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Russia rising? The normative renaissance of multinational organizations

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List of abbreviations:

BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India, China

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organisation

EaEU – Eurasian Economic Union

ECU – Eurasian Customs Union

EU - European Union

EurAsEC – Eurasian Economic Community

G8 – Group of 8

G20 – Group of twenty

GDP – Gross domestic product

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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The period since Vladimir Putin’s first accession to the Russian presidency has seen multiple attempts at institutionalising regional and multinational cooperation. These range from those groups formed out of the ashes of the Soviet Union, in which Russia enjoys a privileged role, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), to more recent attempts to re-define global associations, including bodies such as BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), where Russia’s very belonging has been questioned, and the Eurasian Union, in which Russia will be by far the dominant power – so much so that Hillary Clinton labelled it an attempt to “re-Sovietise” Russia’s region.¹ This attempt to broaden Russia’s multinational memberships falls within a broader strategy, aimed at advancing global multipolarity, which actually has origins in the Yeltsin period. The most significant advocate for multipolarity, and particularly strategic initiatives between the ‘strategic triangle’ of Russia, India and China, was Yevgeny Primakov, Russia’s foreign minister from 1996-1998, and Prime Minister from 1998-1999. Primakov’s era can be seen as one in which Russia experienced growing disillusionment with its Western partners. Western states’ violations of state sovereignty in the name of humanitarian intervention were considered highly selective and hypocritical, especially given strong criticism of Russia’s Chechen campaigns. This contributed to a Russian sense that the structures of global governance were increasingly oriented towards the West’s new values, at the expense of Russia’s longstanding interests. More fundamentally, it fed the Russian perception, even more prevalent today, that the Western world of casual blasphemy and ‘gay propaganda’ was entering a state of moral bankruptcy in which not even the most basic values were held sacred. A strategic shift was considered necessary to restore balance to Russia’s foreign policy. As well as the strategic triangle, Primakov promoted closer relations with Brazil, resulting in bilateral documents outlining a formula for strategic cooperation.² Although the Yeltsin era did not see the full realisation of Primakov’s initiatives, the groundwork was nonetheless set. The concepts of multipolarity and polycentrism became common refrains in elite rhetoric, and Russia’s bilateral cooperation with China and India steadily increased. Multilateral cooperation increased through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and from 2005, this developed into trilateral consultations between Russian, Chinese and Indian foreign ministers, which now occur on an annual basis.

Recent years have seen further moves to diversify Russia’s foreign policy. On the one hand, Russia made its failed overture to the European Union (EU) in the form of the 2008 draft European Security Treaty, and participated in the short-lived ‘reset’ with the United States. On the other hand, the Russian leadership has become increasingly concerned with what it sees as the relative decline of the West, and the corresponding rise of emerging powers, amongst whose number Russia has taken

pains to identify itself, despite recurring questions over the plausibility of its belonging. As well as advocating the expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Russia has been a key player in promoting BRICS, and breathing life into what had been a stagnant Eurasian integration project, with Putin's 2011 article in *Izvestia* giving new impetus to the institutionalisation of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU).³ As this chapter proceeds, it will become clear that there are several issues with the coherence and practical relevance of many of these initiatives, and it is by no means clear that their current format can present a long-term alternative to existing structures of global governance. However, despite this, the process of self-identification itself matters and it has helped bring about some genuine political changes that have helped Russia to challenge the pro-Western norms of multinational institutions.

Traditionally, Russian foreign policy has been dominated by its bilateral relations, which often reflect specific conceptions of Russia's role within the relationship. Since such role conceptions are created and performed within international organisations and institutions, Russia's memberships of multinational bodies can shed light on how its role and position are represented. These representations feed into foreign policy approaches, and increasingly facilitate structural changes in the international arena.

Beginning by introducing some of the insights of role theory, this chapter draws links between the dominant themes in the rhetoric of Russia's ruling elite and Russia's foreign policy activities. However, through its examination of the political elite's conceptions of Russia's role in multinational organisations, it reveals how such organisations form part of a growing normative challenge to the status quo in international relations. Through maintaining an intricate balancing act between its memberships of multiple organisations, Russia is able to play varying roles within different institutional and geographical contexts. This tactic has led to the formation of several partial normative coalitions, aimed at challenging the rationale for the pro-Western perspectives on global governance that are currently dominant. It is from this vantage point as a self-identified rising power that the Russian leadership seeks to preserve its influence, whilst helping to set the norms for a multipolar future. This has resulted in a normative challenge to the current state of global governance in three areas: the economy, politics, and the military/security arena. In several cases these challenges have brought about visible structural changes.

Russia's role

In a seminal study of 1970, K J Holsti found that the ways in which foreign policy-makers articulated their nation's international role (role conceptions) were closely linked to governments' decisions and actions on the international stage (role performance). Roles that seemed to contradict one another could nonetheless operate in tandem in different geographical, topical or relationship contexts.⁴ Thus, role conceptions can be thought of as a short-hand for the norms and expectations foreign

policy-makers use to make sense of the world – they operate as a cognitive lens derived from culturally-specific ideas.⁵

Several scholars have examined the Russian political elite's approach to roles and/or identity, focusing on issues from how actors across the political spectrum represent Russian identity in ways consistent with their political or ideological values, to how their differing political persuasions cause them to adopt specific interpretations of recurring themes.⁶ In recent times, leading Russian politicians have presented a highly restrictive narrative of Russia's past. With its very limited scope of content and representation, this narrative emphasises and naturalises particular identity themes that support the ruling elite's approach to international relations.⁷ This chapter builds on existing work by showing how the simultaneous fostering of different roles across regional organisations has enabled the formation of flexible coalitions motivated by normative convictions, which are capable of mounting a threefold challenge to dominant pro-Western perspectives on global governance. Far from being a development of purely theoretical significance, this challenge has had some visible structural implications. Before presenting a detailed analysis of these challenges and their implications across the economic, political and military/security arenas, it is useful to consider some of the recurring themes surrounding Russia's identity and its international role that appear in the discourse of Russia's ruling elite, which inform its activities within multinational organisations.

History as a guide

The importance of learning from Russia's unique past is a theme that recurs frequently in the discourse of Russia's ruling elite. All of the Russian Federation's Presidents have explicitly linked Russia's future fortunes to its inheritances from the past, taking care to represent that past in ways that support their preferred policy directions.⁸

Great powerism

Leading political figures agree upon Russia's historical status as a great power.⁹ Specific characterisations of this greatness variously focus on sovereignty,¹⁰ territorial integrity¹¹ or unity amongst the peoples of the Russian state.¹²

Instrumentalized citizenry

By comparison to this reification of the state, Russia's citizenry is frequently instrumentalized in the state's service. Ethnic or national identification is characterized as secondary to state belonging, and the citizenry is often portrayed as a resource for national development or state strength. It is recognized that such development often comes at great human cost, since the greatest advances in the country's past have occurred during periods of despotism.¹³

Russia as an international equal

As befitting its great power status, Russia is presented as worthy of equal and respectful treatment by other states.¹⁴ There is a negative appraisal of the EU's apparent monopoly on European values, which neglects Russia's contribution to European culture and the varied traditions of values and moral norms that exist across the continent.¹⁵ Furthermore, senior figures have vocally criticised Western states for double standards.¹⁶

Eurasian Bridge

Much is made of Russia's strategically unique geographical position between Europe and Asia, represented as a key element in Russia's cultural contribution to Europe and the rest of the world.¹⁷ There have even been references to a shared "northern civilisation", in light of which the West's moral decline is felt particularly acutely.¹⁸

First among equals

The Russian political leadership views Russia as having the moral right to leadership of its geographical region, having civilized the Eurasian continent and promoted peaceful ethnic, religious and linguistic cohabitation – a legacy only made possible by the emphasis Russians have placed on the value of tolerance.¹⁹ This role is reinterpreted for today as the consolidation of soft power through strategic partnerships and coalitions,²⁰ though this obscures an approach to hard and soft power not as separate tactics for specific situations, but as two points on the same diplomatic continuum. The tendency to elide the approaches may serve to undermine Russia's efforts in this regard.

Russia's Region

The CIS represents the first organisation to attempt to re-institutionalise regional cooperation following the Soviet collapse. As such, it includes the greatest number of post-Soviet countries, but its value is more symbolic than practical since membership demands only loose commitments, with few coherent shared outcomes²¹. In the economic arena, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which was formed in 2000, is the broadest post-Soviet institution. It was granted observer status at the UN in 2003, and made subject of a 2007 resolution on co-operation.²² More recently, it has been the site of the most significant integrative initiative since the Soviet era – the Eurasian Customs Union, and proposed Eurasian Economic Union that has already formally harmonized the borders, tariffs and trade regime between its three founder members. In line with its predicted (and desired) multipolar world order, Russia has also invested significant diplomatic effort in promoting a number of organisations that institutionalise cooperation well beyond the post-Soviet space, and in which it cannot hope to play such a dominant role. For instance, in marketing the BRICS group of nations, recent presidencies have deliberately framed Russia's economic position as that of a resurgent power, newly rising in the global economy. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO),

whose forerunner was created in 1995, is another forum for economic and infrastructural interaction stretching beyond Russia's immediate region, in which Russian and Chinese influence balance each other out. The organisation boasts an extended membership that includes Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey as dialogue partners, and Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran as observers. Originally conceptualized as a forum for the negotiation of common borders, the SCO remains active in regional security, though it is only the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), created in 1992, that has a legal basis for the collective use of force.

Russia's balancing act between these various institutions has caused significant tensions, most recently in its relationship with the United States and the EU following renewed commitment to the realisation of the ECU (and pre-dating the Ukraine crisis). Despite the ensuing analytical complexity, this balancing act nonetheless accurately reflects Russia's preferred "multi-vector" foreign policy.²³ This enables Russia's prized bilateral relationships to be negotiated through the context of various roles across organisations, and facilitates flexible international co-operation without risk to sovereignty. The approach assists in the consolidation of a regional power base to strengthen Russia's international position, and enables Russia to take part in normative coalitions that challenge the dominant pro-Western perspective on global governance in three areas: the economy, politics, and the military/security arena.

Figure 9.1: Russia in overlapping multinational organisations

Economic activity

Reflecting its struggle to reconcile an influential Soviet past with a current diminished economic status, Russia's activities within different institutions display a prioritisation of seemingly contradictory roles. Attempts to maintain traditional great power relations contrast with vocal promotion of Russia as one of a band of newly-emerging economic powers. Yet, both of these orientations are useful for reinforcing particular aspects of the Russian challenge to contemporary economic governance.

Russia clings to its leading role in the post-Soviet and Eurasian region, and Russian approaches to foreign policy²⁴ and national security²⁵ have long reinforced the importance of structured economic interaction across the area, as well as reflecting the link drawn in Putin's doctoral thesis between the state of the economy, particularly in the energy sphere, and state strength.²⁶ These priorities are evident through the consolidation of the ECU, which had seen little tangible progress since the idea was first put forward in the mid-1990s, but benefitted from a great surge following Vladimir Putin's 2011 *Izvestia* article promoting the institution. The union formally removed internal physical border controls between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, created a common customs tariff and territory and a regulatory body, the Eurasian Economic Commission.²⁷ The ECU boasts a joint population of 167 million, GDP of US\$2 trillion and a goods turnover of US\$900 billion,²⁸ and the fully-fledged Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU) will come into force on 1 January 2015.²⁹

Putin has taken pains to stress that the ECU's legal framework makes provisions for members' WTO obligations and as such, that it complements the EU's economic integration projects.³⁰ However, despite these assertions, it is clear that the development of the ECU represents a normative challenge to the EU's former monopoly on approaches to regional economic integration, which highly prized democratic conditionality.³¹ From the Russian perspective, economic governance should derive from economic interests, not political values. Free from democratic conditionality, the ECU's rules and procedures are nonetheless institution-led, professional, consensual and transparent, and the Commission's decisions automatically become part of the legal base of the ECU and Common Economic Space, without the need for additional ratification.³² This alternative to EU insistence on democratic conditionality symbolises Russia's continued push for normative influence. Whilst Belarusian membership of the ECU is a necessity given its economic dependence upon Russia, Kazakhstan is an economically strong and self-confident state in its own right, which sees the union ultimately as a route to more markets, and to Russian pipelines for exporting hydrocarbons to Europe.³³ It has voluntarily agreed to harmonise its trade norms with those of Russia, despite economic consequences that appear negative in the short-term, including real losses in income, wages, returns on capital and the commitment to two less economically liberal states.³⁴ In so doing, it has given Russia evidence of the attractiveness of an integration project devoid of a normative commitment to democratic standards.

Many questions have been raised over the practical relevance of the ECU. Some have charged that the union's apparent early growth figures owed more to Russia's recovery from a GDP slump than trade outcomes,³⁵ that Kazakhstan and Belarus have suffered economically for Russia's gain,³⁶ and that exclusions and exemptions to the free trade regime remain, including duties levied on Russian oil sent to Belarus that is not for domestic consumption, and as of 2014, on all oil sent from Russia to Kazakhstan.³⁷ Nonetheless, several other states, namely Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia, have announced plans for ECU membership,³⁸ and Kazakh President Nazarbayev has advocated the organisation's further expansion, mentioning Turkey in particular.³⁹ Despite domestic resistance in the light of events in Ukraine, the Tajik and Kyrgyz Presidents both moved closer to accession at the EaEU treaty signing in May 2014.⁴⁰ There is a clear practical consideration here, for leaders who recognise the necessity of good relations with Russia now more than ever. However, there is nonetheless an economic rationale. The common linguistic and educational heritage makes Russia a popular employment destination for Tajik and Kyrgyz workers, who respectively accounted for 16 percent and 7 percent of Russia's migrant labour force in 2010.⁴¹ With prospective member states heavily reliant on remittances from Russia, there are strong incentives to simplify labour migration.⁴²

Sitting alongside such attempts to re-package Russia's longstanding regional leadership and great power status is the apparently contradictory tendency to latch onto the emerging economies in the BRICS. The founding member BRICS are all ranked in the top 10 of global economies, and together represent 15 percent of the world's GDP and more than a 50 percent share in global economic development.⁴³ However, recent times have seen increasingly frequent questions over the sustainability of the group's developmental model,⁴⁴ and of its rise more generally.⁴⁵ Yet such questions are blind to an important factor in the group's development, and one which is of particular interest given Russian foreign policy aspirations. BRICS has evolved from what was essentially a marketing tool to an overtly political project intimately concerned with challenging the dominant norms of global governance.

In spite of criticisms for conceptual incoherence and the unclear basis for membership (a charge that has faced Russia, Brazil and South Africa),⁴⁶ BRICS has presented united dissatisfaction with the pro-Western perspective on global governance. The group and its members have vocally affirmed their attachment to values of territorial integrity, sovereignty and to the concept of global multipolarity, which they see as necessary for ensuring economic stability.⁴⁷ The BRICS have sought to challenge globalisation's inequalities by renegotiating trade and environmental regulations⁴⁸ and voting shares in global institutions. Five percent of voting shares in the IMF and three percent in the World Bank have now been re-allocated to developing and emerging economies,⁴⁹ and plans are currently underway for the establishment of a BRICS development bank that is anticipated to offer an alternative to the conditionality associated with existing institutions.⁵⁰

Russia's leaders are increasingly attempting to ensure an influential role for the country in what is seen as an evolving multipolar, or polycentric global system,⁵¹ by helping to alter the structures of

global governance for the future, and by providing the 'missing link' between a stagnant EU and a rising East Asia in the meantime.⁵² With this in mind, mobilisation of two apparently contradictory roles forms part of a broader strategy of challenging dominant models of multinational governance. At the same time as member states' voters signal their displeasure at the EU's integrative project, Moscow is forging ahead with its alternative model in which moral and ethical dilemmas over internal political representation and democracy are clearly separated from structures of economic governance. Similarly within BRICS, Russia has helped to promote a more equitable treatment of emerging powers in existing multinational organisations whilst reiterating their right to exercise sovereignty internally. Through both of these initiatives, Russia has mounted a clear challenge to the normative content of established institutions. Given some of the teething problems and delays that have affected the consolidation of these initiatives, it remains to be seen whether the challenge to the status quo can be translated into a viable alternative system of long-term governance. Yet in the meantime, member states' treatment of the ECU and BRICS *as if* they were globally significant entities has forged outcomes that genuinely are globally significant.

Political objectives

The BRICS challenge extends well beyond international economic organisation, since all of the organisation's members benefit from regional "power bases and spheres of influence",⁵³ and membership of BRICS enables them to cement these positions. Given a negative international reception of the Eurasian project, especially in the aftermath of events in Ukraine, BRICS membership has offered an additional outlet for the roles of leader and cultural bridge. As Russia's envoy to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, declared in the aftermath of a UN vote to declare Crimea's independence referendum invalid, "Russia is not isolated".⁵⁴ Russia acted as a mediator between the BRICS countries and the then-G8,⁵⁵ making the case for greater inclusiveness in global decision-making. In the contemporary climate, Russia can emphasise continued cooperation within BRICS, just as it is being excluded from meetings of the now-G7.⁵⁶ The BRICS have so far effectively acted as a great power concert by co-ordinating their efforts within the G20,⁵⁷ and "noted with concern" Australian suggestions that, in light of the Ukraine crisis, President Putin may be excluded from the November 2014 G20 Summit. The statement of the BRICS foreign ministers went on to assert that "[t]he custodianship of the G20 belongs to all Member States equally and no one Member State can unilaterally determine its nature and character".⁵⁸ Thus, regardless of individual members' unease over Crimea, BRICS has made a show of unity.

Leaders of the BRICS countries have gone to great effort to defend the group's importance, and in the case of South Africa, the strategic rationale for its inclusion.⁵⁹ Russian politicians have repeatedly and enthusiastically articulated the country's position as a new, rising power within a world that is evolving into multipolarity, and this practice is significant not only for reflecting their vision of Russia's international role, but as we have already seen, for helping to create the structures within which that role is played out. The promise of such significant global influence clearly holds

considerable political attraction: As well as the admittance of South Africa to the group in 2011, Turkey, Indonesia and South Korea have all expressed their interest.⁶⁰

A similar process can be witnessed through the activities of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation. Although the organisation has practical military and economic concerns, one element of its activities that goes under-analyzed is its issuing of statements that have no binding force. These nonetheless have an important political impact, since they serve to produce the 'Eurasian' region as something that is politically meaningful, and so increase the claim of its members to importance on the world stage. This is particularly the case for its two leading members. China appears a regionally-responsible great power, and Russia presents itself as the leader of a regional coalition in external negotiations, thus building its international influence.⁶¹

Aside from the discursive production of a desired world, Russia's membership of multinational organisations is also vital for its consolidation of soft power – economic and normative attractive force. The impact of shared Soviet history and the ongoing legacy of Russian language use and orthodox Christianity greatly assist in Russia's soft power project. Russia's (state-controlled) media outlets are popular in the region and there is widespread acceptance of conservative social values. Since these legacy factors will gradually reduce in relevance, the ECU represents the institutionalisation of Russia's soft power project for the future. Despite the leaders of Belarus and Kazakhstan having openly rejected any grand political project, their appetite for a Russian-centred integration project is nonetheless symbolically powerful. Quite aside from its clear economic benefits to Russia, the planned expansion of the union to include Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would also entail significant geopolitical gains. Whilst Kyrgyzstan's GDP is equivalent to less than half of one percent of Russia's, its inclusion would extend the union's borders to Tajikistan.⁶² As well as helping to bring about Putin's all-important vision of a co-operative space from the EU to the Asia-Pacific,⁶³ this would secure vital sources of aluminium, cotton and labour necessary to Russian industry. Although the issue of migrant labour is particularly contentious in today's Russia, Tajik immigration is likely to be more domestically palatable than the Chinese alternative, which many Russians, wary of their own country's demographic decline, fear. Following the Ukraine crisis, a smooth expansion of the ECU is increasingly important to fulfil Moscow's soft power aspirations. However, the popular unease that has emerged in prospective member states demonstrates just one area in which the elision of soft and hard power could prove to be detrimental to Russia's long-term plans. Nonetheless, the respective elites remain engaged, and the Armenian leadership has taken the opportunity to lobby for additional Russian investment prior to its membership.⁶⁴ The Kyrgyz Prime Minister has similarly expressed a hope for significant investment from the ECU to facilitate its membership.⁶⁵

The success, so far, of the ECU also has wider political implications, including an impact on Russia's relationships with traditional partners, such as the EU. The two parties struggled to come up with a successor to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between them, which expired in 2007. Many of those difficulties originally came about because it proved difficult to move beyond

the relatively straightforward principles of economic interaction that had formed the basis of the initial agreement, to more substantive agreements on political cooperation, as the disagreement over democratic conditionality showed. The EU, wary of Russia's democratic backsliding, and its increasingly geopolitically-motivated foreign policy, sought to achieve a more political successor agreement. Russia, for its part, favoured a treaty that would reinforce its international equality, and help to mitigate what it read as a zero-sum neo-colonial aspect to many of the EU's initiatives in the common neighbourhood.⁶⁶ However, in reserving treaties for members only, the EU made it impossible for Russia to assert itself on equal terms. Thus with the maturation of the ECU, Russia sought to balance out asymmetries in the negotiating process. As well as providing the institutional challenge to the EU's focus on democratic conditionality already discussed, the Eurasian Economic Commission took on practical responsibility for members' talks in trade negotiations. However, this did not have the effect of levelling the playing field that Russia had desired. On a purely theoretical level it would have complicated negotiations by the addition of a second multinational party. Practically, however, the EU failed to recognise the ECU,⁶⁷ resulting in a vacuum for representation in the partnership talks.

In some ways, the desire of both sides to conclude a more comprehensive agreement than the PCA actually precluded the conclusion of any agreement at all. Whilst the frozen state of negotiations allowed continued cooperation on specific matters without the need for renegotiating more substantive issues, it represented a significant qualitative retreat in Russian-EU relations, and one which has only been exacerbated by the current crisis in Ukraine. Together with predictions of Europe's future marginalisation in a changing world order, there are clear reasons why Russia seeks to fortify its normative challenge to the EU through the balancing of various other multinational relationships.

Military and security co-operation

Given Russia's inheritance of Soviet hardware, its claim to great power status is most plausible in the military arena. Whilst Russia and the EU have multiple reasons to co-operate on security, including the various frozen conflicts in their overlapping integration space,⁶⁸ Russia's inability to defend its great power status in its security relationship with the EU has been a source of significant tension for several years. Both parties have resorted to unilateral action, including the EU's recognition of Kosovo, Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its armed involvements in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014). Importantly, Russia's disillusionment with the established mechanisms of security co-operation had been building long before the Ukraine crisis, and it has made several moves to restore the norms of international relations with which it is most comfortable.

In 2008, then-President Medvedev put forward an initiative to create a new European Security Treaty, which was intended both to demonstrate the coherence of Russia's long-term foreign policy, and to help revitalise the relationship with Europe following the tensions of Putin's first two terms.

The draft document reiterated the aspects of international relations frequently invoked by the Russian side – sovereignty, territorial integrity and criteria for the use of force – and in so doing, seemed to unnecessarily duplicate the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.⁶⁹ The initiative received little support, and Russia's great power aspirations were dealt a blow as it was obliged to deal with the very same organisations, including NATO, in which it had expressed a lack of confidence. The episode highlighted incompatibilities between Russia's desire to reorganise the structures of European security and the EU's overall satisfaction with the existing system under the auspices of OSCE and NATO. The impossibility of any future Russian accession to NATO (and specifically the veto this would afford) is a significant barrier to Russia's great power aspirations within the current structure. In October 2011, Russia's then-envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin (whose current Deputy Prime Minister's portfolio for the defence and aerospace industry earned him a place on the EU's May 2014 sanctions list) stated that the NATO-Russia Council was not performing its required function and that the new President may not be interested in attending its next summit.⁷⁰ NATO and Russia continue to view one another as key reference points for security concerns in the region and engage in regular demonstrative military exercises. Similarly, the build-up of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders in 2014 led to increased NATO presence in Eastern Central Europe. The failure of the European Security Treaty damaged Russia's credibility as an equal European partner, worthy of international respect, and contributed to its pursuit of a multi-vector approach. In light of events in Ukraine, an emphasis on alternative partners has been a key part of the Russian ruling elite's counter to claims of international isolation.

Russia is the dominant party within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), an organisation which conducts regular military exercises, has a legal basis for collective defence against aggression, and whose 15,000-strong rapid reaction peacekeeping force can theoretically be deployed on members' territory without the need for a UN resolution, provided that the relevant members consent.⁷¹ In reality, the organisation's focus has been on increasing foreign policy coordination and military cooperation between its members, with its most significant practical successes being in counter-trafficking operations and in the decision that members must all agree over any foreign military bases being established on its territory. In 2007, the CSTO signed a cooperation agreement with the SCO, perhaps facilitated by the "all-time high" in Russian-Chinese relations that came about during Putin's second term (2004-8) as a response to increased US unilateralism, missile defence initiatives and NATO expansion.⁷² As attested by the exclusion of the United States from the SCO, Russia and China share an opposition to US military and economic involvement in Central Asia,⁷³ and so some have represented the group as an anti-Western coalition.⁷⁴ Yet such a perspective is blind to the significant normative content of the organisation, whose members share a vocal normative commitment to principles of sovereignty and non-intervention *as the cornerstones of effective security*. Where civil unrest within member states seems unlikely to spread to the broader region, the SCO is satisfied that it should be treated as a purely domestic matter.⁷⁵ Whilst the annexation of Crimea seems to all outsiders as a clear violation of these principles, in a Russian reading, the incursion merely helped to maintain order in an area de-stabilised by external provocations. The SCO's members are all highly sensitive to the potential for external actors to foment domestic unrest, which is seen in the aftermath of the 'colour revolutions' as a likely route to further regional and regime insecurity. It is for such reasons that

whilst the SCO refused to endorse Russia's 2008 incursions into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, its official response was nonetheless careful, complimenting Russia's active role, but urging dialogue between all parties to diffuse the situation.⁷⁶ China's own official response was deliberately late and vague, and domestically, Chinese state media represented the conflict as a justified Russian response to the provocation of an American client state.⁷⁷ Similarly, it was with reference to the phenomenon of 'colour revolutions' that China's Defence Minister, Chan Wangquan, expressed sympathy with Russia's actions in Crimea, and by contrast to the EU's sanctions, China proved happy to conclude a \$400 billion gas deal with Russia in May 2014.⁷⁸ Whilst this might seem strange given the SCO members' emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity, it nonetheless reflects their shared fear of external forces destabilising a region made predictable by studied compromise and consensus-building.

This consensus-based approach to the pursuit of security relations provides another direct contrast to the EU's preferred governance model. Originally concerned with the negotiation of common borders, the SCO has deliberately shunned legalistic approaches, preferring to focus on consensus-building and common interests over legally-binding mechanisms. In expanding its remit to regional security more generally, the organisation put forward a set of clear, agreed definitions that linked the 'three evils' of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism - something all members have struggled with - in order to facilitate coordinated regional responses.⁷⁹ As Stephen Aris points out, in lesser developed states, such as the SCO's Central Asian members, there is a tendency to link regional security, state building and regime legitimacy. Coupled with the very particular regime models of China and Russia, this helps to explain why many of the SCO's activities are oriented towards regime security.⁸⁰ Members feel commonly threatened by transnational regional problems, which form the basis of the SCO's agenda. Some Central Asian analysts have cited figures from the Global Terrorism Database as evidence that the promotion of a regional anti-terrorism agenda is less closely linked to a significant threat, than to a desire to strengthen intra-regional co-operation, or to control civil insurrection.⁸¹ Minority groups have similarly alleged that anti-terrorist initiatives have been used to stifle opposition and curb freedom of religion,⁸² something that is entirely compatible with the SCO's normative stance, the broad nature of its linked definitions of the 'three evils',⁸³ and also with the prioritisation of sovereignty and territorial integrity as key to security. Regardless of Western scepticism, this vision clearly has attractive potential. The organisation has numerous potential new members waiting in the wings. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made multiple calls for his country's full SCO membership in the context of what he sees as an unenthusiastic EU, and a spokesperson for India's Ministry for External Affairs recently hinted at similar aspirations.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Contemporary Russian foreign policy sees multiple, apparently contradictory roles pursued across overlapping multinational organisations. This multiple-role, multiple-orientation approach has several significant outcomes. In the most basic sense, it shows support for a multipolar world

system, the evolution of which Russia's political elite both anticipates and craves. It also helps to bring about changes that make the realisation of such a system more plausible. For Russia, the diversification of governance structures represents the best hope for retaining significant global influence. By translating its overlapping organisational memberships into partial normative coalitions, Russia is able to contribute to the agenda for a multipolar future by challenging the dominant pro-Western perspectives on global governance in three areas the economy, politics and the military/security arena.

In the field of the economy, Russia has used its privileged regional role to champion the ECU, an institution which represents a clear normative challenge to the EU's model of regional economic integration, and its emphasis on shared democratic standards. At the other end of the scale, Russia's membership of BRICS has helped in the articulation of inequities in the pro-Western perspective on global governance, and has led to structural alterations that favour newly rising powers.

Politically, also, Russia has benefitted from its membership of both the BRICS group and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. As these organisations appear to take on a globally significant role, they have increased the regional and international political influence of both the respective groups, and their individual members. For Russia, such gains can be seen as closely linked to its broader soft power project, for which the development of the ECU remains vital. Russia has translated some of the institutional inheritances of its past into a format of use in the present, both for demonstrating Russia's continued regional attractiveness (and thus global relevance), and creating a viable alternative to some of its more strained international relationships.

Finally, Russia has used its membership of multinational organisations to challenge the dominant mechanisms of security cooperation in Europe, and to promote a return to norms including sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention – but significantly, these norms are sought beyond the military sphere. Thus, where foreign campaigning or intervention in Russia's immediate vicinity is suspected, this is interpreted as a violation of these principles, a threat to regional and regime security, and a provocation. Such an understanding can help to shed light on Russia's heavy-handed responses to perceived threats in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014). The SCO's interlinked definitions of regional threats have been used by members to justify combined responses to them, often to the detriment of civil liberties. They have also helped the organisation to put forward a position relatively acquiescent to Russia's actions. This corresponds with the organisation's qualitatively different take on security relations – that the consensus and common interests of the organisation's members should be valued above legally-binding commitments.

For Western commentators, there has so far been a temptation to view these developments as the 'hollowing out' of multinational organisations, or as the formation of loose interest-based bodies where the absence of shared normative values will impede the potential for collaboration or longevity. However, as the analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates, there are some genuine

normative convictions shared between members of many of these organisations, tempered by very similar common concerns over the threats that the current configuration of international relations permits. They have already made various impacts on the structures of international politics that are likely to be lasting. For Russia, the balancing of different roles across multiple multinational organisations is the safest way in which it can hope to retain a globally influential voice and secure a position as one of the architects of the multipolar world order that it seeks.

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