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WHY A NEW FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IS IMPORTANT FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS?

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Abstract: The Pacific Islands are a diverse and unique region consisting of thousands of islands scattered across the vast ocean. Although they differ in terms of geography, culture and economic weight, they all have a common question: what is their role in the geopolitics of the 21st century and in building a new world order. For a long time, the Pacific Islands were perceived by long-established major actors in the region only in terms of geostrategic benefits. However, times are changing, and there is a growing demand for a more sovereign foreign policy among the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). It's especially important to consider their specific needs and support the pursuit of economic, industrial and technological development. The potential PICs' inclusion in new international platforms, for example, in BRICS+, is seen as relevant here. Many of the countries in the association are already known to them. Common points of foreign policy and development vision can also be traced in the new Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. The document not only defines the vector of the country's future interaction with the Asia-Pacific, but also emphasizes the importance of independent foreign policy and fair access to economic development for all countries. The article examines tectonic shifts in the international arena, Russia's role in the Asia-Pacific, the specifics of the Pacific Islands' vision, and their importance for a multipolar world. Special attention is paid to assessing their possible involvement in BRICS+ affairs. Among other things, the article considers the advantages of cooperation (building of a broad integration contour; ensuring free access of countries to the benefits of the global economy; and reducing vulnerability to unfriendly external influences).

Keywords: *Russia, Pacific Islands, foreign policy, multipolar world, BRICS, Global South*

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Научная статья. Исторические науки

ПОЧЕМУ НОВАЯ ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ КОНЦЕПЦИЯ РОССИИ ВАЖНА ДЛЯ СТРАН ОКЕАНИИ?

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Аннотация: Океания — разнообразный и уникальный регион, состоящий из тысяч островов, разбросанных по бескрайним просторам Тихого океана. Хотя они различаются с точки зрения культуры, географии и экономического веса, многих из них заботит еще один вопрос: какова их роль в геополитике XXI века и построении нового миропорядка. Долгое время океанийские государства воспринимались устоявшимся в регионе акторами лишь с точки зрения геостратегических выгод. Однако времена меняются, среди океанийских стран растет запрос на более суверенный внешнеполитический курс. Сейчас особенно важно учитывать конкретные потребности малых развивающихся островных государств и поддерживать их стремление к экономическому, промышленному и технологическому развитию. Актуальным здесь видится их потенциальное включение в международные площадки, например, в БРИКС+. Общие точки соприкосновения прослеживаются и в новой Концепции внешней политики России. Документ не только определяет вектор будущего взаимодействия страны с Азиатско-Тихоокеанским регионом (АТР), но и подчеркивает важность проведения независимого внешнеполитического курса, справедливого доступа к экономическому развитию всех государств. В статье рассмотрены тектонические сдвиги на международной арене, роль России в АТР, особенности видения стран Океании и их значимость для многополярного мира. Особое внимание уделено оценке их возможного вовлечения в дела БРИКС+, в том числе преимуществам сотрудничества (формирование широкого интеграционного контура, обеспечение, справедливого доступа государств к благам мировой экономики и снижение уязвимости к недружественному внешнему воздействию).

Ключевые слова: Россия, Океания, внешняя политика, многополярный мир, БРИКС, Глобальный Юг

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Introduction

Nowadays, the international arena is undergoing tectonic shifts. The transformation of the world order is taking place and acquiring a new form: multipolarity. The wind of change is rushing across the geostrategic landscape, heralding a new era in which the voice of the Global South is sounding with increasing force. A balance is gradually being created between new, strengthening centers of influence. At the same time, the influence of a single pole of power is decreasing in the world, which should be replaced by a new harmony where the nations of the Asia-Pacific, Africa, South America and Eurasia will be able to conduct a free foreign policy and democratize international relations.

The rise of the Global South is largely due to demographic advantages, great economic potential, and the scope of technological development. Developing countries are becoming the main actors in the global arena. The population of the Global South is growing, abounding with young energy, infrastructure and technology that help eliminate logistical gaps, connect regions, and create proper conditions for life, education and health.

It was during this era that the updated Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation was released. It's especially important that it is a great power, but it began to develop a document not for the sake of calibrating its foreign policy to the current conditions, but formalized the principles that it has followed for many years and continues to follow.

The new Concept of Russia's foreign policy states that in a changing geostrategic landscape, the value of equal and mutually respectful cooperation, respect for cultures and traditions, as well as reducing the opportunities for unfriendly states to abuse their monopoly or dominant position in certain areas of the world economy is increasing. All this is also relevant for the Asia-Pacific¹.

Russia's Role in the Asia-Pacific and the World

Russia has been an Asia-Pacific power for centuries. The East traditionally plays an important role for the country in political, economic and social dimensions. Moreover, the study of this region has always been practice-oriented. The search for new trade routes, opportunities to establish friendly contacts with the peoples of Eurasia, Africa and the Pacific — all this has traditionally been part of Russian interests.

Russia, for example, actively supported the independence of Siam (Thailand) in the 19th century. The country played a crucial role in the

preservation of the kingdom's sovereignty, and also supported the efforts of Siam's diplomacy. At the same time, Russia supported the right to self-determination of many other Asia-Pacific nations. The USSR actively helped Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the 20th century. Since those times, Russia has had a lot to offer its neighbors in the vast land and sea space.

Nowadays, the country's foreign policy concept states that Russia has "more than a thousand years of independent statehood, the cultural heritage of the preceding era, deep historical ties with the traditional European culture and other Eurasian cultures, and the ability to ensure harmonious coexistence of different peoples, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups on one common territory, which has been developed over many centuries, determine Russia's special position as a unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power"².

The country also has significant resources in all spheres of foreign policy and development: the status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a participant in leading international organizations and associations, and one of the major economic powers. Russia made a decisive contribution to the victory in World War II and the elimination of the world system of colonialism. In fact, the country, along with China and India, acts as one of the sovereign centers of world development, "performing a historically unique mission aimed at maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system"³.

It is difficult to argue with the fact that Russia is "pursues an independent and multi-vector foreign policy"⁴. The country is aware of its special responsibility for maintaining security on a global and regional scale. Moscow has repeatedly opposed the intention to create an Asian NATO, and also pointed out the devastating consequences of AUKUS alliance.

However, Russia's attempts to pursue a sovereign foreign policy have resulted in an escalation of confrontation with the West. The new concept says that the United States and its allies have "unleashed a new type of hybrid war. It is aimed at weakening Russia in every possible way, including by undermining its constructive civilizational role, power, economic and technological capabilities, limiting its sovereignty in foreign and domestic policy, violating its territorial integrity"⁵. Such a course of the West has acquired a comprehensive character and is "now enshrined at the doctrinal level"⁶. For example, NATO calls Russia one of the "main military threat to the Alliance"⁷. The German National Security Strategy even claims that Russia is "directly threatening" its security and that of its "allies in NATO and the EU"⁸.

Russia, in the new strategy, emphasizes that "does not consider itself to be an enemy of the West, is not isolating itself from the West and has no hostile intentions with regard to it; Russia hopes that in future the states belonging to the Western community will realize that their policy of confrontation and hegemonic ambitions lack prospects, will take into account the complex realities of a multipolar world and will resume pragmatic cooperation with Russia being guided by the principles of sovereign equality and respect for each other's interests"⁹. In response to the unfriendly actions of the West, Moscow intends to continue to defend its right to existence and free development by using all means available¹⁰.

In international relations, Russia is guided by the principles of "sovereign equality of states, respect for their right to choose models of development, and social, political and economic order"¹¹. The same applies to Asia-Pacific. Moscow intends to concentrate its creative energy on the geographical vectors of its foreign policy, which have obvious prospects in terms of expanding mutually beneficial international cooperation.

Considering the dynamically growing multifaceted potential of the Asia-Pacific, Russia intends to give priority attention to increasing cooperation in the economy, humanitarian sphere, security and other sectors with the countries of the region, including China, India and ASEAN. Russia is committed to promoting the building of a comprehensive, open, indivisible, transparent, multilateral and equitable security architecture in the region and mutually beneficial cooperation on a collective non-aligned basis, as well as harnessing the potential in order to form a Greater Eurasian Partnership. This is also confirmed by calls to counter "attempts to undermine the regional system of multilateral security and development alliances on the basis of ASEAN, which rests upon the principles of consensus and equality of its participants"¹².

Russia also proposes to develop broad international cooperation in the interests of countering policies aimed at drawing dividing lines in the region. Attempts by a number of countries to form dividing lines are observed not only in Southeast Asia, but also in South Pacific, a vast area uniting states with great potential. Pacific Islands are extremely interested in economic development, while they find themselves in a situation where some major and middle powers in the region perceive it as their own "sphere of influence", preventing increasing involvement in the affairs of the Asia-Pacific and cooperation with regional actors.

Pacific Island Countries' Vision in a New Era

The voice of Pacific Island Countries is becoming more and more significant in the international arena. Much more attention is focused on the region itself than before. And the point here lies not only in the rivalry between Australia and the United States with the growing Chinese presence. It is necessary to consider PICs' desire for more equitable development, sovereign domestic and foreign policy decision-making, as well as active participation in building an economic order that will enable them to develop their industrial, food and technological basis is taking root among Pacific Islands.

For example, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh **Sogavare** recognized the value of South-South cooperation and also welcomed China's actions, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the same time, the politician reminded the United States that Washington should show "more respect to Pacific leaders"¹³.

The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, James Marape, stressed at the Forum for India–Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) that the PICs "are victims of the global powerplay"¹⁴. He expressed regret that the resources were "harvested by tones and volumes," but their "people have been left behind"¹⁵.

The trend towards the transformation of the world order is noted in the updated Concept of Russia's Foreign Policy. According to the document, "humanity is currently going through revolutionary changes"¹⁶. At the same time, the "imbalanced model of world development which has for centuries ensured the advanced economic growth of colonial powers through the appropriation of resources of dependent territories and states in Asia, Africa and in the Occident is irrevocably fading into the past"¹⁷, goes into the past, the document says.

The increasing of PICs' weight in the international arena is another evidence of the formation of a more fair, multipolar world. Due to the growing capabilities of the powers of the Asia-Pacific and Greater Eurasia, the sovereignty of Pacific Islands is being strengthened. In the future, thanks to active cooperation in agriculture, industry and technology, their competitive opportunities would also increase. According to the updated concept, the democratization of international relations is facilitated by "Structural transformation of the world economy, its transfer to a new technological basis (including the introduction of artificial intelligence technologies, the latest information and communication, energy, biological tech-

nologies and nanotechnologies), the growth of national consciousness, cultural and civilizational diversity and other objective factors"¹⁸.

PICs' politicians have repeatedly criticized attempts to interfere in internal affairs. Sogavare regarded the concerned attention of Australia and the United States to relations between the Solomon Islands and China as "interference of foreign states in the internal affairs"¹⁹. The Government of Vanuatu has warned that it will not tolerate interference by foreign organizations in the country's political affairs²⁰. The concept notes that such an independent foreign policy course and changes "nonetheless not welcomed by a number of states being used to the logic of global dominance and neo-colonialism". Russia points to their unwillingness to "recognize the realities of a multipolar world and to agree on the parameters and principles of the world order accordingly," and also points to attempts to "interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states"²¹.

Along with this, the Pacific Islands is facing a storm associated with the destabilizing build-up and modernization of offensive military capabilities by major actors. In fact, they find themselves in the crosshairs of a dangerous game associated with the unwillingness to "allow" their cooperation with other actors, for example, with China. The establishing of the AUKUS alliance has become evidence of a willingness to raise the stakes, reinforcing the specter of conflict that threatens to spread both within the Pacific Ocean and beyond its borders. The militarization of the region increases the degree of tension, although in fact it needs economic, not military initiatives.

BRICS+ and Economic Opportunities

A natural response to the crisis of the current world order is formation of regional and trans-regional mechanisms of economic integration and interaction in various spheres and the creation of multi-format partnerships to solve common problems. Pacific Islands Countries are good candidates for participation in global initiatives. Cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) is seen as the most promising here. The author has already considered potential areas of cooperation with Greater Eurasia. At the same time, cooperation within the framework of BRICS+ has yet to be studied.

Six countries intend to join the BRICS from January 1, 2024: Argentina, Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. At the same time, the association does not intend to be limited to only one phase of expansion. At the 15th BRICS summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly stated that the entry of new participants would

strengthen unification and increase confidence in the idea of a multipolar world order. After the extension, the BRICS will account for almost 29% of global GDP, its share in daily oil production will grow from 20.4% to 43.1%, and the share of the world population will amount to 46.7%²². This opens up new opportunities for the Pacific Islands.

In fact, the BRICS countries have formed the basis for cooperation in the fields of economics and finance, politics and security, as well as culture and interpersonal exchanges. A New association Development bank has also appeared. Its authorized capital amounted to \$100 billion. The BRICS countries are also striving to create favorable conditions for open trade.

Special attention should be paid to the advantages that the PICs can benefit from taking part in the BRICS+. Firstly, participation in the association will allow to form a broad integration contour. After all, BRICS+ unites the markets of several continents and oceans at once. The coupling of potentials on such a scale is an achievable goal for Pacific Islands with due efforts by the parties.

PICs' participation in BRICS+ will also contribute to the support and development of mounting for regional and subregional integration within the framework of friendly multilateral institutions, dialogue platforms and regional associations. As a result, the stability of their economic systems will increase, and transport, financial and infrastructural interconnections will strengthen.

This implies ensuring equitable access of PICs to the benefits of the global economy and the international division of labor, to modern technologies in the interests of fair and equitable development (including solving problems of energy and food security). As a result, the vulnerability of the economy to unfriendly external influences will decrease, which will reduce the risks of potential external pressure.

The BRICS countries can be described as well-known partners of the Pacific Islands. All of them have a history of friendly interactions in a wide variety of fields, including economics and humanitarian contacts. Moreover, the BRICS+ countries are provided with natural resources that are necessary for the growth of emerging markets. At the same time, it's important to understand that strengthening trade and investment ties directly depends on the complementarity of economies, which indicates the need for active study and elaboration of this issue between academic, political and business circles.

Tourism is another important area of cooperation, given the rapid growth of the middle class in the BRICS+ countries and travel spending.

Contacts between people are the basis of international relations. This necessitates increased attention to the tourism industry, as well as the development of a network of educational and other humanitarian exchanges. This will not only have a beneficial effect on economic development later, but will also allow us to get to know each other better. It is especially momentous that the next BRICS summit will be held in Russia (2024).

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Pacific Island Countries have great potential in regional and global affairs. At the same time, historically, they have been viewed by many larger actors only through the prism of geostrategic competition and defence.

Now is the time when the Pacific Islands need to be helped to provide real conditions for continuous, progressive development. By actively participating in international associations that meet the trends of the new world order, PICs can open the way to economic sustainability, technological progress, strategic stability and improved quality of life. One of the ways to achieve these goals is to become more actively involved in the affairs of BRICS+. In this case, the Pacific Islands can realize their potential as another pole of power in a multipolar world.

It is safe to note that the BRICS+ countries will perceive PICs beyond simple geopolitical considerations. The focus will be on building a more inclusive and diverse global community, which will also involve the Pacific Islands. The provisions of the new Concept of Russia's Foreign Policy, emphasizing sovereign equality, respect for various development models, commitment to technological progress, and the strengthening of spiritual and moral values, are in good agreement with the vision of the Pacific Islands and highlight the points of contact.

As the world enters a new era, it is imperative for the Global South to support the Pacific Islands in their desire for a comprehensive and sustainable development agenda. The participation of these countries in global affairs is not only beneficial for the region itself, but also contributes to the building of a more harmonious and interconnected world. The new world order doesn't accept approaches to interaction with the Pacific Islands that focus solely on strategic issues. On the contrary, the emerging new world order recognizes and glorifies their potential as active participants in the common progress of mankind.

ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

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