acclimate to a new intellectual and institutional environment. Lacking the requisite knowledge of IR theory and methodological skills, many were unable to fit in the global (if Western-dominated) scientific community and compete with Western IR scholars in the global academic job market for

research funding opportunities or publications. Also, others were forced out of the academic profession by the deplorable economic situation of the 1990s.

### **Post-Cold War Russian IR: Dependence on and Resistance to the Dominance of Western Knowledge**

As the Russian state funds for social science dissipated, prominent Western foundations – MacArthur, Ford, Soros, and Open Society, to name but a few – along with the US State Department's funded programs began filling the void by offering resources for professionalization and training, and support for research for the Russian scientists. Many of these Western agencies pursued liberal agendas. They therefore played a prominent role in shaping the contours of Russian IR in general, and Russia's liberal IR theory in particular. Although open to researchers and professionals of all ages, these programs were particularly successful in training Russian junior IR scholars who began their graduate and post-graduate careers during Gorbachev's *perestroika* or immediately after the fall of the USSR (Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2007). This younger generation of IR specialists schooled in Western IR theory translated the knowledge they gained from the programs into a series of textbooks and monographs designed to spread and popularize Western concepts and theories outside the metropolitan educational and academic centers (Kokoshin and Bogaturov, 2005).

Despite the challenges of the formative years, Russian IR has developed into a recognized discipline officially approved by the Russian Ministry of Education, which included several IR topics as part of the state educational requirements in political science courses. Also, more than 80 Russian universities introduced curricula in world politics and international relations. Russian IR scholars have made significant strides in gaining competence in the Western IR theory, joining the global IR community, and engaging in novel conceptual thinking. Russian IR has also re-built or established a relevant academic infrastructure which includes over a dozen major universities offering graduate and undergraduate degrees in IR, multiple research institutes under the RAS, specialized agencies in the structure of the Russian ministries, independent research centers, scholarly associations, and multiple specialized journals (Torkunov, 2004: 37).

Still, Russian IR is far from creating a globally recognizable 'national school' which would be identified by a distinct set of concepts and theories, specific research methods, and its own criteria for relevance and validity of research. On the one hand, the much-welcomed help of the Western agencies slowed down the formation of a 'distinctly Russian IR' in that it promoted the engagement of the Russian scholars in the study of Western IR theory rather than fostering independent thinking about the living empirical reality. Reproduction of Western IR thought and making students learn Western IR concepts and theories was more convenient, financially more ben-

eficial, and also more prestigious, and as a result, it has become an end in itself for some Russian social scientists (Kokoshin and Bogaturov, 2005; Makarychev and Morozov, 2013).

Furthermore, on the other hand, as had been the case with social research in the Soviet period, post-Soviet Russian IR also took on ideological undertones. In other words, developments in Russian IR theory have been intimately connected with political discourses about present and future Russian foreign policy (Torkunov, 2004: 42). Many in the Russian academic community concur that Russian IR should be considered an 'applied science' because it blurs the line between the goal of understanding and explaining international relations, and the interest in guiding Russian foreign policy (Morozov, 2009). This is, certainly, not a uniquely Russian phenomenon. Still, in the context of American IR, in particular, foreign policy analysis is often separated from that of IR. While the dominant IR approaches – realism, liberalism, and, recently, constructivism – shape both public discourse and policy analysis, when they enter the policymaking arena and the public debate in the US, they lose their theoretical sophistication and become "intellectual window dressing for simplistic worldviews" (Snyder, 2009). Similarly to the Russian IR scholars, American IR scholars of particular paradigms tend to identify themselves politically on a left-right scale based on the resonance between the content of their ideology and the key propositions of IR theories. In contrast to the situation in Russian IR, however, recent surveys have shown that a positivist orientation of the Western IR scholars plays a prominent role in breaking the link between political values and paradigm choices, and positivism has been on the rise in Western IR scholarship (Rathbun, 2012). Russian IR scholars' self-identification has been less determined by their intellectual commitment to a certain theoretical paradigm or school of thought and more so by their ideological orientation (Torkunov and Mal'gin, 2012).

### **Ideology, Theory and Context**

Recognizing the mutual implication of academic theory and political ideology is not to confuse or conflate the two. Whether in the positivist or reflectivist understandings, ideology is primarily concerned with the simplification of reality for political purpose, whereas theory, as used in this study, is seen as an abstraction that organizes and represents complex phenomena in terms of interrelated concepts and categories (Acharya and Buzan, 2010).

All theories are constructed through the interplay of what we, scholars, experience with our senses, and what we construct in our minds using processes of inductive and deductive reasoning. However, theories arise not only from the cognitive and experiential processes of individuals, but from social processes as well (Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda, 1998). All knowledge, including theoretical knowl-

edge, emerges in a specific social, cultural, and historical context, which includes the prevailing political beliefs (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Theories, therefore, are not free from the influence of political ideologies. On the contrary, they are inherently ideological in nature (Kilty and Meenaghan, 1995). As Robert Cox (1986: 207) famously observed, "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose." Liberalism, for example, can be seen as speaking for capital, Realism for the maintenance of the great powers' dominance in the international system, and so on (Cox, 1986).

What differentiates the interplay of ideology and theory in Western IR from that in Russian IR is that in the Western academic context, the ideological underpinnings of the major IR theories are increasingly and openly acknowledged by the representatives of the theoretical perspectives themselves or are illuminated and criticized by critical IR theories, which are also widely recognized, taught, and researched in many Western universities, especially in Europe. However, not only has Russian IR not seen an intervention of critical perspectives – particularly those of Frankfurt School critical theory, post-structuralism, and feminism – but the theoretical and conceptual innovations of many Russian IR scholars have been largely motivated by political concerns about counteracting the Western hegemony and sustaining and increasing Russia's power, prosperity, and influence. These insights inform the analysis of 'Russian' IR across its two key spectrums – which we characterize as conservative and liberal – in the next section.

### **CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN IR: ENDOGENOUS TO RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

The understanding advanced above, that "our politics are connected to our political science," (Rathbun, 2012: 607) or that politics and political science go hand in hand, has informed our analysis of the development of 'Russian' IR, which is presented in this section. Others have looked at similar overlaps and co-evolutions in, for example, the US context (see, e.g., Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Oren, 2003). However, we seek to understand the particular development of 'Russian IR', and we also contend that social context and political concerns have been particularly relevant in this case.

Consistently with our argument about the ideologized character of the Russian IR theory, we place Russian approaches to IR along two main spectrums: the conservative and the liberal spectrum (Torkunov and Mal'gin, 2012). The spectrum of conservative approaches is mainly represented by Russian realists and representatives of the conservative variants of geopolitics. The spectrum of liberal perspectives consists of a range of theories about democratic peace, international institutions, regimes, and globalization.

There are also perspectives that do not fit neatly into either of the two groups, but they are far less widespread. Constructivist thinking, for example, is rarely used



as a standalone perspective, and it typically appears alongside the liberal theories for conceptualizing the influences of global culture and institutions, or alongside the realist theories, where the assumptions of socially constructed threats underpin the securitization paradigm (Shakirov, 2012). Also, sociology of IR is singled out as a separate approach focusing on international norms, institutions, identities, group values, cultures, and tradition. Nevertheless, the Russian sociology of IR in many ways resembles Western constructivism (Tsygankov, 2003). Furthermore, the English School finds supporters among sociologists (Temnikov, 2011), as does neo-Marxism, which emphasizes the importance of “world-economy” in world-systems analysis (Pantin and Lapkin, 2016; Zuikov, 2013). Still, in Russia most university graduates are not exposed to non-mainstream approaches to international relations. Russian IR theory courses focus heavily on the realist and liberal perspectives (see, for example, Khoros, 2016; Kvashnin, Toganova and Shumitskaia, 2015), while constructivism and other post-positivist approaches are presented as “post-modernist pseudo-science” (Makarychev and Morozov, 2013: 333), if discussed at all.

The analysis presented in this section first discusses the dominance of conservative approaches in general before examining two particular strands of conservative thinking in Russian IR – realism and geopolitics. The section then examines the liberal spectrum of approaches that constitute a substantial minority of the contemporary Russian approach to IR.

### **The Conservative (and Dominant) Spectrum in Russian IR**

In the post-independence period, conservative perspectives have dominated the Russian IR since the mid-1990s (Konyshchev, 2004; 2013). The rise of realist thinking in IR was concomitant with the spread of conservative views in the Russian government, where many voiced disillusionment with the outcomes of the domestic reforms and liberal foreign policy of the Yeltsin administration (Tsigankov, 2005: 108). As a result of the Soviet Union’s collapse, Russia plunged into a profound identity crisis that noticeably affected its foreign policy. Boris Yeltsin, who became the first president of Russia, was initially a passionate supporter of a pro-Western liberal orientation for Russia. He and the first Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, advocated for a rapid integration of Russia into the West. However, the Russian government quickly relinquished these ideas as the Russian prospects for an integration with the West dimmed (Maranz, 2012). Russian leaders were disheartened with the minimal volume of assistance from Western institutions, and upset with what they viewed as the desertion of Russia by Western states. The conservative political elite who felt that Russia was left to its own devices to tackle domestic and international problems became determined to resurrect its great power position and regain its influence in the post-Soviet space. Since the mid-1990s, Russian foreign policy has

developed a more unilateralist and, at times, anti-Western direction, reflecting the change in the perceptions and priorities of Russia's national interests (Monaghan, 2006).

The leadership of President Putin solidified the conviction of the Russian political and security elite that a multipolar world dominated by a handful of great powers, including Russia, was inherently more stable and considerably less threatening to Russian national interests than a world dominated by the United States (a position shared by some Western IR scholars, e.g., Mearsheimer, 1990; 2014). NATO's enlargement to the east was described using the rhetoric of an 'encroachment' of the Northern Alliance and the United States on Russia's traditional spheres of influence. Western-sponsored projects advocating political pluralism and democratization in the post-Soviet states have been portrayed as clandestine attempts to encircle and suppress the Russian state (Browning, 2008). Moscow has protested what it deemed as Western intrusions into its 'backyard' and called for the establishment of regional alliances to counterbalance the hegemony of the United States (Omelicheva, 2012).

At this juncture, academic and political discourses became closely intertwined, drawn together by a common agenda of reasserting Russia's great power identity and providing a theoretical justification for its practical resistance to the global dominance of the United States. As will be seen below, while there are important differences within Russian realism (see, for example, Shakleina and Bogaturov, 2004), it is united around state-centric assumptions and an orientation toward foreign policy implications. Russian realist approaches hold a 'moderate' position on the spectrum of conservative views on IR, whereas the Russian tradition of geopolitics, which is discussed in the subsequent sub-section, exemplifies a deeply conservative ideological position.

### **The Main Conservative Approaches I: Russian Political Realism**

Realists of all genres emphasize national interests defined in terms of power or security and national capabilities, which are construed as an ultimate arbiter in the incessant struggle of states for dominance in international relations. In fact, the majority of writings in the West on Russian foreign policy apply realist theories when examining it (see, for example, Casier, 2006; Koktysh, 2006; Lynch, 2001). At first glance, the Russian foreign policy discourse epitomizes the key tenets of political realism. Moscow's foreign policy makers conceive the international environment as "turbulent" and increasingly competitive (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013; Putin, 2014b). The Russian foreign policy discourse also makes frequent references to Russia's national interests and hard security concerns. President Putin characterized the state of the world as "a constant struggle for geopolitical interests" and maintained that national capabilities determine whether a state

has any clout in international politics or is considered a weak state (Putin, 2014a). He and other foreign policy makers have condemned the US for disrespecting Russia's legitimate interests and called on Washington to recognize Russia's needs and aspirations in relation to its international environment (Lavrov, 2014; Putin, 2014a; 2014c).

The Russian foreign policy discourse conveys Russia's uneasiness and discontent with the growing power of the United States, which, in Russia's view, is held responsible for destabilizing international affairs (Lavrov, 2014). As President Putin explained, "After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability as the West, led by the US, has been trying to ram its way of life into the throats of others" (Putin, 2014a). Recognizing the infeasibility of a restoration of the Cold War balance of power, Russian policy makers' hopes rest with the multi-polar structure of international relations, which is viewed as both a more stable and 'just' order of the world.

The majority of Russian realist scholars tend to view the unipolar international system as problematic and harmful (see, for example, Torkunov and Mal'gin, 2012: 48; Shakleina and Bogaturov, 2004). Similarly to the Russian foreign policy discourse that declared an end to the unipolar world order, Russian academic discourse contends that multi-polarity or one of its variants constitutes an established reality.<sup>10</sup> Its theoretical arguments against global hegemony, however, are less coherent and conclusive than its criticisms of the American international conduct exemplifying it. Echoing President Putin's remarks about Western states foisting their way of life on the rest of the world,<sup>11</sup> some Russian realists deplore the US hegemony for creating a "new international community" of developed democracies that embarked on a democracy promotion crusade (Bogaturov, 1999: 28). The NATO intervention in the Balkans and the US assistance to the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine are named as perfect examples of the West's imposition of its rules on neighboring countries by the majority of Russian policy makers and realists. Others critique the US's hegemony for prompting systemic crises, the breakup of the system of international law, and wars (Martynov, 2009).<sup>12</sup>

The discontent with unipolarity has been used to justify, in one way or another, the search for alternative models of international order in both political and academic milieus (Dykin and Arbatova, 2015: 10; Primakov, 2011: 6). The idea of multi-polarity was popularized in Russian foreign policy discourse in the late 1990s and remained a formative principle of Russian foreign policy during Putin's presidential terms in 2000–2008. Originally envisaged as a prospect for the immediate future, it became considered as a *fait accompli* following Moscow's victory in the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. In recent years, the concept of a 'polycentric' world has been used interchangeably with or in place of the 'multi-polar' world order in the Russian foreign policy discourse (see, for example, Putin, 2012). According to

Sergei Lavrov, the transition to a polycentric world order reflects important changes at the international level whereby new economic and financial centers play a greater role in managing the world economy and political processes (Lavrov, 2013).

Russian academic discourse also contains theoretical justification for the 'polycentric' world order embraced by the Russian government. Batalov (2012), for example, compares poles in IR to electric polarity, where the presence of a positive and a negative pole is necessary to complete a circuit. Based on this conceptualization, Batalov argues that a 'unipolar' world is, in essence, non-polar. Subsequently, he suggests portraying the modern world as 'polycentric,' as featuring multiple centers of global decision-making. Although there is no agreement among Russian realists on the number and the nature of these centers, the majority of Russian experts list the US, the pre-post-Cold War enlargement EU (Germany, France, and the UK, in particular<sup>13</sup>), China, India, and Brazil as power centers, while others add Russia, Mexico, and South Africa to this list. Following the recent changes in Russian foreign policy discourse, which point to a power shift from West to East and to the Asia-Pacific region (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 2013), a growing chorus of Russian realist scholars began asserting that the geopolitical center of power in international relations is shifting toward the East/Asia. A locus of the world's energy resources, this area is characterized by rapidly developing markets, high human capital, and economic dynamism. It therefore attracts significant economic interest (Torkumov and Mal'gin, 2012: 48).

Russia's recent foreign policy documents and speeches also foreground cultural and civilizational elements as the formative units of the polycentric world order. In the official foreign policy discourse, civilizations are not linked exclusively to an ethnicity, language, or territory, but defined by references to their histories and cultures. The Russian state, for example, is envisioned as being at the pinnacle of the 'Russian civilization' or the 'Russian world' and tasked with the role of its protector. While the discourse continues emphasizing the Westphalian principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-intervention, it also calls attention to traditions, morality, and cultures that ensure the unity and order within a civilization. States are expected to use threats, coercion, and even armed force to protect and preserve their 'worlds'. The Russian government envisions a greater possibility for cooperation within a civilization of states with a stronger cultural identification; but collaboration is also possible among states that share interests in industry, science, energy, and security (Medvedev, 2008).

Importantly, both the political and the academic discourse interpret the attributes of a 'center' of power more broadly than in the traditional realist sense. Although material and physical capabilities exemplified by a nuclear arsenal and energy resources still matter in the case of Russia, so do the elements of 'soft power,' which come in

two variants: as the power to attract of an attractive model of development and as a source of normative appeal (Makarychev, 2011). Furthermore, in accordance with the Russian foreign policy thinking reflected in the academic discourse, Moscow's soft power credentials need to be recognized, and this recognition can be accomplished by using a full range of instruments, including civil society, Russian media and business, and humanitarian tools.

The discourse over the attributes of power centers echoes deliberations over the properties of a great power state. Russian policymakers and realists of all stripes believe that Russia remains and will always be a great power state. It possesses this status because of its geopolitical position, considerable military and nuclear capabilities, plentiful natural resources, and unique cultural, historical, and intellectual traditions (Batalov, 2000: 33–37). To vindicate Russia's claims to global power, Russian realists have re-engaged with the very notion of a great power state. It has been suggested, for example, that great powers have a political culture that predisposes them to think and act globally. Russia, for example, has been described as a great power that historically emerged as a state with global plans and ambitions (Shakleina, 2011). Furthermore, according to the Russian realists, Russia has been the most active global player after the United States, and great powers are supposed to influence world affairs in a profound way and exercise considerable independence in their foreign policy and domestic politics (Batalov, 2000: 33–37; Bogaturov, 2010: 242; Shakleina, 2011; see also Dynkin and Baranovskii, 2015).

Russian realists have also transmuted the theoretical discussion of global hegemony into a philosophical, sociological, and psychological exploration of the topic of global leadership. According to the Russian realist scholars, the institution of global leadership is in a state of crisis prompted by the disruptive policies of the US (Batalov, 2012). There are only a dozen other states in the world that can rise to the role of a global leader in the future. What follows from the writings of the Russian realist scholars is that Russia holds a special position in this group as one of the states interested in strengthening the world order (e.g. supporting the rule of international law with the principle of sovereignty at its pinnacle), in this way exhibiting a predisposition toward responsible leadership.

### **The Main Conservative Approaches II: A Merger of Classical Geopolitics with Identity Politics**

To recapitulate, the Russian foreign policy discourse fuses realist concepts with cultural and civilization arguments. Russia's great power identity, for example, is derived from its material capabilities as well as its intellectual, cultural, and spiritual potential. Russia's great power identity, in turn, defines its perceptions of and responses to international events, regardless of its internal condition. Since Russian culture has been envisaged as the foundation of the national character and Russia's

'civilizational' identity, the goal of cultural preservation has been raised to the highest priority level in the foreign policy of the Putin administration (Putin, 2012).

However, while Russia's 'soft power' has been initially conceived as a primary conduit of Russia's interest in protecting its culture and institutions in the face of Western dominance, the Russian president has repeatedly called for 'new strategies' for safeguarding the 'Russian world'. The threats to this new civilizational entity are no longer limited to traditional concerns about possible military attacks against and occupations of Russia. Any imposition of Western values alien to the traditions and ways of life in the 'Russian world' is now perceived as immanently dangerous to Russia. This struggle is no longer about territorial spaces and resources, but includes a war of ideas and values, a dispute of minds. As President Putin explained, the Russian "cultural code", which applies to all bearers of the Russian cultural identity, regardless of nationality, has "in the recent years, been subject to some serious trials [...] And it has, nevertheless, prevailed. At the same time, it needs to be nourished, strengthened, and protected" (Putin, 2012). According to this line of foreign policy thinking, in Ukraine, for example, the West carried out a premeditated offensive against Russia's "historic mission" of integrating the "Russian world"<sup>14</sup> while, in the process, threatening the liberties and prospects of the ethnic Russians there. In Ukraine, Russia sees itself as a heroic nation-on-a-mission safeguarding the Russian world and restoring "fairness" in international relations, which were long abused by the West. "Standing up for fairness and truth has been deeply embedded in Russia's honor code, and no threat is great enough to make us give up our values and ideals," explained Putin in a speech commemorating Russia's Unity Day in 2014 (ITAR-TASS, 2014). That statement, in turn, necessitated and legitimated Russia's invasion in Ukraine.

Consistently with this 'civilizational' thinking in Russian foreign policy circles, some of the most conservative Russian realists as well as those working in the classical geopolitics tradition contend that the confrontation between Russia and the West (read, the US) takes on a "civilizational" dimension (Bogaturov, 2007; Dugin, 2000; 2013). Civilizational approaches to the world order precede the introduction of the notion of the 'Russian world' in Moscow's foreign policy discourse.<sup>15</sup> However, the popularization of the ideas of the 'Eurasian space' and the 'Russian world' by Russia's top foreign policy makers has stimulated geopolitical thinking in the Russian academia.

Modern Russian scholars of traditional geopolitics conceive of a civilization as a collectivity united around spiritual values, a shared history, a common mentality, symbols, and traditions. Individuals are expected to sympathize with others within the same civilization irrespective of their national, class, political and ideological affiliation. On the other hand, irreconcilable value-based cross-civilizational differences are viewed as the precursors of conflicts. According to the classical

geopolitical theory, the main confrontation is expected to take place between the land-based civilization, which values stability, conservatism, austerity, respect for tradition, and invariability of judicial and ethical principles, and the sea-based civilization, which embraces dynamism, innovation, and change (Solovyev, 2004). In the contemporary international relations Eurasianism and Atlanticism take the places of the land-based and sea-based civilizations, respectively. The Eurasianist orientation is expressed most distinctly by Russia, and the Atlanticist posture is best expressed by the United States (Dugin, 2000; 2013).

Due to the irreconcilable value differences between the heartland and the sea-land that exist in this view, US foreign policy will always aim to contain, encircle, fragment, marginalize, and otherwise weaken Eurasia. Russian geopolitical scholars see this as a constant of world politics. Russia's goal, therefore, is to reassert its sovereignty against the Atlanticist civilization by integrating Eurasia and denying any American military or ideological presence on or near the Eurasian land.

Although viewed with criticism by many IR scholars at home and abroad,<sup>16</sup> this kind of geopolitical thinking has gained a considerable following among the practitioners and students of global politics. A part of the explanation for the popularity of this geopolitical thinking lies in the similarity of the traditional geopolitics to the previously dominant postulates of Marxism and Leninism. The Russian public and politicians have been accustomed to an uncritical acceptance of claims of absolute 'truth'. They, therefore, feel averse to scientific theories that offer only relative and probabilistic answers to complex questions of international politics. In this context, many find it appealing to turn to the essentialist and highly deterministic theories of traditional geopolitics, which offer simple and unambiguous solutions to some ultimate puzzles of international relations (Solovyev, 2005).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, traditional geopolitics has demonstrated an extraordinary mobilization potential and an ability to rally the support of large swaths of the Russian population (*ibid.*). In this way, it became the ultimate ideological replacement for the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Given its strong resonance with the public, both the Russian government and its opposition now utilize geopolitical terminology. For Russian conservative IR thinkers uncomfortable with the US intellectual hegemony, traditional geopolitics presents itself as a counter-hegemonic discourse grounded in the native ideas of Russian Eurasianists.

It is, however, important to note that traditional geopolitics does not encompass the entire geopolitical professional community in Russia. Other Russian geopoliticians suggest forgoing the traditional politico-spatial thinking in favor of transactional, international, global, multi-level, and multi-dimensional constructs (Gadshiev, 1996; Sorokin, 1996). In this interpretation, geopolitics becomes a complex social discipline integrating various branches of knowledge from humanities and social sciences (Solovyev, 2004: 93). Along these lines, some scholars developed a geopoliti-

tics of cooperation integrating political geography with international relations (Kolosov, 1992; Kolosov and Mironenko, 2002), and a geopolitics of power strongly resembling Western critical geopolitics (Zamyatin, 1998; 2001).<sup>18</sup> Also, some scholars working in the tradition of classical geopolitics relaxed the narrow geographical determinism of their explanations of world order. Modern telecommunications and technologies, including military technologies, have influenced the very understanding of distance and 'geopolitical' space, thus expanding the national strategic objectives and capabilities. Still, all of these perspectives remain Russia-centric and married to the idea of producing effective geo-strategic projects for the Russian government (Solovyev, 2004).

### **Liberal IR Discourses in Russian Academia and Foreign Policy**

Liberal thinking on international affairs proliferated in Russia in the early 1990s, reflecting the views and foreign policy ideas of the Yeltsin–Kozyrev team. In 1992, the then Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev announced that Russian foreign policy would be built on democratic principles of respect for human rights and the universal values of global economic, environmental, and nuclear security, which would be realized through a community of democratic states. Determined to liberate Russia from the burden of imperial and messianic beliefs, Kozyrev, who earned a PhD in history studies and published extensively on arms control and other IR subjects, argued for a radical reorientation of Russia's foreign policy away from the former Soviet republics and toward the United States and Europe, including the economic and security institutions – NATO, the IMF, etc. – spearheaded by them (Kozyrev, 1995; Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2010). Kozyrev's vision not only shaped the first foreign policy concept of the Yeltsin government, but also informed the outlook of many Russian liberal and democratic peace theorists who argued for Russia's continued economic and political liberalization and for forging Russia's integration with the West (Kara-Murza, 2001; Kremenyuk, 2004; 2006; Mel'vil, 1998).<sup>19</sup> An example of an application of this liberal vision to a regional order can be found in the work of Dmitri Trenin (2001), who maintained that Russia's dominance in Eurasia had come to an end. According to Trenin, pervasive external pressures, including normative impacts and new security imperatives triggered by globalization (which is here seen as having been initiated by the West), made Russia's historical "officialdom" obsolete (Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2010).

Russia's rapprochement with the US in the post-9/11 context rekindled Russia's liberal discourse in IR. Many liberal scholars applauded Putin's decision to join the counter-terrorism alliance with the US, and some even encouraged the development of a deeper union defined by a common identity and values (Yavliski, 2002). Other liberal theorists favored a limited tactical alliance with the US reflecting the



policies of the Putin administration (Buzgalin, 2002). The latter issued strong objections to the US-led campaigns against authoritarian regimes as these campaigns were perceived as major causes of terrorism. The Putin government therefore objected to the idea that foreign military interventions are an effective strategy to combat terrorism (Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2010).

As discussed earlier, Western IR perspectives have had a strong formative impact on the contemporary Russian liberal IR theory (Konyshev, 2007; Lebedeva, 2004; see also Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2004; 2010). As a result, neoliberal institutionalism, the democratic peace theory, globalization approaches, and other liberal perspectives have been introduced in the Russian IR (Bogaturov, 2010; Kokoshin and Bogaturvo, 2005; Tsygankov, 2003). As discussed in the earlier section on the historical background of Russian IR, the fact that the Russian liberal IR discourse reflects Western theoretical constructs and policy concerns has much to do with the sources of financial and intellectual support for the Russian liberal scholarship. However, there are also peculiar similarities between the Russian liberal and conservative discourses. Similarly to the Russian realist discourse, the Russian liberal IR discourse characterizes the world as transitional, turbulent, and complex, but unlike their realist colleagues, Russian liberal IR scholars see a greater possibility for progress. The questions of Russia's global identity and Russia's role in global affairs, and speculations about a more progressive world order are also featured prominently in the Russian liberal IR scholarship.

Russian liberal IR scholars with a nationalist streak, for example, recognize the spread of democratic norms and institutions, but stress the importance of respect for cultural pluralism in an increasingly global world. Challenging the idea that the world is becoming homogeneously liberal and democratic (Kulagin, 2000), this group of scholars has argued for the establishment of a "unity in diversity" regime that will allow individual nations to follow their own internally developed principles while complying with certain globally recognized norms (Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 2004: 58).<sup>20</sup> This position echoes the rare liberal notions that emerge in Russian foreign policy discourse. Russian policy-makers underscore commitments to democratic values, yet in a unique way that suits the Russian path. As President Putin explained, "Russia made its choice; our priorities are to enhance democratic institutions and the open economy, and facilitate domestic development by taking advantage of positive modern global trends and paying heed to the importance of social consolidation *on the basis of traditional values and patriotism* [emphasis added]" (Putin, 2014b).

Russian liberal institutionalist scholars emphasize the role of international organizations and norms but, similarly to the Russian government, they foreground the role of the United Nations and define international norms rather narrowly as legal principles enshrined in the UN Charter (Adamisin, 2002). These IR theorists con-

tend that the US cannot stabilize the international system alone. It can only exercise its global leadership if it acts through the global institutions and takes other states' interests into consideration. It is not surprising that these liberal scholars concurred with the Russian government by disavowing the US intervention in Iraq in 2003, which was carried out without the UN Security Council's approval (Borko, 2001; Davydov, 2002; for a more contemporary assessment of the US intervention in Iraq see, for example, Kamyshanov, 2015).

Other Russian liberal scholars share the philosophy of globalization, interdependence, and a global community, but deny the West full credit for shaping international processes and norms. These same scholars reject the dichotomy between 'progressive' and 'backward' nations and emphasize the special nature of the Russian path of development and the importance of local cultures and histories in world politics.

### CONCLUSION

The theoretical perspectives cultivated in Russian academia dovetail with the developments in Russian foreign policy, while Russian foreign policy discourse parallels the premises of the theoretical approaches developed by Russian IR scholars. Regardless of whether the examined theoretical constructs are mutually exclusive on the grounds of Western IR theory, Russian foreign policy makers blend a variety of perspectives – from the most conservative tradition of geopolitics to liberal and institutionalist views – to construe international relations and Russia's place in the world. Does this imply that there is a distinct Russian IR theory that is better equipped to explain Russian foreign policy and international relations? This question animated the present exploration.

Our contention is that there is still not a Russian national school of IR with a distinct set of concepts and theories, research methods, and meta-theoretical standards for assessing legitimate contributions to the IR knowledge. Nevertheless, strongly influenced by the theoretical developments in the West, Russian IR has produced a number of conceptual innovations and approaches for the study of IR. Some of these ideas originate in Russia's own cultural heritage and intellectual traditions, while others have been borrowed and 'resignified.' The notion of *resignification* describes a transformative practice of using established concepts in new contexts that is often accompanied by alterations in the related terms' original meanings which are created by either stretching their content or ascribing additional meanings to them (Makarychev, 2011). This clearly applies to the Russian academic discourse, which has creatively redefined the notions of a great power and multipolarity, among others.

Under some circumstances, local distinctiveness can indeed lead to the formation of national schools that have an independent standing within the discipline and can contribute to global IR knowledge (Makarychev and Morozov, 2013). In the case of

Russia, however, the manifestly ideological character of the theoretical postulates and interpretations has been a major obstacle to the formation of such an academic Russian IR. The theoretical perspectives examined in this study purport to offer authoritative accounts about the present character of Russian foreign policy and Russia's views on international relations. The widespread tendency in this scholarship is to develop theories and concepts that reflect the government's key concerns. In a nutshell, Russian IR perspectives seem able to account for Russian foreign policy and views of the world because the academic and foreign policy discourses have been co-evolving. The emphasis on Russia's great power identity, concerns with the US domination of global affairs, and the search for models of a 'just' and 'progressive' world order have been pivotal for both academic and policy discourses in Russia.

The co-evolution of academic and policy discourses is not unique to Russia. In fact, different kinds of discourses always affect each other. Yet, the unique historical and institutional circumstances of Russian IR have amplified the impact of the Russian politics on Russian social studies with their subsequent ideologization. Ideology and politics played a predominant role in the Soviet scientific enterprise. The ideologization of science in the USSR imposed significant constraints on the development of social science there (Josephson, 1992). This historical legacy handicaps Russian research in contemporary IR to this day. Parts of the older generation of Russian IR scholars, who were professionalized and socialized in the Soviet academe, have not been able to rid themselves of the style of research practices that was characteristic of the Soviet scientific enterprise, but they continue to control the key institutions through which the Russian academic community reproduces itself (Makarychev and Morozov, 2013). What is more, many in the Russian foreign policy establishments have sought to add an academic rank and degree to their government portfolios.<sup>21</sup> Not only have they begun disseminating their political views into the world under the guise of academic publications, but they have also joined the faculties and gained top administrative positions at the leading Russian universities. This, in turn, has enabled them to exert powerful influences on Russian IR scholarship and teaching.

However, it is not only the historical legacy of Soviet academe that has played a role in the ideologization of the Russian IR, but also the willful blurring of the line between academic work and politics, the instrumental use of academia to legitimize and conceptualize policy preferences, the lack of independence of Russian social sciences and their effective capture by the current regime. The government's control of academia has been the primary culprit in the decline of academic freedom in Russia. Following a series of protests against the Putin administration that rippled across the country in 2011, President Putin approved the Russian 'foreign agents' law in 2012. The law requires all non-profit organizations that receive foreign funds and engage in 'political activity' to register as 'foreign agents.' The law provided the pre-

text for the deportation of many Western scientists, and investigations into the universities and programs receiving funds from abroad. Also, a number of investigations and court cases were launched against Russian academics accused of spying for the West (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia, 2012: 338). This, along with the deteriorating economic situation, has further restricted the contacts of Russian scientists and universities with their counterparts in the West.

The overhaul of the RAS pushed through by Vladimir Putin has been seen as another step towards a greater politicization of science. The reform launched in 2014 stripped the RAS of the right to manage its property and imposed a new oversight on its various institutions, effectively putting them under a bureaucracy of those with ties to the governing regime (Staley, Meyer and Kravchenko, 2014). If history is any indication of the future government policies, one can expect to see more government control over publications and the requirement of political loyalty on the part of researchers, as without it, they will not be able to secure funding for their projects. The lack of freedom is one of the reasons for the current intellectual emigration from Russia. The majority of those who left are basic scientists – physicists, biologists, and mathematicians – with social scientists constituting less than 3 percent of the Russian ‘brain drain’ (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia, 2012: 331). The aforementioned challenges to Russian social scientists’ integration in the Western academic community and ability to successfully compete with the Western researchers have left many of them employed at their home institutions, despite the low pay, low prestige, and poor working conditions, all of which are seen as the primary drivers for the exodus of skilled scientists from Russia. Unavoidably, those Russian social scientists who teach and research in the Russian political and socio-economic context become engaged in the reproduction of ideologized knowledge. Those who try to challenge or change the situation – either from within Russia or while residing abroad – form a new generation of “heroes and villains,” as they are lauded by some for withstanding and critiquing the ideological influence on scholarship and resisting co-option by the Putin regime, but simultaneously damned by that regime and its allies (Shnoll, 2000).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For recent analyses of ethnocentrism of IR, see, for example, Crawford and Jarvis, 2001; Inayatullah and Blaney, 1996. It is also important to note that the idea of ‘Global IR’ transcends categories of non-Western and post-Western IR while arguing that the discourse about the future of IR should include multiple and overlapping conversations (Acharya, 2014; Acharya and Buzan, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the existence of multiple ways of thinking about and defining the terms ‘West’, ‘mainstream’, and ‘IR’, we chose the following connotations for them. The ‘West’ is understood as both a geographical (the US, Europe) and an ideological (a set of ideas and meanings brought by the Cold War conflict between the West and the East) entity. The term ‘mainstream’ IR refers to the branch of politi-

cal and international studies which emerged in the wake of World War I as a positivist discipline and in which the US is the leader in the related academia. Political realism and liberalism are considered to be the mainstream IR theories (see, for example, Lott, 2010; Schmidt, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Full texts of IMEMO's articles and books (in Russian) are available at <http://www.imemo.ru/en/publ.html>; the abridged, English language versions of the IMEMO 2015 and 2016 forecast reports on IR and Russian foreign policy were published in the winter issues of *New Perspectives* in 2014 and 2015.

<sup>4</sup> On the journal's website, full texts of its articles are available in Russian only, but the articles' abstracts appear in English – [http://www.intertrends.ru/index\\_e.htm](http://www.intertrends.ru/index_e.htm) (Accessed 06/01/2015).

<sup>5</sup> Online: <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru> (Accessed 06/01/2015).

<sup>6</sup> There are also several texts of this sort that were produced by regional schools, but those did not receive the same national significance as the texts produced in the leading IR programs.

<sup>7</sup> The birth of IR as a field of study is often associated with the establishment of the first chair for the study of international politics in 1919 at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. However, if in the United Kingdom IR was institutionalized as a separate discipline, in the United States it has been located within the disciplinary matrix of American Political Science (Schmidt, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> 'Fundamental research' or '*fundamental'nye issledovaniia*' in the Soviet Union was a kind of basic research driven by the goal of expanding the general knowledge in the field of study rather than producing knowledge aimed at solving specific problems. In the USSR, the Soviet Academy of Sciences was charged with the planning, guidance, and management of scientific research as well as supervision of the work of its institutes and employees. As a result of several reforms implemented in the 1960s in the Academy of Sciences, fundamental research was completely separated from applied research and development. Nearly all of the Academy's technical-oriented (applied) research institutes were shifted into the industrial sector, thus strengthening its focus on basic research (Graham, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note, however, that there are many adherents to the 'softer' reflectivist understanding of theory found among scholars in Europe and the US, as can be seen in the emergence of the International Political Sociology section of the ISA and its associated and highly ranked eponymous journal, which has also been part of a wider trend towards an interdisciplinary IR.

<sup>10</sup> For an exception to this view, see Martynov (2009).

<sup>11</sup> This was the tenor behind Putin's controversial speech at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy, in which he criticized the "unipolar world" promoted by the West as a world of "one master, one sovereign", where the US "has overstepped its national borders in every way" and is imposing its economic, political, cultural, and educational policies on other nations (Browning, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Russian realists explain the rise of instability in international relations by the supposed fact that under the conditions of hegemony no room is left for the self-regulating and natural mechanisms of international relations to play their critical role in reducing the world's escalating tension, essentially implying a lack of balance of power.

<sup>13</sup> The Russian government continues to face the perpetual dilemma of placing Russia vis-à-vis Europe. A solution to it that has been recently discursively communicated by the Putin regime is that Russia is the final keeper of European civilization and a guardian of traditional European culture, referring to the culture and civilization of the 'old' Western Europe (The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation,

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2014). On his first trip to Germany in his capacity as the President, Dmitri Medvedev defended the common roots of the Russian and European civilizations: "We share the same set of values and the same sources of law [...] We have a common history and share the same humanitarian values. The common thinking is the foundation that enables us to speak not just the same legal or business language today, but, I hope, also the same political language" (Medvedev, 2014). The comparison, however, is with Germany, France, and the UK rather than other European states.

<sup>14</sup> In some speeches of Vladimir Putin, the term 'Russian world' is used interchangeably with the term 'Eurasian space.'

<sup>15</sup> These ideas appeared already in early Russian geopolitical thought, like that which was found in the writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers Nikolai Danilevski and Konstanine Leontyev, who speculated about 'cultural-historical types.' The national tradition found in the scholarship of Slavophiles and Russian Eurasianists also continues to inform the core premises of the contemporary civilizational perspective (Solovyev, 2004: 85).

<sup>16</sup> Some Russian scholars call it an 'art' or a 'craft' rather than a science; others use more pejorative references, such as referring to it as 'vulgar' geopolitics. One of the main reasons for this attitude is the fact that Russian geopolitics has been appropriated by nationalist political forces in Russia that use its dubious intellectual foundations in support of their far right ideology. Furthermore, its connection to the German geopolitical thinking of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century makes the intellectual foundations of the conservative Russian geopolitics suspect.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted, however, that the nostalgia for the presumed certainty of the Cold War period is not unique to Russia, but is spread among some segments of the Western scholars and populations as well.

<sup>18</sup> In Russia, there are also little-known traditions of critical geopolitics (see Okunev and Kuchinov, 2014), cultural geography and mythogeography (Zamyatin, 2004; Mitin, 2008), and the regional trends of sacred and existential geography developed by a team of Russian academics from the Ural State University (Bogomyakov, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Russian democratic peace theorists share beliefs in the 'peaceful' nature of liberal democracies and promote the adoption of the standards of Western pluralistic democracy under the condition that Russia would be peaceful and 'civilized' (Kremenjuk, 2004; 2006). In addition, they insist that Russia needs to complete its political and economic transformation before pursuing an active engagement in international politics (Mel'vil, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Other conceptions of the multiple centers of power include 'alternative multipolarity' (Sergeyev, 2001). Still, other Russian IR scholars (Pantin, 2002; Salmin, 2001) argue against using conceptualizations of a uni-polar or multi-polar world order for discussing the contemporary world.

<sup>21</sup> An example of this practice is the recent re-naming of IMEMO as the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations in 2015.

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