



Russia Struggles for a New World Order—Where Are Israel and the Muslim World Positioned?

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The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of the bipolar global system that was formed after World War II, resulting in Russia's loss of superpower status that had been held by the Soviet Union. Thus, in the mid-1990s, the Russian government adopted a perception that the world order was changing and transitioning from a unipolar system led by the United States to a multipolar system characterized by multiple centers of power. According to this view, Russia holds a status similar to that of a superpower, alongside the United States, China, and other countries. Throughout Putin's rule, the idea of transitioning to a multipolar world became established and it developed into a guiding principle of Russia's perception of the world system, as reflected in the foreign policy concept documents of the Russian Federation. Russia's engagement with the multipolar world order intensified even further with its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, a thorough examination of the official Russian discourse reveals that the concept of the multipolar world order is vague, partial, inconsistent, and has internal lacunae and contradictions. Despite these difficulties, it is possible to identify the general guidelines of this perception that steer Russia's foreign policy toward Israel and emphasize the centrality Russia attributes to the place of the Arab world and the Muslim world in the struggle against the West, in order to establish a multipolar world order. Due to the significance of this perception in the official Russian discourse, its presentation—despite its incoherence—is critical in analyzing Moscow's position toward Israel, comprehending its standing alongside Israel's enemies following the October 7 attack, and outlining future Israeli policy toward Russia.

Keywords: Russia, Israel, New World Order, United States, China, Muslim World, Ukraine

Introduction—The Perception of the Multipolar World Order in Russian Foreign Policy

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar world order led by the United States and the Soviet Union, the Russian elite found themselves in a unipolar world led by the United States. Toward the middle of the 1990s, Russia began to emphasize the transition from a unipolar world order to a multipolar world order. This approach helped present Russia's deteriorating position in the world system as part of a wide global trend of changing the world order, and not as a result of internal weakness. Andrei Kozyrev, the first foreign minister of the Russian Federation (1990–1996),¹ used the term “multipolar world” several times and argued that the future world order would not be bipolar, nor would it be led by the United States. However, he advocated for rapprochement with the West, and the transition to a multipolar world during his time was not part of the agenda promoted by the Russian elite.

Yevgeny Primakov, whose views were conservative and who did not completely break away from Soviet perceptions, replaced Kozyrev in January 1996 as Foreign Minister, after having served as the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. Primakov laid out his doctrine in 1996 and claimed, contrary to his predecessor, that one of the main trends of the international system is a transition to a multipolar world, and that Russia maintains a decisive role in this world order.² He sought to advance Russia's relations with non-Western countries at the expense of fostering ties with the West and worked to strengthen Russia's control over countries of the former Soviet Union. In 1997, Primakov even succeeded in securing a jointly signed Chinese–Russian declaration on the subject of a multipolar world and the creation of a new world order. In 1998, after being appointed Prime Minister, he proposed to establish a trilateral cooperation mechanism between Russia, China, and India, as

a practical step toward institutionalizing global multipolarity, although this initiative did not gain traction. This approach also appeared in Russia's national security concept document that same year, characterizing the world system as moving toward the formation of a multipolar world order. With Putin's accession to the presidency of Russia in 2000, the aspiration to create a multipolar world order became one of the main pillars of Russia's foreign policy concept.

In his speech, Putin referred to the United States as a hostile country and described it as leading a unipolar world order that produces conflicts and wars and strengthens the nuclear arms race.

Shifts in the relationship between Russia and the West have also led to changes in the perception of the transition to a multipolar world. Tension in the relations between Russia and the United States gradually escalated in the 2000s following significant events, such as the withdrawal of the United States in 2002 from the ABM treaty limiting the possession of ballistic missiles, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Russian suspicions regarding the involvement of the United States in the color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine in 2004, and the expansion of NATO. Under the influence of these events, a change in Russia's attitude toward the United States began to take shape in 2005–2006, and it was considered an unfriendly country. The worsening of this approach and Russia's treatment of the United States as a hostile pole in the full sense of the word was evident in Putin's famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007. In this speech, Putin referred to the United States as a hostile country and described it as leading a unipolar world order that produces conflicts and wars and strengthens the nuclear arms race. The Russia–Georgia war in 2008, the Russian invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and Russia's entry into Syria in 2015

increased tensions and led to a deterioration in Russia's relations with Western countries. As a result, Russian rhetoric toward the United States and the West intensified, prominently emphasizing the desire to build a multipolar world in which Russia would play a decisive role.

An examination of the idea of a multipolar world order in the five foreign policy concept documents³ issued since 2000 reflects the change that has also taken place in Russia's self-perception regarding its position in the international system. It illustrates how, with the rebuilding of Russia's military and economic power, its self-perception has changed from a country that strives to rehabilitate itself to one that strives to influence the world system. While the first document in 1993 did not mention the term multipolarity whatsoever and the emphasis was on Russia's need to be a full-fledged member of the international community, subsequent documents of the Russian foreign policy concept clearly discussed the need to build a multipolar world order and Russia's decisive role in it.

Flaws and Incoherence in the Russian Perception of the Transition to a Multipolar World

Although the perception of the multipolar world order has been one of the main pillars of Russian foreign policy for nearly three decades, and the ruling elite claim that the process of transition is already underway, the structure of the multipolar world order is vague and lacks a clear definition. Basic questions regarding the future structure, including the division into poles that will comprise the new order, the composition of the countries of each pole, which countries will lead the poles, and more, currently remain unanswered. At this stage, the obscurity serves the Russian interest, since any division into poles could cause disagreements among the various players in the international system, and as long as the details are obscure, it is likely that there will be less opposition to a Russian format of the new world order.

Nonetheless, statements on the subject by Putin and other officials provide a glimpse into the architecture of the multipolar order as it is characterized in the Russian discourse.

The Poles Mentioned in the Russian Discourse

The Eurasian pole led by Russia: This is the main pole in the new world order that aims to unite the entire Eurasian space under Russia's leadership. Despite its obvious importance for Russia, there are hardly any detailed references to this pole. Sometimes referred to as the Russian pole and sometimes as the Eurasian pole, there is no breakdown of the countries that comprise it. It is reasonable to assume that Russia's aspiration is to lead the former Soviet Union republics, and this pole will include at least Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. These countries, together with Russia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and all of them except for Tajikistan are also members of the Eurasian Economic Union. The affiliation of the other republics of the former Soviet Union to this or any other pole is not mentioned. It is important to note that there are also no explicit mentions of Ukraine's position in the new world order. Yet Russia's war against it suggests the importance of its being part of the Russian sphere of influence, and therefore the war can be seen as an attempt by Moscow to restore Ukraine to its "natural place" under Russia's auspices, as part of the Eurasian pole under its leadership.

The Western or Anglo-Saxon pole: The use of the term "Anglo-Saxon countries" became frequent in Russia with its invasion of Ukraine and appeared for the first time in Russia's foreign policy concept document in 2023. The use of this term has affected the stance toward the pole led by the United States. In Russian discourse it is sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Saxon pole and other times as the Western pole. Therefore, there is no clear answer to the question whether the United States is the leader of the entire Western camp

or if it will stand at the head of the Anglo-Saxon countries only, while Europe will be a separate pole in and of itself. It should be emphasized that both the pole led by the United States and the European pole are perceived by Russia as hostile poles, and all other poles that Russia considers its allies must unite in the struggle against them.

The East Asian pole led by China: The composition of the Chinese pole is also obscure. The Russian concept does not make any reference to the question whether this pole will include China alone, or if countries in Southeast Asia will also be part of it.

The Muslim pole and the Arab pole: These poles are of great importance to Russia, especially after the invasion of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [said](#) in March 2023, “together with our friends from Muslim countries, we are championing the establishment of a more democratic and just multipolar world, based on the principles of the United Nations.” The term “Arab pole” was prevalent in the Russian discourse in the past, but in recent years the term “Muslim pole” has become more common. This distinction has a decisive impact on the composition and nature of the pole, as an Arab pole will not include Iran, Turkey, and other non-Arab Muslim countries. However, if it is a Muslim pole, the issue of who leads the pole is not at all obvious: Will Saudi Arabia, Iran, a country from Southeast Asia, or another country lead the pole? In addition, Aleksandr Dugin, a prominent ideologue among Russian extreme nationalists, [claimed](#) that if the unification of the Muslim world into one pole is delayed, the entire process of forming a multipolar world order will be deferred.

The African pole: Reference to the African pole is almost non-existent. However, in an [article](#) written by Putin in advance of the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit, he claimed that Africa will be an important part of creating the new world order, and in doing so, it will free itself from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

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Additional poles: The lack of clarity among Russian officials regarding the architecture of the multipolar world order is expressed by Lavrov in an interview at the end of December 2023, in which he [claimed](#) that “this is multipolarity, where not only countries become poles (Brazil, India, China, and Russia will always be independent poles), but also associations of countries that are not so large, but also medium and small.” In that same interview, Lavrov additionally claimed that cooperation organizations among countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and other organizations will also become poles. Therefore, it is not clear at all what the structure of the new world order will be and how it will simultaneously comprise countries and organizations. It is also important to emphasize that the African Union includes the Arab countries in North Africa, but at the same time, these countries are supposed to be part of the Arab pole or the Muslim pole, creating a lack of clarity regarding the future structure. However, the importance of various organizations, especially BRICS, is indeed mentioned in the discourse. For example, Putin [claimed](#) that the BRICS expansion process (the joining of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia) in 2024 is an expression of the process of forming a multipolar world. The member countries of the organization have complex relations with the United States, some of which are hostile. Russia sees this platform as having the potential to cultivate relations with countries that will

be friendly poles against the Western pole, by creating a competing economic partnership to the United States and the Western economy.

It should be emphasized that in addition to a multipolar world, two other related concepts can be identified in the Russian discourse: a multilateral world and a polycentric world. In the Russian discourse these concepts are considered synonymous, although some [researchers](#) insist on differences between them. The main distinction between the concepts lies in the idea of equality among all partners in a multilateral world order, as opposed to hierarchy in a multipolar world order.

Russia did not succeed in swiftly defeating Ukraine as it expected, and what was initially referred to as “a special military operation” has turned into a war of attrition that exacts a heavy toll on Russia, with no end in sight. Therefore, the war is presented to Russian citizens not only as a conflict between Russia and Ukraine but also as Russia’s battle against the Western camp led by the United States, accelerating the transition to a multipolar world order.

The Perception of the Multipolar World Order and the Position of Israel and the Muslim World in it Against the Backdrop of the War in Ukraine

The invasion of Ukraine marks a significant turning point for Russia and has influenced the development of its foreign policy. The international system is now viewed exclusively through the prism of the war. Even before the war began, the Russian government [claimed](#) that the United States was intentionally creating chaos in the Middle East to maintain a unipolar world order. These claims have become increasingly frequent since the invasion of Ukraine, with the war in Ukraine being presented as the start of a new phase in the struggle for a multipolar world order, characterized by overt confrontation and a prolonged struggle. The

Russian government has invoked, among other things, the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world to justify and explain its lack of military success in Ukraine. Russia did not succeed in swiftly defeating Ukraine as it expected, and what was initially referred to as “a special military operation” has turned into a war of attrition that exacts a heavy toll on Russia, with no end in sight. Therefore, the war is presented to Russian citizens not only as a conflict between Russia and Ukraine but also as Russia’s battle against the Western camp led by the United States, accelerating the transition to a multipolar world order.

This approach is [detailed](#) in Russia’s foreign policy document published in March 2023, about a year following the outbreak of the war. This document describes how the unipolar world order allowed colonial powers to exploit countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America for centuries. However, now the tide is turning with the rise of non-Western global and regional powers. The Western neo-colonialist countries are not ready to relinquish their hegemony and influence and refuse to acknowledge the reality of a multipolar world order. Therefore, Western countries employ a wide range of illegal measures such as sanctions, incitement of color revolutions and military conflicts, threats, manipulation of groups and entire nations, and more. Additionally, the United States instigates chaos in various parts of the world to undermine global stability, with the war in Ukraine part of this scheme. The strong American resistance to changing the world order implies that change will only be achieved through a violent and prolonged struggle, ensuring the collapse of the old system in the foreseeable future. Russia attributes great importance to the countries of the “global South,” believing that they will support its struggle against the dominance of the “collective West” in the unipolar world order.

As previously mentioned, according to the Russian perception, the United States instigates conflicts in strategic locations to maintain its hegemony and the unipolar world order, such

as the conflict between [China and Taiwan](#), or the color revolutions. Putin has [claimed](#) that the war between Israel and Hamas is also part of this, stating that “We must understand who is truly behind the tragedy of the nations in the Middle East and in other regions of the world, who is generating this deadly chaos, who is benefiting from it. Today, in my opinion, it is clear to everyone [...] these are the elites of the United States and its satellites, and they are the beneficiaries.”

The Russian perception of Israel as a protectorate state and the executive arm of the United States, along with their characterization of the war between Israel and Hamas as part of the struggle against the United States for world order, has significantly shaped Russia’s policy toward Israel since the October 7 attack. An example illustrating this is a [caricature](#) published in the “Secret Service Agent” journal of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, accompanying an article by Sergey Naryshkin, the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. According to the caricature, the world is divided into two camps, with the United States leading the Western camp, attacking the camp led by Russia. Russia symbolized by a bear, stands as a defender against the United States, while the Western pole (G7 countries) appears weak and wounded. Israel is portrayed as a parasite on the United States’ neck.

Another prominent example is a program that was [broadcast](#) in February 2024 on Channel One Russia, reflecting the government’s messages and propaganda. This program focused on the Muslim world as part of a series on civilizations and the creation of the new world order. It highlighted the negative attitude of Muslim countries toward the West, portraying the burning of flags of the United States and Israel in a positive light. Furthermore, the war between Israel and Hamas was presented as a unifying issue for the entire Muslim world against Israel, which is depicted as acting aggressively and violently under the auspices of the United States. Additionally, [Putin’s statement](#) that “the

fate of Russia, the future of the entire world and the Palestinian people will be determined on the Ukrainian front” offers further insight into the Russian perspective. It underscores the belief that the outcome of conflicts in the struggle for a multipolar world order is contingent upon Russia’s success on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The deterioration of Moscow’s policy toward Israel following the invasion of Ukraine reflects an escalation and intensification of the policy toward Israel. This is part of an attempt to achieve dominance in the regional system and strengthen ties with Muslim countries, particularly Iran. Russian policy toward Israel is driven by instrumental considerations rather than a close relationship based on shared values or long-term interests. This approach allows Russia a wide range of action while taking advantage of opportunities in the region to promote Russian interests within the framework of the formation of a multipolar world order.

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Israel is positioned in the Russian discourse as part of the Western camp hostile to Russia, while Israel’s enemies, including Iran, are placed in the Muslim pole. This pole is presented in the Russian discourse as a friendly pole that fights together with Russia to create a more just world order. This is despite the fact that there are players in the Arab and Muslim world who have acted or are acting contrary to Russian interests, such as the preservation of the Assad regime, which is of great importance to Moscow. According to the Russian perspective, the strengthening of relations with the Muslim world in recent times, due to the needs of the war cannot be separated from the perception of the Muslim world as a co-pole in the struggle

for a new world order against the West. Arab and Muslim countries, for the most part, did not condemn Russia in the war against Ukraine. Now, as Russia seeks new partners in lieu of the West, it sees great potential for cooperation in these countries. Lavrov also commented on this, stating that the Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar are close partners of Russia. Therefore, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Muslim pole is presented as an integral part of establishing the new world order. It is important to note that in the various references to the Muslim world in the Russian discourse regarding the multipolar world order, there is almost no mention of controversies or nuances. For example, Lavrov often [refers](#) to the multipolar world and the Muslim world as one entity, without addressing differences between Arab countries and non-Arab countries, between Shiite and Sunni, or conflicts within the Muslim world.

The importance attributed to the Muslim pole in recent times in Russia can be seen in Sergey Naryshkin's [claim](#) that in 2024, the Arab world will be a key arena in the struggle alongside Russia for the new world order. According to Naryshkin, there is a resurgence occurring in the Middle East, leading to opposition against the United States. He asserts that the Muslim world was severely damaged by the United States' attempts to maintain its dominance. Events such as the American invasion of Iraq, the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, the destruction of Libya and Yemen, the rise of ISIS, and the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran are the result of American policy and that of other Western countries seeking to maintain their hegemony and the United States' position as the ruler of the unipolar world order. Naryshkin adds that an awakening has begun in the Middle East, and the countries in the region are no longer willing to accept American conduct. This process is demonstrated through the presence of strong leaders in Arab countries who pursue independent policies vis-à-vis the United States

and the strengthening of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in these countries.

The 2023 foreign policy [document](#) extensively references the Muslim world, stating that the countries within the friendly Muslim pole have the potential to become an independent center in a polycentric world order. The document also states that these countries could be reliable partners, and cooperation with them could ensure stability, security, and the resolution of regional and global economic problems. Therefore, Russia aims to increase cooperation with the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation while respecting their social and political systems as well as their traditional spiritual and moral values.

In the Russian discourse, the significance of relations with Iran among the countries of the Muslim world is emphasized, as evident in the 2023 foreign policy document. Iran assists Russia militarily, and their relationship has deepened, even becoming a strategic alliance after the start of the war in Ukraine.

Examining the Russian considerations related to the new world order shows that the importance of the Muslim world for Russia is considerably greater than the importance of its relations with Israel, which is perceived as belonging to the enemy camp. Therefore, Russia's resolute stance alongside Hamas and its hostile position toward Israel following October 7 are not surprising.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the Russian perception, as mentioned earlier, the United States and Western countries are sowing destruction and chaos worldwide to maintain their hegemony and prevent the emergence of a just, multipolar world order. According to this perspective, Israel is part of the hostile pole that must be fought against, while Israel's enemies—Iran, Syria, Hamas, and others—are aligned with Russia. Although the concept of a struggle for a multipolar world order is not entirely clear and has flaws and inconsistencies, it is an

important tenet of Russia's foreign policy. In our assessment, the promotion of the idea of a multipolar world order will be a central component of Russian policy in the foreseeable future, mainly due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Despite the significance of this concept within the highest levels of government and Israel's problematic position within it, Israel's attention to it is minimal. Israel should develop a deep understanding of this perception, which is fundamentally anti-Israel, particularly regarding the positioning of the Arab and Muslim world within the new system.

Israel's policy—to act in a way that does not “upset” Russia at the expense of relations with the West—could be detrimental, because such actions will not change Israel's position as part of the hostile camp in the perception of the multipolar world order. Israel must internalize Moscow's view of the world system and shape its policy toward Russia accordingly. Russia is a significant player in the international and regional arenas; therefore, Israel should be prepared for the possibility of Russia further escalating its relations with Israel's enemies, especially given the significant strengthening of ties between Russia and Iran following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

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Notes

- 1 Andrei Kozyrev began to serve as the minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation in 1990, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- 2 For a comprehensive overview of the term “multipolar world order” in official Russian discourse during the years 1991–2019, see A. Kortunov (2019), Between polycentrism and bipolarity. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 17(1), 10–15, <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2019-17-1-10-51>
- 3 The official foreign policy concept documents of the Russian Federation were published in 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016, and 2023, and signed by the president of Russia.