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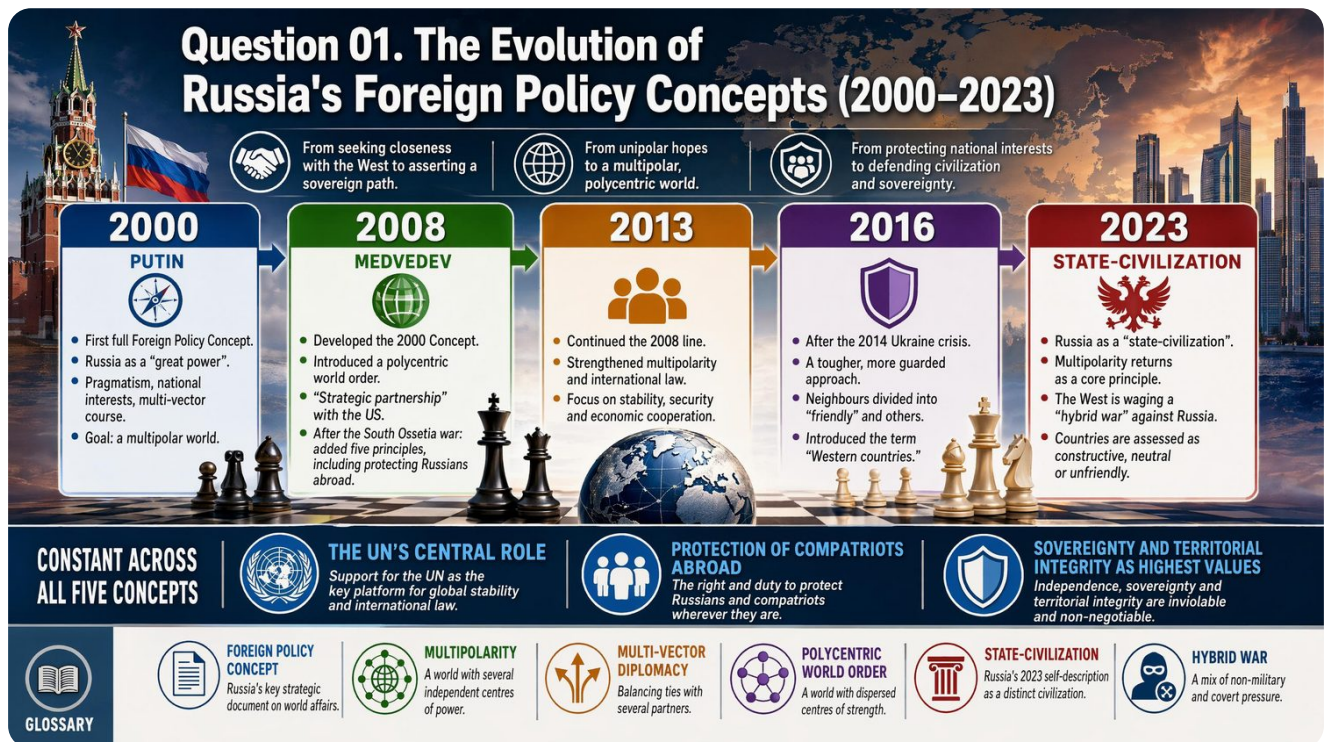
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The Evolution of Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts (2000–2023)

Russia's foreign policy has followed five official **Foreign Policy Concepts** — 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016 and 2023 — each showing a shift in how Moscow saw itself and the world.

Before 2000, Kozyrev's "democratic solidarity" bet on closeness with the West. From 1996, Primakov replaced it with **multipolarity** and a **multi-vector** course, rejecting the junior-partner role.

The **2000 Concept**, signed by Putin, was the first full document of its kind. It called Russia a "great power" and set out **pragmatism**, national interests and a multi-vector course, aiming at a multipolar world.

The **2008 Concept** under Medvedev "developed" the 2000 text, introducing a **polycentric** world order and a "strategic partnership" with the US. After the war over South Ossetia, Medvedev added five principles, including protecting Russians abroad.

The 2013 Concept continued this line. The **2016 Concept**, after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, was harder: it split neighbours into "friendly" and others and coined "**Western countries**."

The **2023 Concept**, still in force, calls Russia a "**state-civilization**," brings back multipolarity, and accuses the West of a "hybrid war," now grading countries as constructive, neutral or unfriendly. Yet across all five texts, some things stay constant: the UN's central role, defence of compatriots abroad, and sovereignty and territorial integrity as the highest values.

■ GLOSSARY

Foreign Policy Concept

Russia's key strategic document on world affairs — *Концепция внешней политики*

multipolarity

a world with several independent centres of power — *многополярность*

multi-vector diplomacy

balancing ties with several partners — *многовекторность*

polycentric world order

a world with dispersed centres of strength — *полицентричный миропорядок*

state-civilization

Russia's 2023 self-description as a distinct civilization — *государство-цивилизация*

hybrid war

a mix of non-military and covert pressure — *гибридная война*

■ EXTENDED ANSWER

■ What Is a Foreign Policy Concept and Why Does It Matter

A Foreign Policy Concept is Russia's official statement of the principles behind its foreign policy: which national interests the state treats as vital, and which tasks its diplomacy should pursue. Since 2023 it has been formally defined as a "strategic planning document" that translates the broader National Security Strategy into concrete terms for relations with specific countries and organizations. In practice, though, documents of this kind have existed since 2000; only the legal label came two decades later.

Such a document matters because the foreign policy of a large state cannot rest on ad hoc decisions by individual officials — it needs a shared reference point, at home and for foreign partners. Since the Soviet collapse, Russia has rewritten its Concept five times — in 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016 and 2023 — and each version captured a change in how Moscow saw itself and the world. Tracing this sequence shows how Russian diplomacy's self-image evolved: from a cautious search for a place among strong powers in the 1990s to a claim, by the 2020s, to be an independent center of power in its own right.

■ Background: From "Democratic Solidarity" to the Primakov Doctrine

Before 1993 post-Soviet Russia had no coherent foreign policy doctrine; decisions were made, in the view of many scholars, impulsively. In April 1993 a presidential directive approved the "Basic Provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept," a transitional document rather than a full concept.

The architect of the early course was Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (1990–1996). His approach, "democratic solidarity," assumed shared interests with the Western democracies and aimed at close rapprochement, even potential NATO and EU membership. In January 1992 Boris Yeltsin told the UN Security Council that Russia saw the US and other Western states as allies, and that summer Moscow and Washington signed a Charter of Partnership and Friendship.

By the mid-1990s the line was faltering: NATO's eastward enlargement felt like a betrayal of "a Europe without dividing lines," and NATO's 1995 operation in Bosnia deepened the resentment. In 1996 Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev, marking a turning point. His doctrine rested on four ideas: priority for Russia's own interests without provoking the West; **multipolarity** and a **multi-vector** course — refusing to build policy around one center of power and instead balancing among partners; continued integration into the world economy; and relations with former Soviet states "at different speeds." Primakov also initiated informal ties between Russia, India and China, later BRICS's core. In 1999, protesting NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, he famously turned his plane around over the Atlantic rather than fly on to Washington.

■ The 2000 Concept: The First Full Document of the Putin Era

On 28 June 2000, President Vladimir Putin approved the first full Foreign Policy Concept. Unlike the 1993 text, it set out principles, priorities and regional directions systematically, and for the first time officially called Russia a "**great power**" — the 1993 document had only set that status as a goal.

Its principles — **pragmatism**, national interests, a multi-vector approach and economic efficiency — echoed Putin's address to the Federal Assembly weeks later, in July 2000: "Our foreign policy's independence is beyond doubt. Its foundation is pragmatism, economic efficiency, and the priority of national tasks." The document worried about a growing unipolar world dominated by the US and committed Russia to building a **multipolar** system of international relations. On security, it stressed preserving the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty as "the cornerstone of strategic stability," warning that US missile-defense plans would force countermeasures — which happened after Washington withdrew from the treaty in 2002. New tasks included protecting compatriots abroad and developing Russia's own **soft power**.

■ The 2008 Concept: Polycentricity and Strategic Partnership

On 12 July 2008 President Dmitry Medvedev approved an edition that "supplemented and developed" the 2000 text rather than replacing it. It introduced the term "**polycentric** world order" — close to multipolarity, but describing the gradual dispersal of power centers rather than a finished picture. Relations with the US were framed as a "**strategic partnership**," a formula proposed by Putin as prime minister and endorsed by Medvedev.

A month later, the August 2008 war over South Ossetia prompted Medvedev to proclaim five principles: primacy of international law; a multipolar world with no single decision-maker; rejection of confrontation; protection of Russian citizens wherever they are; and special interests in "friendly regions." The 2008 Concept also made the rule of law a separate priority for the first time and expanded multilateral formats, adding the Russia-India-China "troika" and the BRIC "four" — the forerunner of BRICS — alongside the G8.

■ The 2013 and 2016 Concepts: From Continuity to a Harder Doctrine

The 2013 Concept (12 February 2013) formally stemmed from Putin's "May decree" No. 605 of 7 May 2012, one of a series signed right after his return to the presidency. In substance it continued the 2008 line, listing nine tasks: defending sovereignty and territorial integrity, favorable conditions for growth, good-neighborliness, and promoting the Russian language abroad.

The Concept approved by Decree No. 640 on 30 November 2016 was noticeably different. Its real trigger was 2014 — Crimea's reunification with Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine — and Putin's Kremlin speech of 18 March 2014, often called the "**Putin Doctrine**": the West had "crossed a line" drawing Ukraine toward NATO and the EU, Russia was not part of Euro-Atlantic civilization, and Asia, Africa and Latin America were gaining weight in the new balance of power. Scholars call 2016 a "harder, more nationally oriented doctrine": it split neighboring states into "good-neighborly" and others, and coined the umbrella term "**Western countries**" for the US, Canada and the EU. Tasks stayed close to 2013's, with a new emphasis on Russia as "one of the influential centers of the modern world" and on Russian media abroad.

■ The 2023 Concept: A State-Civilization and Hybrid War

On 31 March 2023 Putin approved the fifth, current edition, replacing the 2016 text — a direct response to the 2022 Ukraine conflict and the collapse of relations with the West. For the first time the document formally defined a "Foreign Policy Concept" as a strategic planning document.

Its central innovation is a new self-image: Russia as a "distinctive **state-civilization**, a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power" uniting the peoples of the "Russian World." No earlier edition used this language. The document also revived "**multipolarity**," the 2000-era term, in place of the more cautious "polycentricity" of 2008–2016, claiming a "unique mission" of building a multipolar system. A new, openly confrontational element appeared: the Concept speaks of a "**hybrid war** of a new type" waged by the US and its "satellites" against Russia over Ukraine, calling the West's hostile course "comprehensive" and doctrinal. States are now graded not as "good-neighborly" or not, but as **constructive, neutral or unfriendly**. New tasks include countering "anti-Russian activity," supporting allies regardless of international recognition (an apparent nod to the DPR, LPR, Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and preserving historical truth about Russia's role in world history.

■ 2024–2025: The Doctrine's Development After the 2023 Concept

The 2023 edition remains in force; no new Concept has been adopted as of 2026, but its logic has developed further. On 19 November 2024 Putin signed Decree No. 991 on nuclear deterrence, replacing the previous version, Decree No. 355 of 2 June 2020. It broadens the grounds for nuclear response: aggression by a non-nuclear state backed by a nuclear power now counts as a joint attack on Russia, as does a massed launch of cruise missiles, drones, hypersonic weapons or aircraft across the border, or conventional aggression against Russia or Belarus (as Union State members) threatening their sovereignty — effectively extending Russia's "nuclear umbrella" to Belarus.

A second thread is the "**world majority**" — states taking a neutral or constructive stance on Ukraine and rejecting Western sanctions, a term from the 2023 Concept later elaborated by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as roughly 85% of the world's population seeking a fairer, more multipolar order. The Kazan Declaration of the 16th BRICS summit (23 October 2024, chaired by Russia) endorsed this position on UN reform and sanctions; from 2024 BRICS itself expanded to include Egypt, Iran, the UAE and Ethiopia, later Indonesia. Finally, on 2 October 2025 at the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin restated "six principles" for a new world order — openness, respect for civilizational diversity, no single Western-led hierarchy, states' right to define their own interests, synergy over bloc confrontation, and equality among states. He had first set out a similar formula

at Valdai on 5 October 2023 and repeated it on 7 November 2024; the 2025 version was a restatement, not a novelty, continuing the line begun by the 2007 Munich speech.

■ **Conclusion: Why the Full Evolution Matters**

Across all five editions, a stable core survives every change of rhetoric: the central role of the UN, protection of compatriots abroad, a multi-vector course avoiding rigid attachment to one pole of power, and sovereignty and territorial integrity as the state's highest values. The formula affirming the permanence of the five permanent UN Security Council members appears in the 2000, 2008 and 2016 texts; the 2023 Concept instead calls for "restoring" the UN's role rather than affirming it as fixed — a nuance, not a break with the underlying constants.

What changes is how Russia describes its place in the world: from a cautious "one of the influential centers," through "polycentric world order" and "strategic partnership" with the US, to open opposition to the collective West and a proclaimed status as a separate civilization. Each new Concept was a direct response to a specific event — NATO enlargement, the 2008 war, the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the 2022 conflict — and, at the same time, an attempt to state in advance the direction the country intended to take. Comparing the five editions is, in effect, a condensed history of how the Russian view of the world has evolved over the past quarter century.

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