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From Soft to Aid Power.

International Aid as an instrument of Russian Foreign
Policy: Donor Competition and COVID-19.

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Contents

Contents	2
Figures	3
Abbreviations and expressions	4
Introduction	6
Chapter I - International aid as a foreign policy tool	9
1.1 International aid: between economic development and foreign policy	9
1.1.1 Classic forms of foreign aid	9
1.1.2 Foreign aid and donors' foreign policy	11
1.1.3 Broadening the definition of aid	13
1.2 Donor – recipient relationship	16
1.2.1 Gift-giving and obligations	16
1.2.2 Influence and soft power	18
1.2.3 Geopolitical relevance	22
CHAPTER II - Donor competition	26
2.1 Coordination vs competition	26
2.1.1 Theoretical considerations	26
2.1.2 A changing landscape: re-emerging donors	28
2.2 Russia as a re-emerging donor	30
2.2.1 International Aid of the USSR	30
2.2.2 International Aid of the Russian Federation	32
Re-emergence as a donor and policy objectives	32
Geopolitical relevance: Official Development Assistance	36
Geopolitical relevance: Other Official Flows	40
Domestic actors in Russian aid	43
2.2.3 Competing with the United States and China	45
Main figures	46
Main actors	47
Aid philosophies and donor interests	47
Concluding remarks: what model for Russian aid?	51
Chapter III - Russia's international health assistance	53
3.1 General overview	53
3.1.1 International health aid of the USSR	53
3.1.2 Transition of the Russian Federation from health aid recipient to donor	54
3.1.3 Pharma-2020 national strategy	56
3.1.4 Russia's response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa	58
3.1.5 Concluding remarks: global health leader or threat?	59
3.2 Russia's international health assistance – COVID-19 first phase	60

3.2.1 Russia's humanitarian aid – COVID-19 first phase	62
3.2.2 Donor competition: US and China	69
3.2.3 From Russia with Love – to Italy	75
3.2.4 Concluding remarks	78
3.3 Russia's international health assistance – COVID-19 second phase	78
3.3.1 Vaccine development: state (East) vs private sector (West)	79
Sputnik V vs Western vaccines	79
Other Russian COVID-19 vaccines	83
3.3.2 Sputnik V distribution	84
Global reach	84
The issue of production capacity	87
Sputnik V in Italy	89
3.3.3 Donor competition: US initial absence and China's lead	90
3.3.4 Concluding remarks	95
A values contest with soft power implications	95
A diplomacy of "vaccine technology transfer"?	101
What next?	105
Conclusion	106
Appendix – Vaccine Geopolitics	110
Bibliography	111
Summary	134

Figures

Figure 1: Top 10 recipients of Russia's bilateral ODA (2011-2019).	37
Figure 2: Distribution of Russia's bilateral ODA by continents and regions (2011-2019).	37
Figure 3: Breakdown of Russia's bilateral ODA by number of years.	39
Figure 4: Recipient countries of Russia's COVID-19 humanitarian aid by primary aid provider (Feb. 2020 - Feb. 2021).	64
Figure 5: COVID-19 humanitarian aid provided by Russian state and non-state actors (Feb. 2020 - Feb. 2021).	66
Figure 6: Map of countries that have registered Sputnik V by 25 May 2021.	85
Figure 7: Russian and Chinese vaccines against COVID-19.	110
Figure 8: Western vaccines against COVID-19.	110

Abbreviations and expressions

<i>AMC</i>	Advance Market Commitment
<i>Big Pharma</i>	Western pharmaceutical multinational corporations
<i>BRI</i>	China's Belt and Road Initiative
<i>BRICS</i>	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
<i>CAG</i>	Center for Advanced Governance [<i>Центр перспективных управленческих решений</i>]
<i>CEPI</i>	Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations
<i>CIDCA</i>	China International Development Cooperation Agency
<i>CIS</i>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<i>COVAX</i>	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility
<i>DAC</i>	Development Assistance Committee
<i>DAC List</i>	DAC List of Recipients of Official Development Assistance
<i>Developed countries or advanced economies</i>	As per IMF categorization, see World Economic Outlook 2021 at [https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2021/01/weodata/groups.htm]
<i>Developing countries</i>	As per IMF categorization, see World Economic Outlook 2021
<i>DFC</i>	United States International Development Finance Corporation
<i>DoD</i>	United States Department of Defense
<i>DoS</i>	United States Department of State
<i>EAEU</i>	Eurasian Economic Union
<i>EaP</i>	Eastern Partnership of the European Union
<i>EMA</i>	European Medicines Authority
<i>EMERCOM</i>	Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters
<i>EU</i>	European Union
<i>EUL</i>	WHO Emergency Use Listing
<i>GFATM</i>	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
<i>GAVI</i>	The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations
<i>H5N1</i>	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza
<i>IAPP</i>	International Aid Public Policies
<i>IMF</i>	International Monetary Fund
<i>IO</i>	International Organization
<i>IPRs</i>	Intellectual Property Rights
<i>MNC</i>	Multinational Corporation

<i>NATO</i>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<i>NCDs</i>	Non-communicable Diseases
<i>Near Abroad</i>	Post-Soviet States from Russia's perspective
<i>NGO</i>	Non-Governmental Organization
<i>ODA</i>	Official Development Assistance
<i>OECD</i>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<i>OOF</i>	Other Official Financial Flows
<i>PCR</i>	People's Republic of China
<i>PPE</i>	Personal Protective Equipment
<i>RDIF</i>	Russian Direct Investment Fund
<i>R&D</i>	Research and Development
<i>Rospotrebnadzor</i>	Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing of the Russian Federation
<i>Rosselkhoznadzor</i>	Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance of the Russian Federation
<i>RusAid</i>	Project for a Russian Aid Agency
<i>SARS</i>	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
<i>SSC</i>	South-South Cooperation
<i>SVR</i>	Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation
<i>TB</i>	Tuberculosis
<i>UAE</i>	United Arab Emirates
<i>UK</i>	United Kingdom
<i>UN</i>	United Nations
<i>UNAIDS</i>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<i>UNICEF</i>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<i>US</i>	United States
<i>USAID</i>	United States Agency for International Development
<i>USSR</i>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<i>WB</i>	World Bank
<i>WHO</i>	World Health Organization
<i>2007 Concept</i>	Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in International Development Assistance
<i>2014 Concept</i>	Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance
<i>2021 White Paper</i>	China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era

Introduction

“Aid does not occur in a geopolitical vacuum”

(Blair, Marty and Roessler, 2019)¹

Russia’s international aid has been widely discussed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, when Russia provided humanitarian aid to foreign countries, even to advanced economies that are traditional aid donors such as the United States and Italy, and then when Russia developed and distributed a vaccine against COVID-19 which is now an important tool of Russian foreign policy. Many countries, even some that are usually aid recipients, provided international aid during the pandemic. China – the largest re-emerging donor – was the leading provider of humanitarian aid, arguably driven by economic and foreign policy interests related to its Belt and Road Initiative, and it developed and is distributing its own vaccines against COVID-19. The health aid of the United States – the largest traditional donor – arrived later than China’s and Russia’s, but the US provided large volumes of financial aid; its vaccine distribution to foreign countries is only starting now in May-June 2021, but it is poised to become very relevant, as several companies that developed and manufacture vaccines are based in the US.

Since President Vladimir Putin’s rise to power in 2000, Russia is back on the global stage after the inward focus of the 1990s, and it is seeking a multipolar world order, great power recognition and influence over its Near Abroad.² Pursuing a global foreign policy, it has re-engaged with countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, where its influence had been absent since the Soviet collapse, and is providing again international aid, as the USSR did.

The opening quote of this introductory section, *“Aid does not occur in a geopolitical vacuum”*³, summarizes well the overarching argument of this thesis: international aid occurs amidst great power rivalry, which translates to donor competition, namely aid is used as a tool of foreign policy by donor countries, to advance their geopolitical interests and expand their influence.

In this thesis I will examine the dynamics of donor competition in which Russia’s international aid, as an instrument of Russian foreign policy, may be placed.

Thus, with a view to Russia’s global foreign policy, which encounters China’s increasing global engagement, and in light of Russia’s challenge to the US-led international order, I will research the geopolitical drivers of Russia’s international aid policy and the aspects of donor competition with the US and China, with a focus on international health assistance.

The structure of the thesis is as follows.

¹ Blair, R.A., Marty, R., & Roessler, P. (2019). *Foreign Aid and Soft Power: Great Power Competition in Africa in the Early 21st Century*. AidData Working Paper 86. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary, p. 11.

² Near Abroad (*Blizhneye Zarubezhye*) is a Russian concept that indicates post-Soviet states.

³ Blair, Marty & Roessler (2019).

The first chapter provides a theoretical overview of aid: definitional issues, analytical tools to understand its use as an instrument to wield influence over foreign countries (as both hard and soft power), characteristics of the asymmetrical donor-recipient relationship, and the geopolitics of aid: geopolitics is envisaged as a broad framework, chiefly the intersection of geography, history and strategy, but that also encompasses a wide range of factors, which can be economic and technological or symbolic, therefore including both hard and soft power.

The second chapter presents the concepts of donor competition and re-emerging donors, and provides an analysis of the strategy, geopolitical drivers, and institutional set-up of Russia's international aid. An OECD dataset on Russian ODA flows is analyzed. In order to paint a clearer picture of Russia's aid, Other Official Flows (OOF) would require consideration, but Russia does not submit them to the OECD and there is currently a gap in comprehensive academic research on the matter. Nevertheless, some examples of military, diplomatic, energy and non-ODA financial aid are put forward. Russian aid policy is then compared and contrasted with the aid policy of the United States and China.

The third chapter delves into the topic of Russia's international health assistance, which is addressed in general, and then specifically with regard to mask and vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The international health assistance of the United States and that of China are researched to investigate the dynamics of donor competition.

The section on mask diplomacy (3.2) is largely based on a data set compiled by the Moscow-based Center of Advanced Governance (CAG), which is comprised of Russian-language official reports on Russia's international humanitarian aid provided to tackle COVID-19, from February 2020 to February 2021. Information on aid sent by Russia in the following months of 2021, and on the aid sent by China and the US in the whole period are obtained from academic, official or media reports available online. A comprehensive account of aid deliveries has not been released by Russian nor Chinese authorities.

The section on vaccine diplomacy (3.3) provides a snapshot of the phenomenon since the announcement of the development of Sputnik V (the Russian vaccine) on August 11, 2020 up until June 10, 2021, as this thesis is being submitted. The situation continues to evolve every day at a very fast pace. Lack of official data from Russia and China constrains the comprehensiveness of the analysis, but the section attempts to provide an account of this initial phase of vaccine diplomacy and to analyze the trends that have emerged so far.

This thesis builds on Professor Igor Pellicciari's definition of International Aid Public Policies (IAPP)⁴, through which the political significance of aid can be grasped more clearly than through the

⁴ Pellicciari, I. (2017). Feeding the Trojan Horse: International Aid Policies in support to NGOs (1990–2015). In R. Marchetti, *Partnerships in International Policy-Making* (pp. 293-310). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

conventional definition of foreign aid as Official Development Assistance (ODA). The category of IAPP includes asymmetrical exchanges of any kind as long as they are funded by the donor's public budget and are part of a strategy, and it does not equate the roles of donors and recipients with the groups of advanced economies or developing countries. Roles are interchangeable, depending on the interests that the donor seeks to promote with its aid. Relying on the IAPP definition allows to examine a broader range of exchanges than just development and humanitarian aid flows (ODA), as part of the overall aid strategy of a donor country. It is in this framework that mask and vaccine diplomacy may be considered as part of a state's international aid policy even when medical equipment and vaccines are sold rather than fully or partly donated: as scarce resources, their sale may be seen as an asymmetrical exchange.

The sources of this thesis are academic literature, official state strategies, decrees and policy documents, data sets by the OECD and CAG, reports by international organizations and research centers, official statements and press releases, news articles, official or research centers' websites, personal e-mail communications and expert interviews. Sources are in English, Russian, and Italian.

Chapter I - International aid as a foreign policy tool

“It follows from the political nature of foreign aid that it is not a science but an art. That art requires by way of mental predisposition a political sensitivity to the interrelationship among the facts, present and future, and ends and means.”

(Hans Morgenthau, 1962)⁵

1.1 International aid: between economic development and foreign policy

1.1.1 Classic forms of foreign aid

International aid is a complex category that comprises several types of aid and different mechanisms for aid-giving. In common-sense use, but even in a large part of the literature, it is labeled as foreign aid and it is usually associated with development assistance and humanitarian assistance from richer countries to poorer ones.

Indeed, official information on foreign aid is gathered by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which monitors the resource flows from developed to developing countries that fall within the category of Official Development Assistance (ODA). These resources may be funds, goods or services. Humanitarian assistance, which is directed towards countries facing conflicts, shocks or natural disasters, accounts for roughly 9% of ODA flows. Every three years the DAC compiles a List of eligible ODA recipients, divided into four groups, namely least developed countries, low income countries, lower middle income countries, and upper middle income countries. The DAC defines ODA as “the gold standard of foreign aid”⁶ and sets three criteria to be met for government aid, either bilateral or mediated through multilateral institutions, to be classified as ODA: it needs to be provided by official agencies; it needs to be aimed at promoting developing countries’ economic development and welfare; it must have a concessional nature, which means that each transaction of ODA loans requires a grant element, on a scale from 10% to 45%, depending on the category that the recipient country belongs to or whether the transaction has a bilateral or multilateral character. Private foreign direct investment and government aid for military purposes or aimed at promoting the security objectives of donor governments, peacekeeping activities, nuclear energy (unless it is used for civilians) and cultural programmes promoting the image of donor governments, do not count towards ODA, but are nonetheless monitored under “private flows” and “other official flows” (OOF). OOF are flows that do not qualify as ODA, because they lack a primary development purpose or a grant element of at least 25%, but that are disbursed by the official sector of donor countries to countries on the DAC List of ODA Recipients. Donor countries whose aid flows are measured by the DAC may or may not be on the Committee. DAC membership – 30 countries plus the European Union – reflects the majority of the OECD membership and is thus naturally skewed

⁵ Morgenthau, H. (1962). A Political Theory of Foreign Aid. *The American Political Science Review*, 56(2), p. 308.

⁶ OECD Website. *Official development assistance – definition and coverage*. [<https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistance/definitionandcoverage.htm>].

towards the West. The group of countries that undertake ODA and submit the relative data, but are not DAC members is more varied, comprising Eastern, Asian and Arab countries.⁷

Most of the literature on foreign aid is grounded in development economics and may be said to be recipient-centered. It sees foreign aid primarily as a tool of economic policy. The first main strand investigates the effectiveness of foreign aid in recipient countries (namely, does aid foster economic growth? what are its effects?); the second one aims to explain patterns of aid allocation, usually in relation to recipients' characteristics (what determines aid distribution? on what basis are recipients chosen?).⁸

The findings on aid effectiveness are largely inconclusive; disentangling the endogenous correlation between aid, bad policies and poverty has proven impossible. At best, studies show no significant positive impact or no impact of aid on investment and growth. The teleological narrative of economic development – which largely informs the work of international organizations involved in foreign aid programs and whereby industrialization and democracy are seen as the final and destined purpose for all developing countries – has been criticized by William Easterly as a cause of the ineffectiveness of foreign aid. In his view, the teleology of development, untestable and unfalsifiable since its object is in the future, would raise the utopian expectation that poverty can be eradicated through central planning rather than “searchers”, i.e. free market actors and accountable politicians, when instead history has refuted the ability of central planning to reduce poverty.⁹

On aid allocation, there is agreement on the relevance of a number of features of recipient countries, such as income and poverty levels, democratization, economy and trade openness, but there is also evidence of the role of history and strategic interests of donors. Alberto Alesina and David Dollar found that countries that are poorer, smaller, more open and more democratic receive more bilateral aid. However, the relative importance of poverty, democracy and policy is lessened by political and strategic variables, such as colonial past (being a former colony of the donor) and voting history in the United Nations (voting with the donor, which is considered proof of a political alliance, either military or commercial), that have more explanatory power with regard to bilateral aid allocation. The two scholars further elaborate on differences among donors and find that the relative weight of political-strategic variables varies across donor countries: colonial history was the main

⁷ For further information on the DAC and ODA, see OECD Website. *Development Assistance Committee*. [<https://www.oecd.org/dac/development-assistance-committee/>]. See also Lahiri, S. (2006). *Theory and Practice of Foreign Aid: Introduction*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

⁸ On aid effectiveness, see Bourguignon, F., & Sundberg, M. (2007). Aid Effectiveness: Opening the Black Box. *The American Economic Review*, 97(2), pp. 316–321; Boone, P. (1996). Politics and the effectiveness of foreign aid. *European Economic Review*, 40(2), pp. 289–329. On aid allocation, see Alesina, A., & Dollar, D. (2000). Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why? *Journal of Economic Growth*, 5, pp. 33–63.

⁹ Easterly, W. (2008). *Reinventing Foreign Aid*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 1–21.

determinant for France, UN voting patterns and the underlying commercial ties were more important for Japan, while the specific strategic interest in the Middle East explained US aid allocation.¹⁰

The quantitative nature of these empirical studies in development economics requires large and comprehensive data sets. Indeed, they rely on the ODA definition and ODA data, which are easily available, but in doing so they miss out on aid flows that are not targeted at developing countries nor tied to development goals, that nevertheless impact international relations.

1.1.2 Foreign aid and donors' foreign policy

Another strand of literature, grounded in international politics, is generally open to a wider classification of aid and explains foreign aid flows from a donor-centered perspective, investigating the determinants of foreign aid linked to the foreign policy objectives of donors and the political-strategic interests resulting from donor countries interaction in the international system.¹¹

A milestone in this field is the seminal article "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid" by Hans Morgenthau, a prominent scholar of the realist theory of international relations.¹²

While the liberal paradigm sees foreign aid as a public good that developed states are responsible for providing to less developed countries, in a system where international cooperation is possible and yields mutual benefits for international actors engaging in it, the realist paradigm, informed by the concept of anarchy and consequent states' self-help to protect national interests, portrays foreign aid as a tool to advance donors' foreign policy and foreign economic interests. As difficult as it is to discern which theory has more validity and considering that a wide range of motives – moral ones included – can determine aid allocation, it is nevertheless undeniable that donors' strategies may be guided by pragmatic motivations.¹³

Morgenthau clearly places foreign aid within the realm of foreign policy instruments, on par with military intervention, diplomacy and propaganda, despite acknowledging that some reject this assumption on the grounds that rich countries have a moral obligation to help poorer ones, regardless of foreign policy interests. Half a century later, the US Obama Administration still envisioned foreign aid as one of the pillars of American power, that in complement to diplomacy and defense ensures a comprehensive approach to national security.¹⁴

¹⁰ Alesina & Dollar, pp. 33-63.

¹¹ See for instance, Morgenthau, H. (1962). A Political Theory of Foreign Aid. *The American Political Science Review*, 56(2), pp. 301-309; Baldwin, D.A. (1969), Foreign Aid, Intervention, and Influence. *World Politics*, 21(3) pp. 425-447; McKinlay, R.D. (1979), The Aid Relationship. A Foreign-Policy Model of the Distributions of Official Economic Bilateral Aid of the United States, The United Kingdom, France and Germany, 1960–70. *Comparative Political Studies*, 11(4), pp. 411-463.

¹² Morgenthau (1962).

¹³ Degterev, D. A. (2012). Содействие международному развитию как инструмент продвижения внешнеполитических и внешнеэкономических интересов [International Development Assistance as an Instrument of Promoting Economic and Political Interest of Donor Countries]. *Vestnik MGIMO*, 2(23), p. 47.

¹⁴ Quirk, P. W. (2014). (Re)Emerging Aid Donors in the Reshaping World Order. *Transatlantic Academy Paper Series*. Washington: Transatlantic Academy, p. 1.

Building off of the basic common definition of foreign aid as “the transfer of money, goods, and services from one nation to another”¹⁵, Morgenthau advances a six-type typology, whereby foreign aid may be humanitarian, subsistence, military, bribery, for prestige or for economic development.¹⁶

Three of these types, namely humanitarian foreign aid, subsistence foreign aid and foreign aid for economic development could fit into the ODA definition – provided the recipient countries were developing ones and the aid had the prescribed grant element, but still, their stated aim resonates with ODA’s development and welfare aims. The other three types of aid, i.e. bribery, military foreign aid and prestige foreign aid are something else entirely: the link to the morally justifiable objective of development is severed, and the political-strategic nature of foreign aid is made evident.

Humanitarian foreign aid is deemed by Morgenthau as the only nonpolitical kind, although it may take on a political meaning if the context is political. Subsistence aid may be political, as the provision of funds and resources to countries that struggle to offer the minimum standard of public services is seen as serving the hidden objective of preserving the status quo of the political regimes in the recipient countries. Aid for economic development, although legitimate, is criticized as ideological – akin to the teleological criticism made by Easterly – and often hiding the purpose of bribing the recipient for political advantage. An interesting insight is that the pretense of aid for economic development blurs the lines between ideology and reality, with the result that both donor and recipient expect economic development to come from aid even when its original (hidden) purpose is merely political. Military foreign aid in itself is one of the most ancient tools of political alliance. The category of prestige aid is hidden under the pretense of development or military assistance. It is strictly symbolic and economically inefficient: the purpose is to allow the recipient country to appear industrialized, or militarily advanced, when really no material progress has been made. The increased prestige of the recipient accrues to the donor in the form of his own increased prestige and political allegiance from the recipient.¹⁷

Seeing bribery as a standalone type of foreign aid may be surprising to the contemporary reader, given the great expansion of anticorruption and antibribery international law in the last decades. Moreover, Morgenthau focuses mainly on foreign aid given by the United States, who incidentally were one of the forerunners of the fight against international corruption and the first country to criminalize the bribery of foreign public officials in 1977 (FCPA). Nevertheless, Morgenthau’s account dates back to earlier times (1962), plus he avers that the true nature of the bribes categorized as foreign aid, just as it happens with prestige aid, is generally dissimulated as aid

¹⁵ Morgenthau, p. 301.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 301-304.

¹⁷ Ibid.

for economic development or military purposes, when the aim is really to buy political allegiance from the recipient country.

The broader classification offered by Morgenthau and his focus on the political objectives that inspire donors' foreign aid strategies shifts the discussion on foreign aid from the field of economics – that sees it “as though it were a self-sufficient technical enterprise of a primarily economic nature”¹⁸ – to the field of politics. In this view, donors' foreign aid strategy should pertain to foreign policy (and its experts) rather than economic policy. A fundamental question on aid, from the donor's perspective, becomes that of political effectiveness. In order for aid to be efficient at least for the donor, the source has to be evident: the political value of foreign aid resides in the creation of a psychological relationship between donor and recipient that cannot be minimized to a mere contractual relationship. If the donor is able to coopt the recipient into sharing its “political philosophy, system and objectives”¹⁹, and the recipient is not led to believe that he is entitled to aid simply because of his condition of need, but recognizes that it is bestowed upon him under political considerations, then aid can be said to be politically effective.

The moral dimension, which Morgenthau dismisses, and the (geo)political dimension, on which he instead builds his argument, are essential to understanding the relationship between donor and recipient. Before analyzing such relationship in section 1.2, by addressing the moral implications of aid as a gift exchange, and the international politics literature on (geo)political influence of aid, the definitional question of what constitutes aid beyond economic development and humanitarian assistance (ODA) requires further consideration.

1.1.3 Broadening the definition of aid

In her study of the purposes for which governments disburse foreign aid and of the domestic politics determining the choices of donor countries, Carol Lancaster expands on the ODA definition to include a range of other purposes (alongside development there may be diplomacy, humanitarian relief, trade, culture) and developed beneficiaries. She formally defines foreign aid as “a voluntary transfer of public resources, from a government to another independent government, to an NGO, or to an international organization (such as the World Bank or the UN Development Program) with at least a 25 percent grant element, one goal of which is to better the human condition in the country receiving the aid”²⁰. Lancaster goes on to describe the mechanisms through which aid pursues donors' objectives: it may allow the beneficiary to expand its activities or capacities; it may tie the recipient to supporting the donor's policies, in the same way that an incentive or payment would; it may act as

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lancaster, C. (2007). *Foreign Aid. Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics*. Chicago: UC Press, p. 9. With regard to ODA, the 25% grant element has now been tweaked to accommodate different levels of development of the recipient countries, but it was part of the official definition until 2017.

a political signal between donor and beneficiary, but also to other countries, of reciprocal approval, tightening of relations when aid is raised or their deterioration when aid is withheld.²¹

However, some contradictions arise when one looks at the types of resource transfers that are explicitly left out of the definition, in particular military aid, counter-terrorism assistance and bribes for purely diplomatic or political purposes. Indeed, outright military assistance is excluded, but since aid is fungible, i.e. it can spare recipient governments expenses in certain public services and they can redirect those pre-planned funds to other fields, it may eventually and indirectly finance the military sector in the recipient country. Bribery is omitted, but the resemblance between Lancaster's incentive/payment function and Morgenthau's bribery type is uncanny – the latter scholar is also not considering unequivocal bribes but rather the bribery rationale, so to say, behind certain foreign aid flows.

From the point of view of the material aspect of aid, the lines of what constitutes exactly foreign aid seem to be inevitably blurred, especially when one takes into account the fungibility of aid. A relevant remark made by Lancaster is that the gift of public resources has to be “sustained and sizable over time”²², which means that foreign aid has to be a tool of a certain magnitude and embedded in a medium to long-term policy, not just function as a short-term expedient.

Hitherto, the term *foreign aid* has been used in this chapter, in spite of the first part of its title being *international aid*. The two forms are generally used interchangeably, but the first collocation appears to be the preferred one in literature and policy. A Ngram search comparing the frequency of the two collocations, across a corpus of millions of digitized publications, shows that *foreign aid* has always been more used and is still today more than twice as used as *international aid*.²³ On a side note, the search yields a graph that shows increased interest in the topic of foreign aid starting in the late 1940s, consistently with the implementation of the Marshall Plan by the United States in 1948, which is considered by many scholars the starting point of the history of contemporary foreign aid.²⁴ Also, the graph peaks in the 1960s, which seems to be consistent with the launch of foreign aid initiatives and/or establishment of related agencies, of which the US was a precursor, by several countries across Europe, but also Japan, USSR and China, in response to the decolonization process and the need for coalition-building during the phase of pacific coexistence of the Cold War, as well

²¹ Ibid., pp. 10-12.

²² Ibid., p. 1.

²³ Search performed on 29 March 2021 using Google Books Ngram Viewer, available at [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=foreign+aid%2Cinternational+aid&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cforeign%20aid%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cinternational%20aid%3B%2Cc0]. For the use of this tool as a source in political science research, see Richey, S., & Taylor, J. B. (2020). Google Books Ngrams and Political Science: Two Validity Tests for a Novel Data Source. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53(1), pp. 72-77.

²⁴ For a dissenting opinion, see Markovits, D., Strange, A., & Tingley, D. (2019). Foreign Aid and the Status Quo: Evidence from Pre-Marshall Plan Aid. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 12(4), pp. 585–613.

as by some developing countries in the Middle East who owed their growth to the oil trade. The 1960s were also declared the first Decade of Development by the UN, at the prompting of US President John F. Kennedy, who greatly increased the amount and recipients of American foreign aid.

The adjectives *foreign* and *international* may carry nuanced meanings and may even echo different concepts. *Foreign* reveals an implicit recipient-centered view: aid is foreign to the recipient, not to the donor.²⁵ It also seems that *foreign* may at times imply a normative judgement which is in contrast with an objective analysis of donors' actions and motives.

For instance, skepticism towards foreign aid channeled through NGOs and the desire to reemerge from the subdued position of recipient country, has led Russia to require that these NGOs register as "foreign agents", which is negatively reminding of intelligence organizations.²⁶ Foreign government agencies may suffer the same fate, as did USAID – the American government's aid agency – which was expelled from Russia in 2012 under accusations of meddling in Russian domestic politics and fomenting pre-elections political unrest.²⁷

Using the term *international aid* allows to offer either perspective, the recipient's as well as the donor's – the latter is the focus of this thesis. Talking about international aid rather than foreign aid also presents the opportunity to broaden the definition of aid, in keeping with the political scope of aid underlined by the realist school of international relations, and thus to include types of aid other than ODA, and types of aid beneficiaries that are not necessarily developing countries but that represent instead areas of geopolitical interest for donors.

In this sense, Professor Igor Pellicciari introduced the category of "International Aid Public Policies"²⁸ (IAPP), through which the political significance of aid can be grasped more clearly than through the conventional definition of foreign aid. In particular, the category is envisioned in order to study the foreign policy objectives of donor governments, as aid is seen as often replacing war and trade as an instrument of political domination – although it is hardly communicated as such to the public opinion by donors, given that one of its main advantages is exactly the moral justification it provides to government action. Within IAPP, aid is conceived as "any asymmetrical exchange flow"²⁹ from donor to beneficiary that are identifiable governments of different countries, either direct or mediated by international or non-governmental organizations, provided the aid comes in full or in part from the public budget (regardless of whether it is proposed by local or central entities), and the aid flow is a component of a coordinated policy, which means that it exists within a "series of

²⁵ Pellicciari, I. (2017), Feeding the Trojan Horse: International Aid Policies in support to NGOs (1990–2015). In R. Marchetti (ed), *Partnerships in International Policy-Making*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 294.

²⁶ Pellicciari (2017), pp. 307-308.

²⁷ Rojansky, M. (2012, Sept 20). Why USAID is leaving Russia. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at [<https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/20/why-usaid-is-leaving-russia-pub-49444>]

²⁸ Pellicciari (2017), pp. 293-299.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 297.

continuous actions of assistance over a set period of time”³⁰. Therefore, the category of IAPP does not constrain aid within a limited set of fields related to development, that are often concealing political objectives anyway, but is open to any field, from energy, technology and know-how, to security and military assistance, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the overall aid policy of the donor and the influence thereby sought. As a theoretical basis, the thesis will follow the definition of international aid as International Aid Public Policies.

Professor Pellicciari’s approach foregrounds that “a minimum operational definition of aid must arise from the parties involved in the aid relation, rather than from the object of the transaction”³¹, which allows to overcome the issue of blurred lines in the categorization of the material element of aid and prompts us to turn more specifically to the relational aspect of aid.

1.2 Donor – recipient relationship

The aim of the following discussion is not to establish what theory of international relations interprets best the political use of international aid in the donor-recipient relationship, but it is rather to present some analytical tools from the realist as well as the liberal traditions to understand such political use. A brief introduction on the moral arguments for international aid precedes the discussion. The broad framework of geopolitics may then synthesize several factors.

1.2.1 Gift-giving and obligations

Altruistic arguments are a common justification for international aid. Whether such motivations may be considered genuine depends on the specific case and on the analytical approach adopted: they would not be in the realist view; they would from a liberal idealist perspective; they may or may not through constructivist lenses, depending on the donor society’s ideas and values. It may be safe to say that the motives underpinning international aid-giving have a mixed nature, of which altruism may be a component. Nevertheless, even aid stimulated by altruism may have power-shifting consequences.

International aid can be seen as a form of gift from richer to poorer nations, a voluntary extension of resources allegedly prompted by moral norms. One of the first scholars of gift-exchange was anthropologist Marcel Mauss,³² who argued that a social obligation to reciprocate arises from receiving a gift, otherwise one would incur in debt, and saw gift-giving as a practice that reinforces mutual trust and stabilizes relations, reducing the need of war. However, as argued by Annalisa Furia, while the practice of gift-giving entails not only the creation of debt, but also its cancellation through

³⁰ Ibid., p. 298.

³¹ Ibid., p. 297.

³² Mauss, M. (1966). *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Cohen & West. Originally published in French in 1925.

reciprocation of the gift, in a continuous process of gifting and reciprocating, aid-giving differs insofar as the second action is not made visible. There is indeed counter-giving by the aid recipient, for instance in the form of political returns, but since it is not visible, it has allowed for the aid donor-recipient relationship to be construed on the concept of indebtedness of the recipient.³³

In modern-day international aid, flows that have exclusively a grant nature (no need for repayment – thus explicit suspension of the social obligation to reciprocate) are much rarer than concessional loans that have only a grant element. These are partially paid back, but they can be envisioned as unreciprocated gifts, too. Indeed, the obligation to repay is not the type of counter-giving taking place among equals in a social relation of gift-giving: it is instead a “coercive and unequal relation”³⁴, enshrined in contractual agreements. Further, the donor may exert direct influence as a creditor if the debt goes unpaid.³⁵

The unreciprocated nature of international aid practices determines the quality of the donor-recipient relationship, that is an ambiguous one where the recipient perceives not only a material debt, but also a debt of development, civilization and capacity towards donors. Indebtedness justifies donors’ intervention in the domestic affairs of recipient countries and the request of domestic reforms. Absent from aid practices is reciprocal recognition, which via gift-giving would be the basis for the creation of a community of equals, reducing the distance and potential for conflict between donor and recipient. Rather, distance is reinforced and controlled by the donors. In particular, Furia argues that this unreciprocated form of gift-giving, from developed to developing countries, has emerged after World War II as a paradigm of government of international relations between the Global North and the Global South, and that it is continued gift-giving – in the single direction from the North to the South – that allows the conservation of this order and hierarchy, on a “material and ethical promise of transformation”³⁶ that never materializes.

Since only wealthy countries can afford to give international aid, the effect of this unreciprocated gift-giving is that the existing material hierarchy among states is translated into a moral hierarchy. Tomohisa Hattori argues that the processes of monitoring, evaluation and standard-setting undertaken by the DAC reinforce this mechanism of extension from the material to the moral, given that the DAC is dominated by wealthy (and mostly Western) states. In his view, only aid channeled through multilateral organizations can eschew this power dynamic, because even though it is once again an unreciprocated gift, the identity of the donors is obscured and they relinquish control of the aid programs, so they cannot hold any symbolic and moral power over the recipient.³⁷

³³ Furia, A. (2015). *The Foreign Aid Regime. Gift-Giving, States and Global Dis/Order*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁴ Hattori, T. (2003). The Moral Politics of Foreign Aid. *Review of International Studies*, 29(2), p. 233.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Furia (2015), p. 111.

³⁷ Hattori (2003).

1.2.2 Influence and soft power

As a foreign policy tool, international aid acts as an instrument of intervention of the donor in the recipient country. Intervention is conceptualized by David Baldwin as the exertion of influence, which goes beyond the conventional definition of intervention as the violation of another state's territorial sovereignty with military means.³⁸ He adopts Robert Dahl's well-known definition of influence, which is a relation where one actor is able to get one or more other actors in that relation to do what they would not do otherwise.³⁹ Elsewhere in his work, Dahl replaced the word influence with power, using them interchangeably.⁴⁰ In later elaborations of the concept of influence, Dahl specified further elements, reaching the following definition of influence: "a relation among human actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intentions of one or more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, of one or more actors in a direction consistent with – and not contrary to – the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence-wielder(s)"⁴¹.

If aid is intervention and intervention is influence, it follows that the donor-recipient relationship is a relation of influence; international aid is a tool whereby the donor succeeds in coopting the recipient to act in accordance with the donor's preferences, a tool whereby the donor seeks to dominate the recipient's actions.

Tied aid, which is international aid that is conditional on the recipient spending part of it in the donor country or in a small group of countries, for instance buying equipment or procuring services, might be the most straightforward example of exertion of influence, as the recipient is compelled to act accordingly to the donor's desire to sell equipment or have its own companies operating in the recipient's territory.

Dahl envisages different forms of influence, i.e. "inducement, power, force, coercion, persuasion, manipulation, and authority"⁴². Amongst them, inducement, power and authority seem the most suited to apply to international aid as a political instrument.

Force, coercion, persuasion and manipulation are rather expressions of military power, diplomacy, and propaganda or disinformation campaigns.⁴³

Inducement is the form whereby influence is exerted using rewards, whereas power entails the use of sanctions or deprivations. An instance of the inducement form of influence may be the flow of international aid during the Cold War: the initial disbursements made by the US and the USSR to

³⁸ Baldwin (1969), pp. 425-426.

³⁹ Dahl, R. A. (1963), *Modern Political Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, pp. 39-54, cited in Baldwin (1969), p. 426.

⁴⁰ See for instance, Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral Science*, 2(3), pp. 201-215.

⁴¹ Dahl, R.A. & Stinebrickner, B. (2003). *Modern Political Analysis*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. 17, cited in Baldwin, D. A. (2016). *Power and International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: PU Press, p. 33.

⁴² Dahl & Stinebrickner (2003), pp. 38-43, cited in Stinebrickner, B. (2015). Robert A. Dahl and the essentials of Modern Political Analysis: politics, influence, power, and polyarchy. *Journal of Political Power*, 8(2), p. 196.

⁴³ Ibid.

third countries may have been made to coopt them into their own camps, then once the coalition was built, aid may have functioned as a reward to retain recipient countries within the coalition.

As for power, the withholding of aid is a form of influence as much as the giving. For instance, Baldwin notes how it was a deliberate policy choice of the US to withhold aid from developing countries where it would compete with American private investors.⁴⁴ The lack of aid, which he defines “a technique of statecraft”⁴⁵, was intentionally aimed at directing (non-)recipient countries towards private investors, consistently with the US policy preference: indeed, a full-fledged form of influence. Regarding sanctions, Professor Pellicciari underlines that they have come to be employed in synergy with aid: they pursue the same goal of political obligation towards the donor or the sanction-imposer, whilst being formally the opposite. With regard to their extensive use towards and by Russia, he argues that today all or almost all of Russia’s international relations involve either aid or sanctions, to the point that a diplomatic relation that involves neither one is the exception. Further separating sanctions from the domain of military power and placing them into that of international aid, as a diametrically opposite tool, is the acknowledgement that the nature of sanctions has evolved insofar as they have ceased to be the herald of impending military conflict and they now represent an alternative that removes war from the available choices. Emergency used to be relevant to aid and sanctions; it may be still, with regard to the initial decision to disburse aid or impose sanctions, but it is not a necessary requirement to continue to do so.⁴⁶

Authority is a form of influence that stems from legitimacy, where the influenced actor acts in the direction desired by the influence-wielder because he finds it morally good. This type of influence may have more to do with development or humanitarian aid channeled through multilateral organizations. Such aid, apparently motivated by moral considerations, could contribute to strengthen the legitimacy of international organizations and therefore enhance the moral authority of their decisions. One could respond that the widely discussed issues of accountability and transparency of international organizations, along with the equally debated crisis of multilateralism, might nullify the positive effect.

Indeed, Baldwin argues that the fact that aid is given via multilateral mechanisms does not eliminate donors’ national foreign policy objectives: the donor may deliberately choose not to be directly involved, but may find it in his national interest to seek anonymity behind a multilateral channel, or the donor may have the ability to influence the multilateral institution to choose recipients

⁴⁴ Baldwin (1969), p. 432.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Pellicciari, I. (2018) Il Governo dell’Aiuto. La Russia e l’evoluzione delle politiche di Aiuti e Sanzioni [The aid government. Russia and the evolution of Aid and Sanctions policies]. *Studi Vrbinati*, 69(1-2), pp. 72-83.

according to his own national interest, or conversely, he may be even able to foresee the choices made by the multilateral institution and shape his own foreign policy accordingly.⁴⁷

Two additional mechanisms whereby donor states may use international aid as influence to achieve their foreign policy objectives are the commitment of the donor and the dependence of the recipient. In his analysis of the aid relationship, McKinlay explains that the expenses incurred by the donor to support the recipient constitute an unequivocal signal of commitment, which the donor can leverage in the relationship with the recipient. The latter's dependence derives from the superior bargaining position of the donor, who has the freedom to terminate (or threaten to) the aid flow at low cost, decides conditions and possible repayments, and may even intervene directly in the recipient country's internal affairs particularly in the case of technical and development aid.⁴⁸

Another analytical tool that allows to grasp the political relevance of international aid is the concept of soft power coined by Joseph Nye, Jr, father of the neoliberal theory of international relations. Defined as the power of a country that "gets other countries to want what it wants"⁴⁹, soft power has a co-optive nature as opposed to the coercive nature of hard power that operates through the threat or the use of force, namely the deployment of military power, or the exertion of economic power. Soft power resources are the attractiveness of the country's culture, ideology and support for international norms, that the state can harness to appeal to other states, creating a structure within which states develop autonomously preferences and interests that coincide with his own.⁵⁰

Multinational corporations (MNCs) may also be a soft power resource of the state where they are founded, incorporated or managed.⁵¹ They may indeed contribute to spreading the country's value system, language and culture, or business practices, to the countries where subsidiaries are established or to those that receive private foreign investment from MNCs.

But corporations may also operate as a tool of hard power. Baldwin notes that international private investment too may be an instrument of (US) national policy and intervention in developing states, referring in particular to the significant role played – as early as 1969 – by the giant corporation, able to exert pressure on recipient of private investment to adopt a pluralistic social system like the American one.⁵² Baldwin seemed to refer to an implicit conditionality mechanism, where beneficiaries would have to adapt to certain economic and legal features of a pluralistic system, e.g. commercial law, in order to qualify as a safe investment environment and attract donors. Considering that the US intentionally curtailed public international aid to certain areas to stimulate private investment, the only opportunity for recipient countries would have been to adapt political

⁴⁷ Baldwin (1969), pp. 441-443.

⁴⁸ McKinlay (1979), p. 413.

⁴⁹ Nye, J. S. Jr. (1990). *Soft Power. Foreign Affairs*, 80, p. 166.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167 ff.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Baldwin (1969), pp. 443-445.

and economic institutions so as to attract private capital – which seems to be a case of coercion, via economic hard power, rather than cooptation through soft power.

Blair, Marty and Roessler studied the link between international aid and soft power, and deem that aid may function as a tool of both hard power, conceived of in the realist terms of the early Dahl, as the ability to get someone to do what he *otherwise*⁵³ would not do, and soft power. In the latter meaning, international aid bolsters “affinity for the donor country”⁵⁴ and its values, at the level of government or society. For aid to increase soft power, the society of the recipient country has to come into contact with the donor’s international aid, either through direct benefit or by exposure to public discourse about such aid. If the aid initiative has a successful outcome, it may garner support for the donor and prompt a positive response to his values beyond the original aid initiative to comprise politics and governance models – what Nye calls the “implicit appeal to a broader set of values”⁵⁵ that is distinctive of soft power resources.

There is no inevitability nor automaticity to the mechanism that links international aid to greater affinity of the recipient with the donor and thus increased soft power. Indeed, it was found that Chinese aid in Africa has the soft power ability to improve the perception of China and at the same time strike at the perception of the US among African recipient societies, but only for the limited period of time while the aid is being distributed. Then, upon completion of the project, ideological support for China wanes and the perception of the US and other Western donors, along with support for their free-market values and democratic institutions, emerges unscathed if not improved. In the same area, US and Western donors’ international aid generates ideological support both during and after its disbursement, showcasing a stronger ability to operate as a soft power instrument. The explanation suggested by Blair, Marty and Roessler for this disparity in the effectiveness of aid as a tool soft power is that China’s aid is often perceived by recipients as characterized by low levels of quality and transparency, or as a means for the establishment of Chinese firms and workers, or even as lacking a strong moral justification, as opposed to the Western powers’ explicit attempt at exporting democracy.⁵⁶ China’s strategic interests behind aid may be perceived too overtly for China to be able to attract recipients towards its value system.

The mechanism described above, whereby international aid increases soft power of its donor while decreasing the soft power of donors with opposite and competing values, is a “substitution effect”⁵⁷ that occurs in a situation of geopolitical rivalry.

⁵³ Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Blair, R.A., Marty, R., & Roessler, P. (2019). *Foreign Aid and Soft Power: Great Power Competition in Africa in the Early 21st Century*. AidData Working Paper 86. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Nye (1990), p. 169.

⁵⁶ Blair, Marty & Roessler (2019).

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

1.2.3 Geopolitical relevance

The term geopolitics has become increasingly common not only in academia, but also in everyday journalistic speech, often without careful definition. Owing its origins to classical geopolitics theories dating back to the late 19th century – early 20th century, the word geopolitics was disparaged after World War II, because of the linkage between its German school and Nazi expansionist ideology; additionally, in the Communist side of the globe it was seen as a reactionary capitalist ideology that promoted militarism.⁵⁸ The core proposition of geopolitics is control of space, whose classical versions are Halford Mackinder's control of the *Heartland*, the landlocked Eurasian plain at the center of the *World Island*, and Nicholas Spykman's control of the *Rimland*, the Eurasian coastline that comprises Western Europe, the Mediterranean, India and South-East Asia.

Henry Kissinger, a realist scholar and American policy-maker, re-popularized geopolitics during the Cold War, in 1979, and envisioned it as an approach that looks at the politics of equilibrium, at the international balance of power. Geoffrey Sloan maintains that geopolitics aims to underline the importance of “certain geographical patterns in political history”⁵⁹ and the relevance of the geographical context in power relations: political predominance is grounded in the geographical space across which influence is exerted, not only in material and human resources. Geopolitics is not however a deterministic framework, where geographical features determine automatically foreign policy and history; they rather provide opportunities to the policy-maker, in the same way as historical and economic forces do. The extent to which geopolitical opportunities are turned into geopolitical interests of a state and are pursued, depends on policy-makers' decisions regarding strategy.⁶⁰ This conception is akin to Kissinger's view of geopolitics as a strategic doctrine, that informs policy choices and is dynamic, as the “validity of its maxims depends somewhat on the particular political constellation being confronted at any given time”⁶¹.

Among Russian scholars and policy-makers, geopolitics regained preeminence after the collapse of the USSR, when Russia considerably lost geostrategic space and geo-economic opportunities, as it was left with shrunken sea access as well as reduced land frontiers. In the early 1990s, geopolitics was linked to issues of national security, resulting in a comprehensive approach where national security consists of the protection of individual, societal and state vital interests from a wide range of threats, both internal and external, spanning the fields of politics, military, information, economy and ecology (many more could be added today, from health to energy to cybersecurity). The assessment of these threats is subordinated to the analysis of the systems

⁵⁸ Erickson, J. (1999). ‘Russia will not be trifled with’: Geopolitical facts and fantasies. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22(2-3), p. 242.

⁵⁹ Sloan, G. & Gray, C. S. (1999) Why geopolitics? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22(2-3), p. 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 1-11.

⁶¹ Henrikson, A. K. (2003). Henry Kissinger, Geopolitics, and Globalization. *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 27(1), p. 95.

influence of geopolitical factors on the “development of states, regions and the world as a whole”⁶². Geopolitical factors include not only geographical factors such as land, sea and natural resources but also factors that are economic, military, political, ecological, demographic: geopolitics is seen as the science that integrates strategic theory and all of the above disciplines.⁶³

Indeed, also according to the Anglo-American school, geopolitics is an interdisciplinary science, that brings together geography, history and strategy, and integrates economics and technology variables.⁶⁴

In Yves Lacoste’s – leading French scholar of geopolitics – approach, the defining dynamic of a geopolitical situation is a dynamic of rivalry over control of a territory, for a range of reasons, that can be economic, strategic, historical or symbolic.⁶⁵ Geopolitical rivalry is the object of conflicting representations (ideas) by the rival actors, based not only on geographical data, but also on prior conflicts and therefore interpretations of history and related perceptions of territories – in a way, the conflicting representations are subordinated to subjective understandings of reality by states and their leaders. The media becomes a geopolitical factor, insofar as it influences the public opinion and spreads representations of geopolitical rivalry. In this modern conception of geopolitics, domestic politics and the power of ideas are relevant variables. As a scientific method, geopolitics studies objectively the contradictory geopolitical representations and strives to understand both sides of the rivalry. Since the spatial dimension is essential to geopolitical rivalry, the study of geopolitics entails the use of maps. Rival geopolitical positions will rely on different spatial representations of a phenomenon. The phenomena taken into consideration may not be geographic in the physical sense (e.g., natural frontiers are physical), but may be economic, political, demographic, cultural etc., and nonetheless be described cartographically. Different phenomena related to the same territory have limits that do not coincide and thus define multiple spatial sets on the same territory; their intersection provides ground for conflict (e.g., where the distribution of languages or the historical borders do not coincide with state borders). The joint analysis of the multiple spatial sets and their intersections allows for the geopolitical scientific method to not only study rival representations, but also understand the objective and multi-level dynamics at play.⁶⁶

⁶² Rear Adm. Pirumov, translated by Love, R. R. and cited by Erickson, p. 249.

⁶³ Erickson, pp. 244-252.

⁶⁴ Wu, Z. (2018). Classical geopolitics, realism and the balance of power theory. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(6), p. 793.

⁶⁵ Lacoste, Y. (1994). Che cos’è la geopolitica (III) [What is geopolitics (III)]. *Limes Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica*, 2/94, available at [<https://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/che-cose-la-geopolitica-iii>]. Lacoste’s strand of geopolitics has been defined “subversive”, as opposed to the “neoclassical” strand inspired by Kissinger. Nevertheless, when looking at international relations between states, the differences fade away considerably; see Mamadouh, V.D. (1998). Geopolitics in the nineties: one flag, many meanings. *GeoJournal*, 46(4), p 241.

⁶⁶ Lacoste, Y. (1994). Che cos’è la geopolitica (IV) [What is geopolitics (IV)]. *Limes Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica*, 3/94, available at [<https://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/che-cose-la-geopolitica-iv>].

What has international aid got to do with geopolitics? Indeed, international aid may be used by donor states as a tool to advance their geopolitical interests or compete under circumstances of geopolitical rivalry. Milner and Tingley, after McKinlay and Little, distinguish three goals that may be pursued through aid: geopolitical/strategic interests of the donor country; its commercial interests; the needs of recipient countries. They further specify that the geopolitical interest of the donor is linked to certain characteristics of the recipient country, such as its “geographic location, strategic resources, political alliances, colonial relations, and geopolitical interest similarity to the donors”⁶⁷ – indeed taking the multidisciplinary approach outlined above.

The effectiveness of the geopolitical use of aid to enhance national security is still debated. Two dynamics may stymie the effort: on the one hand, giving away resources to another state may weaken the donor, unless the geopolitical goal is great enough to offset the loss, or even weaken the recipient who becomes dependent from aid; on the other hand, the fungibility of aid makes it a candidate for other purposes of the recipient, which may go against the donor’s objectives or even threaten his national security, that aid was supposed to advance in the first place.⁶⁸

As argued above, the dynamic nature of geopolitics implies that geopolitical interests shift depending on the particular political constellation; international aid allocation may change as a consequence. For instance, international aid did not stop being a geopolitical tool for the US with the end of the Cold War: its role was downsized for some time in the 1990s⁶⁹, only to regain attention with the start of the War on Terror, when aid allocation became less focused on recipients’ needs, so that higher-income developing countries received more aid than before, indicating a shift from the focus on development in the interwar period back to geopolitics with the War on Terror, whilst aid flows to geopolitically significant countries such as Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan surged.⁷⁰

Russia’s international aid provides other examples of geopolitical use: aid flows to Eastern European governments and allegedly to pro-Russian political groups in Western European countries are deemed to be aimed at re-expanding Russian influence regionally (within the former Soviet space, still the geopolitical priority) and internationally. This type of action is labeled “destabilising aid”⁷¹ by American scholars Markovits, Strange and Tingley, who refer to Valery Gerasimov’s – chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces – 2013 article where he envisages a “broad use of

⁶⁷ Milner, H. V. & Tingley, D. (2013). *Introduction to the Geopolitics of Foreign Aid* in Milner, H. V. & Tingley, D. (eds), *Geopolitics of Foreign Aid*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁶⁹ The 1990s were the only decade in the period 1960-2019 that saw ODA decreasing. OECD. (2020). *Development Co-operation Report 2020: Learning from Crises, Building Resilience*. Paris: OECD, p. 220.

⁷⁰ Fleck, R. K. & Kilby, C. (2010). Changing aid regimes? U.S. foreign aid from the Cold War to the War on Terror. *Journal of Development Economics*, 91, pp. 185-197.

⁷¹ Markovits, Strange, & Tingley (2019), p. 609.

political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures”⁷² used in conflict to create chaos, catastrophe and civil war in previously thriving states. Rather than showcasing Russia’s strategy, Gerasimov was actually analyzing the Russian view of the Arab Spring uprisings and the color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, for which Russia blames the West.⁷³ However, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine exploded soon after, and Russia deployed the kind of broad measures – including humanitarian aid initiatives and military aid to rebels – described by Gerasimov, which led to the establishment of the term “Gerasimov doctrine” among scholars. The approach has been compared to George Kennan’s 1948 concept of US “political warfare”, that is the use of all means short of war to achieve national objectives: among these means, international aid appears prominently in the employment of economic measures such as the Marshall Plan, and more subtly in the support to friendly groups in foreign states.⁷⁴

Milner and Tingley envisage a broad approach to the geopolitics of international aid so as to include in their analysis both domestic politics and international politics, in a way that allows to analyze the pursuit of the donor’s geopolitical interests through international aid, but also the effects it yields for states’ interaction in the international system (donor to recipient and donor to donor).⁷⁵

Domestic politics may determine the type of aid sent by donors, may explain the support, or lack thereof, for aid as an instrument of foreign policy in donor societies, as well as the acceptance by recipients and the effects and perceptions of aid in their societies. Domestic politics variables have been studied in the literature on foreign aid and arguably deserve a place in any comprehensive analysis of international aid and its consequences for international politics. With regard to states’ interaction in the international system, the dynamic that results from the use of international aid as a weapon, so to say, of geopolitical rivalry, is donor competition.

⁷² Gerasimov, V. cited in Kirchik, J. (2017). *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 215.

⁷³ Galeotti, M. (2018, Mar 5). *I’m Sorry for Creating the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’*. Foreign Policy, available at [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>].

⁷⁴ Galeotti (2018); Kennan, G. (1948). *Policy Planning Staff Memorandum*. National Archives and Records Administration, RG 273, Records of the National Security Council, NSC 10/2, available at [<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm>].

⁷⁵ Milner & Tingley (2013).

CHAPTER II - Donor competition

2.1 Coordination vs competition

2.1.1 Theoretical considerations

Multiple donors operating in a single recipient country or in the same sector may compete rather than coordinate, and thus generate a situation of aid fragmentation, where aid efforts are separate and duplicated, to the detriment of efficiency and efficacy from the beneficiary's point of view. The OECD has repeatedly called for harmonization of donors' action and increased coordination among donors, in order to reduce aid fragmentation and achieve a more effective division of labor. For the OECD, coordination should focus on recipients' needs and should not cause a decrease in quantity and quality of the aid distributed.⁷⁶

However, donor coordination may have different effects on aid fragmentation. It has been shown by Martin Steinwand, in a study of ODA data from 1970 to 2010, that, on the one hand, coordination in response to the problem of donor competition for aid with private goods characteristics (e.g., geopolitical aid) may indeed decrease fragmentation. On the other hand, coordination for aid with public goods characteristics may instead increase donor fragmentation, but as a consequence of reduced free-riding, with positive outcomes in terms of recipient's development. In the latter case, fighting fragmentation per se may be counterproductive in terms of aid volume, because the problem is not competition but free-riding.⁷⁷

From the donor's perspective, international aid possesses private goods characteristics when it yields a benefit that can be enjoyed by the donor only; it is the case of tied aid or aid that is predominantly motivated by geopolitical/strategic interests. Alternatively, international aid may have public goods characteristics, when its outcomes can be shared by other donors; examples are general improvements in fields such as health, education or overall economic development. It is recognized that the nature of international aid may be mixed, for instance health aid motivated by geopolitical considerations, but the relative weight of private and public characteristics can vary, tipping the balance towards one type or the other for the sake of the model realized by Steinwand.⁷⁸

In a public good setting, donors have an incentive to free-ride, because they enjoy the public good regardless of the actual extent of their aid (public goods are non-excludable and non-rivalrous by definition)⁷⁹. Lack of coordination allows for the emergence of a lead donor, while other donors

⁷⁶ OECD. (2005). *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*. Paris: OECD; OECD. (2011). *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation*. Paris: OECD.

⁷⁷ Steinwand, M. C. (2015). Compete or Coordinate? Aid Fragmentation and Lead Donorship. *International Organization*, 69, pp. 443–472.

⁷⁸ Steinwand (2015).

⁷⁹ For instance, where aid has public goods features, donors whose aim is to increase health levels in the recipient country cannot be excluded from benefitting from the achievement of such improvement (non-excludable), and the fact that they benefit from it does not diminish the benefit enjoyed by other donors (non-rivalrous).

free-ride on his efforts. Coordination among donors can be pushed by the largest donor, using the threat of retaliation or shaming. Coordination reduces free-riding opportunities, so that all donors have to contribute in order to benefit from the public good. Donor fragmentation increases as a result of coordination, but it is good insofar as it overcomes the problem of free-riding; aid contributions are more evenly distributed among donors and overall aid levels increase, with positive consequences for the development of the recipient country.⁸⁰ Scandinavian countries may provide a good example of international aid with public good characteristics, as their aid is known to be underpinned by strong norms of social solidarity that are intrinsic to those societies; nevertheless, proving to the mixed nature of aid, these countries are also guided by commercial motivations, such as the expansion of their exports.⁸¹

In a private goods setting, which is the area of greatest interest for the study of the geopolitical use of aid, the outcomes of aid are rivalrous and excludable: the donor benefits in the same measure that he contributed. Donor countries, vying for influence over the beneficiary, compete by giving aid in an uncoordinated manner: the larger the aid provision, the greater is the donor's influence. Lack of coordination locks the donors into a competitive dynamic, where no lead donor arises. Lead donorship, a term coined by Steinwand, designates a long-term relationship between donor and recipient, where the donor's top position as the largest donor for that recipient country (or sector) is not defied by other donors. Under competition, aid is fragmented among donors and is given in greater quantities, more evenly distributed among donors. Coordination may set in, through an implicit or explicit division of respective spheres of influence among donors, so that a single donor becomes lead donor in a given recipient or sector, while other donors reduce their contributions. Aid fragmentation decreases as a consequence of this coordination.⁸²

In the public goods setting, one could argue that both donors and recipient are satisfied with coordination, even though it increases fragmentation, because it is beneficial to development (or whatever other improvement is sought through aid), which is the objective of both types of actors; plus, donors are not vying for influence, so they do not aim for a lead donor position.

In the private goods setting, the exclusive donor-recipient relationship that is lead donorship, achieved through coordination, may be exactly what is sought by donors eager to coopt recipients into their area of influence.

Two interesting patterns emerge from Steinwand's analysis: lead donorship is characterized by geographic proximity and lead donorship is declining, contrary to donor competition. Geographic

⁸⁰ Steinwand (2015), pp. 449-451.

⁸¹ Lancaster (2007), p. 14-19.

⁸² Steinwand (2015). Incidentally, from the point of view of the beneficiary, in the private goods setting, one would need to weigh the benefits of reduced fragmentation (good for development) against the costs arising from lead donorship, which is believed to take a toll on aid efficiency because of its potentially personalistic dynamics.

proximity resonates with the geopolitical interests that largely motivate international aid. The US is found to be a lead donor in many instances in Central and South America, Japan in Asia and Australia in Oceania, Italy in Albania and Malta. Historical and colonial ties matter too, as many studies on aid allocation have demonstrated, and indeed France is found to be a lead donor in many African countries.⁸³ The study could not take into account Russia and China, since their ODA data for the period analyzed is not available, but these relatively recent donors also concentrate much aid in their proximity (in Central Asia for Russia and in Russia for China).

Established patterns of lead donorship among traditional donors (namely DAC countries) may be defied by the appearance in the international aid landscape of re-emerging donors, such as BRICS countries, causing increased donor competition.

2.1.2 A changing landscape: re-emerging donors

Not only are re-emerging donors actively competing with traditional donors in the same recipient countries and sectors, but they are offering a competing model of aid-giving, entrenched in very different values. The international aid architecture established by Western countries and Japan in the 1960s through the DAC and the lending system of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) are being challenged by increasing bilateral aid flows from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, who are not DAC members, and by a lending system that comprises the New Development Bank (NDB), established within the BRICS framework, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the proposed Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Bank. Turkey is operating its aid agency out of 56 foreign countries⁸⁴ and Latin-American middle income countries are increasingly engaging in aid provision under South-South Cooperation.⁸⁵ Unlike Western donors, these emerging actors play the double role of donor and recipient of development assistance at the same time. Within this group, BRICS countries play the leading role.

According to statistics on ODA-like flows, BRICS aid is just a fraction of Western aid.⁸⁶ However, as argued before, we have to rely on the ODA definition and related data because it is the most comprehensive data available for quantitative comparisons, but international aid in the meaning of International Aid Public Policies contains more types of aid for which public official statistics often do not exist and qualitative analyses may be more appropriate. Indeed, BRICS countries provide a considerable amount of aid to both developing and developed countries that does not fit the ODA

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 457-458, 469.

⁸⁴ TIKA Website. *Overseas offices*. Available at [<https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/overseasoffices>], accessed 23 April 2021. The number has increased quickly in the past few years, since according to Quirk (2014) it was just 33.

⁸⁵ Robledo, C. (2015). New donors, same old practices? South-South Cooperation of Latin American emerging donors. *Bandung: Journal of the Global South*, 2(3), pp. 1-16.

⁸⁶ Asmus, G., Fuchs, A. & Muller, A. (2017). *BRICS and Foreign Aid*. AidData Working Paper 43. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary, pp. 1-2.

definition.⁸⁷ Plus, Russia is the only country of the group that submits data to the DAC, so that data on ODA-like flows of the other four countries has to be extrapolated from government reports, if they are published. Data on international aid is not released by these countries as transparently as it is by DAC members.

Re-emerging donors are often referred to as “new donors”, but as anthropologist Patty Gray argues, the reason is not their newness to the aid sector.⁸⁸ BRICS, for instance, have been involved in aid activities in the role of donors since the 1950s (the latest was South Africa in 1969), although their contributions – especially in the 1990s – have not always been “sizable”⁸⁹, which is an element of the foreign aid definition by Lancaster; continuity is also a core element of Professor Pellicciari’s IAPP definition.⁹⁰ The reason why BRICS and other re-emerging donors are set aside in a different category than Western donors is that they do not “share the culture of [the] imagined transnational community”⁹¹, that is the Western development community, with its institutions and bureaucratic practices, that ultimately constitute cultural practices. Emerging or new donors is a subjective category that reveals the point of view of traditional donors, rather than describing some objective feature of these so-called new donors.⁹² Re-emerging donors challenge what the West considers as the right way to go about international aid and development by introducing their own new cultural practices.⁹³ Western states are worried by this otherness, and their doubts fuel the fear that aid from new donors will cause more harm than good to recipient countries and undermine democracy.⁹⁴

Indeed, the approaches of established donors and re-emerging ones differ in many respects. With regard to development aid, operating outside the DAC affords more freedom to re-emerging donors, as they are not subject to DAC principles and peer reviews.⁹⁵ Thus, they do not need to be concerned with improving recipient’s ownership of projects funded through aid, reducing aid fragmentation or even simply being accountable for aid flows and aid impact. Modalities and target sectors of aid-giving may therefore differ from those of Western donors. Arguably, their geopolitical motivations may come to light more easily.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Gray, P. A. (2011). Looking 'The Gift' in the mouth: Russia as donor. *Anthropology Today*, 27(2), pp. 5-8.

⁸⁹ Asmus, Fuchs & Muller (2017), p. 2.

⁹⁰ See para. 1.1.3.

⁹¹ Gray (2011), p. 7.

⁹² Gray, P. A. (2014). Russia as a Recruited Development Donor. *European Journal of Development Research*, 27(2), p. 274.

⁹³ On reimagining development from a non-Western viewpoint, anthropologist Akhil Gupta argues that it is necessary to critically reflect on the discourse of development, which is largely informed by the post-colonial and post-war international order, and that “alternatives to development, and not development alternatives” need to be sought. See Gupta, A. (1995). Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. *American Ethnologist*, 22(2), pp. 375–402.

⁹⁴ Gray (2011).

⁹⁵ Asmus, Fuchs & Muller (2017), pp. 4-7.

However, the most relevant difference and one that applies regardless of the development aim of international aid, lies in the aid philosophy: BRICS and Latin-American countries stress the principles of South-South Cooperation, rooted in the Non-Aligned Movement of Third World countries and characterized by non-interference in foreign countries' domestic affairs. Thus, their aid is not conditional on policy and institutional changes by the recipient, it is declared not to have any political strings attached, and its discourse is centered on mutually beneficial cooperation and partnership rather than donorship. Such approach is in contrast with the developmentalist aid philosophy of Western donors, that from their hierarchically superior position of developed countries strive to export Western models of economic development and democratic political institutions.⁹⁶ Compared to the alternative international aid model set forth by re-emerging donors, Western aid may be perceived as charity – in a demeaning way for the recipient⁹⁷ – or as interference in the domestic affairs of the recipient. The exception to the South-South Cooperation aid philosophy is Russia, whose tradition of aid-giving comes from a long history of Soviet aid, aimed at strengthening ties with geopolitical allies during the Cold War, and who was not Third World country, but rather a Second World one.⁹⁸

2.2 Russia as a re-emerging donor

2.2.1 International Aid of the USSR

The Soviet Union began to engage in international aid activities in 1953 through an aid and trade program, during the *otpetel* (*о́ттепель*, thaw era) under President Nikita Khrushchev, who concretely integrated into Soviet foreign policy the ideological commitment to bring communism to the Third World. The guiding principles of early Soviet aid were anti-colonialism, nation-building in newly independent countries and economic development, all considered as part of a process of national liberation revolution that would have inevitably brought Third World countries to communism. The USSR aimed to lead by example, showcasing itself as a developing society that could share its unique and alternative path to development with less developed countries. Under Khrushchev, there was the belief that the revolution in the Third World could become self-sustaining; it would have been practical too, since the state coffers held limited resources: by the mid-60s, in its first decade as a donor, the USSR had been able to earmark for international aid purposes (both economic and military) around \$7 billion, in contrast with the 100 billion bestowed by the US in the previous two decades.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Gray (2011), p. 6.

⁹⁸ Asmus Fuchs & Muller (2017), pp. 4-7.

⁹⁹ Ermarth, F. (1969). The Soviet Union in the Third World: Purpose in Search of Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 386, pp. 31-40.

The conviction that the revolution would be self-sustaining faded away rather soon, but aid continued to flow steadily, peaking in the 1960s and 1970s, then waning in the 1980s. Aid volumes of the US and of the USSR are difficult to compare primarily because of the different accounting standards between Western ODA and Soviet development aid, but it is estimated that Soviet aid amounted to a volume between 1/3 and 1/2 of US ODA across the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, according to estimates, aid qualifiable as ODA constituted less than half of overall Soviet international aid. Constant objectives of the Soviets were ousting Western influence and replacing it, balancing the Chinese challenge to Soviet primacy in the Communist world after the Sino-Soviet split, and winning over Third World countries to the Soviet Communist cause. Aid projects had a bilateral nature and were mostly concentrated in heavy industry, infrastructure construction, health care and education; the latter program offered scholarships to thousands of youths from developing countries' elites who shaped their thinking at Soviet universities. But opportunities for prestige aid were not shunned either: asphaltting the streets of Kabul in the late 1950s is considered an example. Regional priorities were Eastern European countries, Cuba, Mongolia, North Korea and Vietnam, who were members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and constituted the bulk of the Soviet bloc; socialist African and Middle-East countries; non-socialist countries in geostrategic positions, e.g. India, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.¹⁰¹ Clearly, Central Asian countries that receive most of Russia's aid today and represent its top geopolitical priority¹⁰², were not recipients of Soviet international aid since they were part and parcel of the Soviet Union.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the dire economic conditions faced by Russia ground Soviet international aid to a halt and led the former donor to become an official aid recipient; for this purpose, a list of "transition economies" was added as Part II to the DAC List of Recipients – since Russia and other Eastern European countries could hardly be labeled as "developing". Throughout the 1990s Russia continued to provide humanitarian aid and debt relief to poorer countries, but the scope of its aid activities had shrunk dramatically.¹⁰³ In particular, it gave humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Transnistria, whilst financial aid flows tied to the energy trade (which could be considered Other Official Flows, OOF) were given to former Soviet republics.¹⁰⁴ Only in the mid-2000s would Russia make its comeback to the international aid arena.

¹⁰⁰ Bakalova, E., Spanger, H. & Neumann, J. M. (2013). *Development Cooperation or Competition? Russia as a re-emerging donor*. Frankfurt am Main: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Larionova, M., Rakhmangulov, M. & Berenson, M. P. (2016). Russia: A Re-emerging Donor. In J. Gu et al. (eds), *The BRICS in International Development* (pp. 63-92). London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 64-66.

¹⁰² President of the Russian Federation (30 November 2016). *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, art. 49.

¹⁰³ Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), p. 66.

¹⁰⁴ De Cordier, B. (2016). Russia's international aid donorship: from diplomatic status symbol to "frontline aid"? *Global Affairs*, 2(1), p. 33.

2.2.2 International Aid of the Russian Federation

After the fall of the USSR, the Russian Federation retreated from the global stage amidst domestic political instability and deep economic crisis. Its foreign policy ambitions were humbled, Russia could no longer afford to be an aid donor to foreign countries, and it became a recipient of international aid, which arguably felt like a demeaning experience for a former great power. Since President Vladimir Putin's accession to office in 2000, Russia began to reposition itself as a global player, following former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov's doctrine, according to which Russia should aim to transition the world towards a multipolar order where Russia is the leading player in the post-Soviet space, as opposed to the US-led international order and NATO expansion. As Russia's economic outlook improved and Putin's rule provided political stability, Russia pursued an assertive foreign policy on a global level, that led to re-engagement with countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, where its influence had been absent since the Soviet collapse.

The quest for multipolarity, for recognition as a great power, and for influence over its Near Abroad are constants in Russian foreign policy. The first one is reflected in Russia's distinct approach to sovereignty, which makes it stand out before foreign countries as an alternative to the Western model, the second one is aimed for by deploying both hard and soft power, while the third one, from a geopolitical viewpoint, is motivated primarily by security concerns due to geographical features – namely the loss of geostrategic space due to the disintegration of the USSR and the lack of natural barriers at Russia's borders, which easily reignite an ancient fear of encirclement.¹⁰⁵

Russia's return to the global stage was followed by and linked to Russia's re-emergence as an aid donor.

Re-emergence as a donor and policy objectives

In 2004, when Russia officially ceased to be a DAC List aid recipient, the UN Development Program (UNDP) started to provide assistance in building (back) Russia's development assistance capabilities through a project called "Russia as Emerging Donor" and then in 2006-2010 through the "Emerging Donors Initiative". In 2007, Putin officially marked Russia's reappearance as an aid donor by approving the "Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in International Development Assistance"¹⁰⁶ (hereafter, 2007 Concept). The Concept was supposed to be complemented by an action plan that would have given it operative direction, but the latter was never approved.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁵ Gurganus, J. & Rumer, E. (2019). *Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁰⁶ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 14 June 2007. *Russia's Participation in International Development Assistance. Concept*. Hereafter, 2007 Concept.

¹⁰⁷ Twigg, J. (2010). Russia's Global Health Outlook. Building Capacity to Match Aspirations. In K. E. Bliss (ed.), *Key Players in Global Health. How Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa Are Influencing the Game* (pp. 34-40). Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 35.

World Bank office in Moscow contributed to the drafting process and indeed the 2007 Concept draws on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and traditional development discourse, stating among its goals the elimination of poverty, humanitarian and disaster relief, health and education support, and sustainable economic development. Other goals, such as the creation of

“a belt of good neighborliness along the Russian national borders to prevent the occurrence and facilitate the elimination of the focal points of tension and conflict, as well as sources of drug trafficking, international terrorism and crime, primarily in the regions neighboring the Russian Federation”¹⁰⁸

and the strengthening of

“the credibility of Russia and [promotion of] an unbiased attitude to the Russian Federation in the international community”¹⁰⁹

correspond respectively to geopolitical objectives tied to Russian national security, and the use of aid as soft power. They also resonate with goals stated in Russia’s 2000 Foreign Policy Concept and reiterated in later concept notes on foreign policy (2008, 2013, 2016).¹¹⁰

The elaboration of the 2007 Concept followed the Russian presidency of the G8 in 2006, where commitments towards international development assistance were made and the Russian media began discussing the fact that the Russian Federation was the only G8 country lacking a strategy for international development assistance.¹¹¹

In 2014, the concept was revised and updated under the name “Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance”¹¹² (hereafter, 2014 Concept). The title itself – “State Policy” instead of “Participation” – reveals the intention to be more assertive in the field of international aid. The new strategy “serves the national interests”¹¹³ of the Russian Federation, promoted “by maximizing the return on aid provided”¹¹⁴ and giving priority to bilateral rather than multilateral assistance. Moreover, it is explicitly stated that beneficiaries are to be selected according to Russia’s National Security Strategy and the Foreign Policy Concept.¹¹⁵ While the 2007 Concept grounded Russia’s international development assistance policy in the latter two strategies and in the UN Millennium Development Goals, its successor only mentions UN soft

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ President of the Russian Federation. (2000). *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. See, for instance, among General Principles, “To form a good-neighbor belt along the perimeter of Russia's borders, to promote elimination of the existing and prevent the emergence of potential hotbeds of tension and conflicts in regions adjacent to the Russian Federation” and “To promote a positive perception of the Russian Federation in the world”.

¹¹¹ Gray (2014), p. 278.

¹¹² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 20 April 2014 n. 259. *Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance*. Hereafter, 2014 Concept. Available at [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/64542].

¹¹³ Ibid., art. 5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., art. 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

law as a factor to be given “due regard”¹¹⁶ and it outlines the main elements of the Russian legal framework as bases for policy. Overall, the 2014 Concept stresses an element of intentionality in pursuing geopolitical interests through international aid that was milder in the 2007 Concept, still more aligned to the discourse of established Western aid donors. With regard to bilateral aid, its share did increase: Russian ODA channeled through multilateral organizations fell from 62% of total ODA in 2010 to 25% in 2014.¹¹⁷ Multilateral ODA however surged again to 39% in 2019¹¹⁸; its share fluctuates and has been close to 40% since 2016. Overall ODA steadily increased in 2005-2016, suffered a minor setback in 2017-2018 but is reported to have increased again in 2019.¹¹⁹

Writing in 2011, Gray argues that the intention to reaffirm Russia’s role as one of the world’s great powers and the consequent use of international aid for real-politik purposes cannot fully account, by itself, for the way Russia’s donorship rose like a phoenix from the ashes. Cultural reasons may have informed this policy change, too. Gray argues that the development discourse is structured along two trajectories: the traditional one is “the North developing the South”, to which “the West developing the East” was added more recently, after the fall of the USSR. While in Soviet times Russia belonged to the Global North that developed the Global South, during the 1990s it shifted into the second directionality, becoming an Eastern beneficiary of Western aid. But being on the receiving end of the social relation of gift-giving may be a demeaning experience, if the gift is perceived as charity – whereby the beneficiary is considered incapable of return – rather than a gift from which mutual obligations arise.¹²⁰ For this reason, Russia would have come to refuse the role of non-reciprocating recipient and the resulting feeling of subjection, thus seeking to join the community of donors. Particularly, Russia is argued to have aimed to join the Global North as an aid donor, in order to get out of the West-East category. This is why Russia has never embraced the philosophy of South-South Cooperation and endeavored instead to develop the organizational capabilities and accounting standards of the Western aid architecture; it is after all the only BRICS country that reports data to the DAC (since 2012, only in aggregate form). A focus on Russian aid to Africa in government’s official documents and in the media discourse, even if contributions to other areas, especially Central Asia, were greater, is considered by Gray an attempt to side with the Global North, as Africa is probably the most straightforward example of Global South. In this sense, Russia is seen as both challenging and reaffirming the established directionality and architecture of development aid.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Ibid., art. 2.

¹¹⁷ Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), p. 73; OECD. (2016). *Development Co-operation Report 2016: The Sustainable Development Goals as Business Opportunities*. Paris: OECD, p. 290.

¹¹⁸ OECD (2020), p. 270.

¹¹⁹ Zaystev, Y. & Knobel, A. (2020). Russian Economic Development Assistance in 2019. *Monitoring of Russia's Economic Outlook. Trends and Challenges of Socio-economic Development*, 17, pp. 20-23.

¹²⁰ See para. 1.2.1.

¹²¹ Gray (2011).

Indeed, Russian officials have described the country's role as a "re-emerging donor inclined toward the OECD norms and principles"¹²².

From a broader perspective, Andrei Tsygankov argues that Russia's assertiveness in foreign policy, which emerged after the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005 (thus around the same time as Russia's comeback as a donor on the international aid scene in 2006-2007), was primarily prompted by the US regime-change policy in the post-Soviet space. Not only did Russians think that the West aimed to isolate Russia from economic, political and moral viewpoints, but they also experienced feelings of humiliation and betrayal as the West sought to enlarge into Russia's traditional geopolitical sphere of influence, concretizing ancient fears of encirclement.¹²³

Thus, an assessment of the cultural aspects of Russia's return to donorship needs not only to consider the demeaning experience that receiving charity-aid represented, but also the general discontent caused by the perception of being belittled by the West in many areas of the international system.

Further, Gray challenges the definition of Russia as a re-emerging or emerging donor, by proposing that it is a "recruited" donor. Recruitment would have been attempted by Western donors such as the US, the UK and the EU, as well as international agencies such as UNDP, DAC and the World Bank, with the purpose of expanding Western aid standards. These actors held workshops and seminars – such as the ones mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph – for officials of the Russian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, aimed at capacity-building, professionalization and standardization of development aid practices. Russia's data submission to the DAC is to be seen as a result of such recruitment attempt. The latter has not been entirely successful, but it may be yet another reason, together with Russia's goal to be perceived as part of the Global North, why Russia has not challenged the Western aid architecture in any major way, as India and China have done instead.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, a clear divergence from Western donors' approach is the lack of policy conditionality of Russian aid. Promoting democracy and developing market-oriented economies were goals of the 2007 Concept, but already in the 2014 Concept the part on market economies was omitted and more emphasis was put on fostering "equality and democratization of the system of international relations"¹²⁵ rather than democracy in domestic systems.

¹²² Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), p. 67.

¹²³ Tsygankov, A. P. (2008). Russia's International Assertiveness. What Does It Mean for the West? *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55(2), pp. 38–55.

¹²⁴ Gray (2014).

¹²⁵ 2014 Concept, art. 8.

Geopolitical relevance: Official Development Assistance

While it does not characterize its international aid as South-South Cooperation, Russia supports it and has contributed to the World Bank's dedicated support mechanism. But the Russian approach to international aid differs from the Western countries' approach, too. Russia aims to present itself as a country that has faced the same development issues as developing countries and can therefore offer the unique perspective on modernization of someone that "has seen both ends of the ladder"¹²⁶. This attitude bears resemblance to the Soviets' idea of sharing their own path to development with developing countries. Such approach was anti-colonialist as much as today's approach may be seen as non-hierarchical.

Another element of continuity with Soviet assistance are the geopolitical priorities underlined by the 2014 Concept's "Regional Priorities" and confirmed by the rankings of recipients of Russian ODA (see fig. 1 and 2):

- CIS countries¹²⁷, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia, which were all part of the territory of the USSR. Notably, Central Asia is the second main recipient of Russian development aid, falling behind the American continent by just half a million;
- other States that are "good neighbors" and allies of Russia, and States involved with Russia in Eurasian international organizations. For instance, Cuba, although not a neighbor, was a long-time Soviet ally and former COMECON member, was recently granted observer status at the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)¹²⁸ and is indeed the top recipient of Russian bilateral ODA (America's top position in recipient ranking is driven by aid to Cuba, which accounts for more than 90% of total development aid to the American continent);
- States that have historically friendly relations with Russia; indeed, all top 10 recipients were either part of the USSR or Soviet allies, except for Serbia, which was, through the Soviet Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, among the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement; nevertheless, Russia-Serbia relations have deep historical and cultural roots¹²⁹.

¹²⁶ Aleksey Kvasov (2013), cited in Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), p. 66.

¹²⁷ Commonwealth of Independent States members: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

¹²⁸ EAEU members: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia; observers: Moldova, Uzbekistan, Cuba.

¹²⁹ The narrative leveraged to strengthen relations has been that of a brotherhood between peoples with the same orthodox roots.

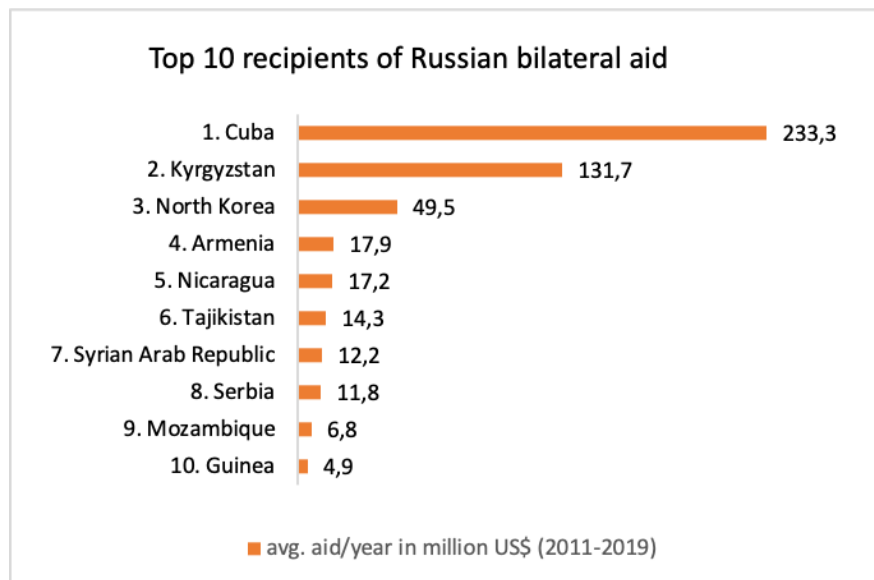


Figure 1: Top 10 recipients of Russia's bilateral ODA (2011-2019). Source: author's elaboration, OECD data.¹³⁰

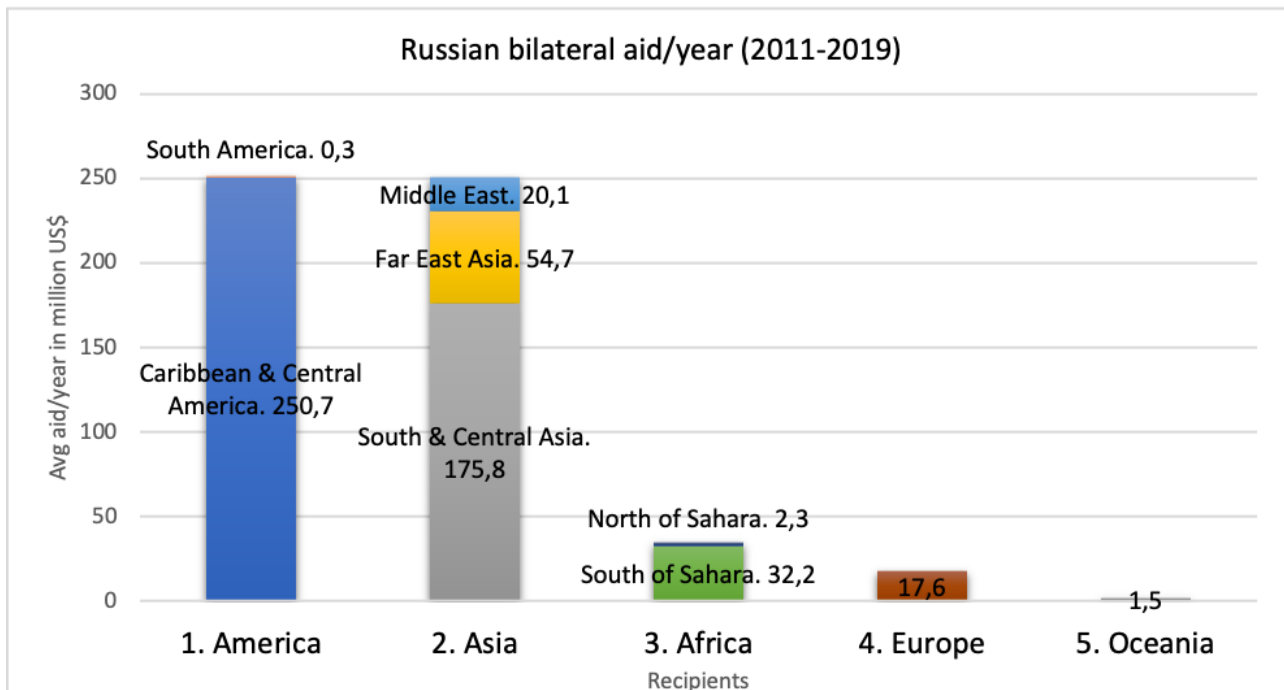


Figure 2: Distribution of Russia's bilateral ODA by continents and regions (2011-2019) Source: author's elaboration, OECD data.¹³¹

Additionally, the 2014 Concept mentions as priorities the assistance to States that are involved with Russia in mutually beneficial economic and social projects, and developing countries according to Russian national interests.¹³²

Similarities in the directionalities of modern-day Russian aid and Soviet aid underscore the existence of geographical patterns in international relations and factors of continuity in state action. This is especially visible at the intersection of three core components of geopolitics: history,

¹³⁰ Author's elaboration of OECD data, extracted on 13 April 2021 from *Aid (ODA) disbursement to countries and regions*, available at [https://stats.oecd.org/].

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² 2014 Concept, art. 9.

geography and strategy. The history of Soviet aid and the relations it fostered find some degree of continuity in Russian aid history. Geography is relevant, since proximity is a key factor of the 2014 Concept, with its focus on good neighborly relations. Plus, natural resources definitely play a role in directing development aid flows to two top recipients such as Mozambique and Guinea, respectively rich in natural gas extracted by the state-controlled company Rosneft¹³³ and in bauxite mined by Russian company Rusal, allegedly on advantageous terms¹³⁴. Strategy finds a great in Russian aid to Syria. Indeed, Russia's only currently-used military bases beyond former-USSR borders are in Syria (naval in Tartus and air force in Hmeimim) and the Russian military is involved in the current Syrian conflict since 2015. Russia is arguably planning to stay in the Mediterranean in the long term, not only because of its desire to re-establish itself as a great power in this region's geopolitics, but also to prevent the threat of Jihadism from spreading into the North Caucasus and to protect its southern regions in case of conflict with NATO.¹³⁵ Strategy is also a factor in aid flows to the above-mentioned Mozambique and Guinea: both signed military cooperation agreements with Russia, the Russian military is present in the former, and Russian private military contractors¹³⁶ have been reported to operate in both countries.

Temporal continuity is an essential element in order to define aid flows as an instrument of foreign policy. The definition of International Aid Public Policies (para. 1.1.3) requires aid flows to form a continuous set of actions over a period of time. Looking at the distribution of Russian bilateral aid over the 9 years for which data has been submitted to the DAC (fig. 3), one can see that indeed lasting geopolitical interest has been focused on the country's neighborhood, on conflict areas where the Russian presence is essential to national security interests (Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and Africa, especially the Horn of Africa, as it provides strategic access to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Plans to establish naval facilities in Sudan and Eritrea, would give Russia the possibility to establish its presence and collect intelligence on trade and military ships passing through on their way to the Mediterranean or the Arab peninsula. The rest of sub-Saharan Africa is targeted mainly for its natural resources, trade opportunities and diplomatic support.

¹³³ TASS. (2019, Aug 22). *Rosneft signs agreements on offshore gas field development with Mozambique*. Available at [<https://tass.com/economy/1074649>].

¹³⁴ Maclean, R. (2019, Aug 27). "Russians have a special status": politics and mining mix in Guinea. *The Guardian*. Available at [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/27/russians-have-special-status-politics-and-mining-mix-in-guinea>].

¹³⁵ Rumer, E., Sokolsky, R. (2021). *Russia in the Mediterranean: here to stay*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹³⁶ Anadolu Agency. (2021, Mar 5). *Russia's Wagner Group reportedly deployed in Africa*. Available at [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/russias-wagner-group-reportedly-deployed-in-africa/2165414>]; Club of Mozambique. (2020, Aug 10). *Russia to establish military bases in 6 African countries, Mozambique included: Report*. Available at [<https://clubofmozambique.com/news/russia-to-establish-military-bases-in-6-african-countries-mozambique-included-report-168319/>].

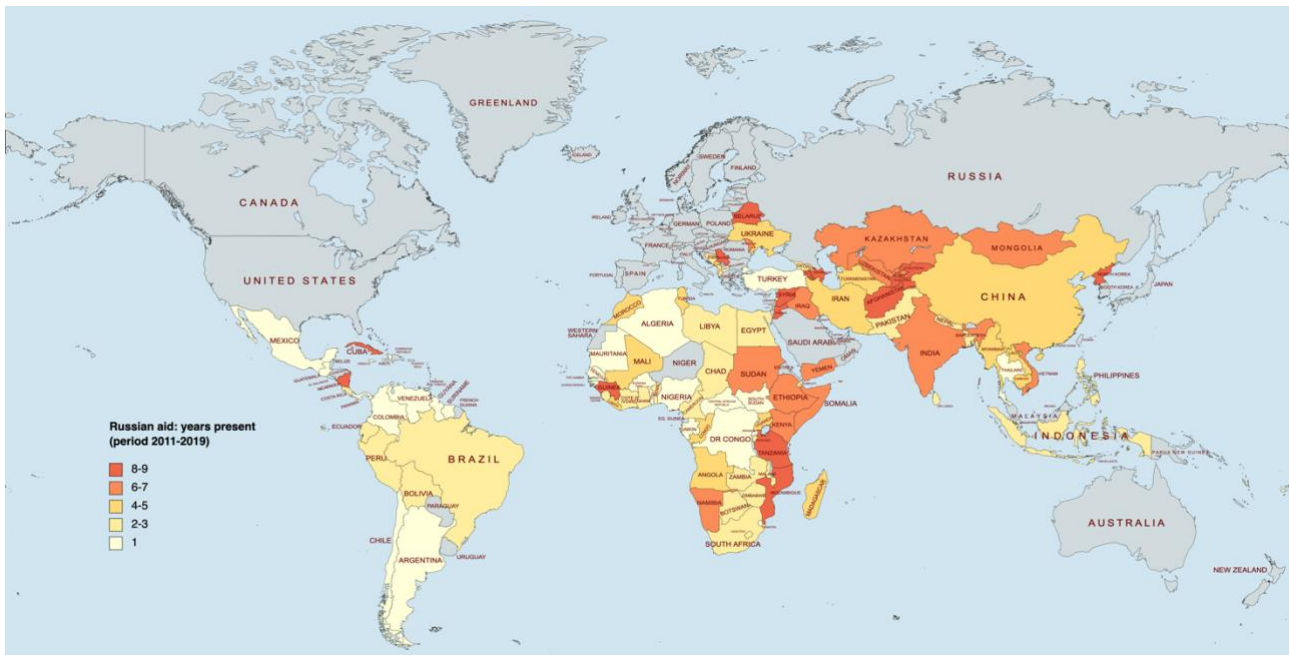


Figure 3: Breakdown of Russia's bilateral ODA by number of years. Darker colors indicate a higher number of years, signaling continuity and commitment. Source: author's elaboration, OECD data.¹³⁷

Russia's ODA spans various sectors. As priorities, the 2007 Concept listed energy, health and education, but actually more than 2/3 of Russian bilateral ODA consists of debt relief.¹³⁸ Aid programs in the humanitarian, food and agricultural development fields are also undertaken, as well as technical assistance and capacity building for counter-terrorism and anti-money laundering.¹³⁹

In order to compare aid recipients, aid volumes and identify patterns of continuity and commitment in a comprehensive manner, as attempted above, it is necessary to rely on official aid data, that is ODA and OOF.¹⁴⁰ However, Russia reports to the OECD only its ODA flows¹⁴¹, therefore data elaborations in fig. 1, 2 and 3 have been constrained to development aid. Moreover, even if OOF were reported, the data analysis would be limited to developing countries (DAC List), whilst aid beneficiaries may be also developed countries, with relevant consequences for foreign policy (see Chapter 3). Further, these data elaborations were limited to bilateral flows of ODA. The choice of looking at bilateral flows rather than at the broader picture of multilateral and bilateral flows together, is justified by the focus on bilateral flows expressed in the 2014 Concept: bilateral flows are indeed considered more effective than multilateral flows in terms of foreign policy. Former head of *Rossotrudnichestvo*¹⁴² Konstantin Kosachev voiced concern in 2012 about the depersonalized nature

¹³⁷ See note 124.

¹³⁸ See OECD Website. *Development Cooperation Profiles*. Available at [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/013eabc4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623-en&_csp_=b14d4f60505d057b456dd1730d8fcea3&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=chapter].

¹³⁹ Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), pp. 75-79; Russia's Ministry of Finance. (2015). *Russian contribution to the international development assistance in 2014*. Available at [https://www.minfin.ru/common/upload/library/2015/10/main/Russian_contribution_to_the_international_development_assistance_in_2014.pdf]

¹⁴⁰ See para 1.1.1 for definitions.

¹⁴¹ OECD Statistics [<https://stats.oecd.org>] reports the same figures for Russia's donor flows on its page on ODA and on its page on ODA+OOF.

¹⁴² See para 2.2.2, *Domestic actors in Russian aid*

of multilateral flows: the origin of the aid is overshadowed by the international organization channel and “no one, in fact, says thank you to us afterwards”¹⁴³.

Russian bilateral ODA accounted for 61% of its total ODA flows in 2019, which in turn totaled \$1.1 billion.¹⁴⁴ The figure is modest, as it represents 1/34 of US ODA and 1/4 of estimated Chinese ODA.¹⁴⁵ It is telling of the different aid philosophies that Chinese OOF were estimated at \$24.1 billion, while American OOF at \$1 billion, in 2014. China giving pride of place to OOF is a long-term trend,¹⁴⁶ arguably related to the alternative aid model of mutually beneficial cooperation that it projects, challenging what is perceived as the Western altruistic but hierarchical model.

Similarly, in order to paint a broader picture of Russian aid – as International Aid Public Policies – one needs to consider OOF as well. Zaitsev and Knobel underline throughout their yearly reports on Russia’s international aid donorship that Russia’s official aid volume is higher than what reported in ODA statistics, which do not comprise military aid, funding for counterterrorism activities and aid to the Republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria who are not internationally recognized.¹⁴⁷

The AidData Research Lab – where China’s international official finance activities (ODA+OOF) are tracked using the TUFF methodology (tracking underreported financial flows) – confirmed to me that there is a dearth of quantitative data on Russian total aid and that they are not aware of any projects undertaken at other centers to track Russian international official finance comparable to theirs on Chinese aid.¹⁴⁸ Lack of data transparency¹⁴⁹ impairs the analysis presented in the next paragraph, but some examples may provide an idea of the relevance of other official flows of aid as tools of Russian foreign policy.

Geopolitical relevance: Other Official Flows

Notably, military aid is not comprised in ODA, but if sustained over time it is part and parcel of International Aid Public Policies. Russia’s military presence or plans thereof in Africa are supported by cooperation agreements with over 25 African countries, presence of military forces and military trainers as well as private mercenaries, plans to establish air bases or naval bases in the Horn of Africa, a geostrategic area where ODA flows were sustained over time, in the Maghreb and the

¹⁴³ Konstantin Kosachev quoted in Gray (2014), p. 282.

¹⁴⁴ OECD (2020), p. 270.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 265, 276.

¹⁴⁶ AidData. *China's Global Development Footprint*. Available at [<https://www.aiddata.org/china-official-finance>], accessed 16 April 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Zaystev and Knobel (2020), but also their reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, listed in the thesis’s bibliography.

¹⁴⁸ AidData. (2021, Apr 27). *Personal e-mail communication*; Fuchs, A. (2021, June 2). *Personal e-mail communication*. Asmus, G. (2021, June 8). *Personal e-mail communication*.

¹⁴⁹ As far as official reports are concerned, Russia’s Ministry of Finance (2015) does not mention OOF; the 2012 report mentions the EurAsEC Anti-crisis Fund as OOF: Russia’s Ministry of Finance. (2012). *The Russian Federation Oda. National Report*. Available at [<https://minfin.gov.ru/common/img/uploaded/library/2012/05/PresentationEng2012-0.pdf>].

Central African Republic, where ODA flows are inconsistent but Russia is present militarily in conflict situations, as well as for natural resources procurement and arms export.¹⁵⁰ Other notable recipients of military aid are of course Central Asian countries, particularly top ODA beneficiaries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.¹⁵¹

With regard to aid for diplomatic support, what Morgenthau labeled as bribery,¹⁵² it is noteworthy that the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been recognized by beneficiaries of Russian official aid, namely Nicaragua, Syria, Venezuela and Nauru. The two secessionist Republics declared their independence from Georgia in the early 1990s and were granted diplomatic recognition for the first time by Russia in 2008 in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War; Georgia accuses Russia of occupying these territories, and the international community has criticized their recognition. Russia was accused of leveraging aid for political purposes through what has been called “checkbook diplomacy” towards the pacific islands of Nauru, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, who allegedly received tens of millions of dollars in exchange for recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁵³ Tuvalu and Vanuatu subsequently withdrew their recognition, which was reportedly dependent on continuous flows of Russian aid.¹⁵⁴

International aid may have yielded a political pay-off also in relation to Russia’s annexation of Crimea amidst the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the disruption of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, with the opposing votes of Russia and 10 of its aid beneficiaries: Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Armenia, Belarus, North Korea, Syria, Sudan and Zimbabwe.¹⁵⁵

Russian aid activities in the energy sector are necessarily political. Indeed, energy – particularly natural gas exports – is used as a tool of foreign policy by Russia and earlier by the USSR. In particular, the interplay between giving and depriving, between aid and sanctions, is visible in Russia’s use of its “energy weapon” to retain post-Soviet countries under its geopolitical sphere of influence. Politically motivated disruptions of gas supply, such as the Ukrainian gas crises in the mid-2000s, are the sanctioning mechanism that garners the most attention, because of its tangible and often severe consequences. On 17 different occasions, in the period 1990-2015, Russia has reportedly

¹⁵⁰ Bugayova, N. & Regio, D. (2019). *The Kremlin’s Campaign in Africa: Assessment Update*. Washington: Institute for the Study of War; Russell, M. & Pichon, E. (2018). *Russia in Africa. A new arena for geopolitical competition*. EPRS.

¹⁵¹ Szálkai, K. (2020, Sept 3). Russia’s Recent Military Buildup in Central Asia. *CSIS*. Available at [https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/russias-recent-military-buildup-central-asia].

¹⁵² Morgenthau (1962).

¹⁵³ The alleged funds amount to more than \$50 million, a lot more than the ODA these small countries receive from Russia. See also Korolev, A. (2019). Australia’s Approach to Cooperation with Russia. *Valdai Papers, Russia in Global Affairs*. Available at [https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/australias-approach-to-cooperation-with-russia/#_ftn14].

¹⁵⁴ Bullough, O. (2014, Apr 2). This Tiny Pacific Island Nation Just Gave Russia a Big Bruise. *The New Republic*. Available at [https://newrepublic.com/article/117238/tuvalu-bruises-russia-establishing-diplomatic-ties-georgia].

¹⁵⁵ Rupar, T. (2014, Mar 27). Here are the 11 U.N. members that voted against a resolution on Ukraine’s unity. *The Washington Post*. Available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/03/27/here-are-the-11-u-n-members-that-voted-against-a-resolution-on-ukraines-unity/].

cut off gas supplies or raised prices of its gas exports to former Soviet republics, mostly when they declared independence or assumed a pro-Western stance; 11 similar cases occurred with regard to crude oil exports.¹⁵⁶ Price rises would cause large debts to accumulate, that newly independent States could hardly repay and that Russia could leverage as blackmail (a classic realist strategy) by demanding immediate repayment when they tried to elude its geopolitical influence. As for aid, Russia would reward allies by offering subsidized prices, accepting delays in debt repayment or even offering shares in oil and gas ventures, that could be seen as bribery for political goals. Randall Newnham systematized these actions in the framework of yet another realist strategy, “carrot and stick”, declined in this case as “petro-carrots” which could be broadly identified as aid policies, and “petro-sticks” that have a sanctioning character. While the effectiveness of the former can hardly be doubted, especially since these countries are energy-dependent on Russia, the effectiveness of the latter measures, which would rein in the targeted ally and forewarn other allies, has been questioned on the grounds that in the long-term “petro-sticks” pressure the ally to seek energy (and political) alternatives.¹⁵⁷

A more traditional means to pursue the geostrategic objective of enhancing regional integration in Eurasia through aid is the Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development (EFSD), previously known as EURASEC Anti-crisis Fund, which was created to alleviate the consequences of the 2009 financial crisis. Russia is the largest contributor, having pledged \$7.5 billion, and *de facto* controls it. A ministerial document reports that OOF have been channeled through this multilateral mechanism from Russia to Tajikistan (which has yet to join the EAEU) for tens of millions and to Belarus for more than \$1 billion.¹⁵⁸ This information predates 2012, but it has been relayed by various studies of Russian aid, even quite recently, arguably because more up-to-date figures have not been published.¹⁵⁹

Indeed, while Russia may be praiseworthy compared to other BRICS countries and emerging donors that do not submit ODA data to the DAC, information on aid flows is actually dispersed at best and far from being comprehensive. Information on ODA allocations by economic sector started to be reported to the DAC only in 2016.¹⁶⁰ Shenfeldt described in 2016 the lack of either data or reports on the website of the Ministry of Finance or any other relevant ministry or government agency, and conditions have not improved to this day; she finds some isolated information in government

¹⁵⁶ Collins, G. (2017). *Russia's Use of the "Energy Weapon" in Europe*. Houston, TX: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.; Newnham, R. (2011). Oil, carrots, and sticks: Russia's energy resources as a foreign policy tool. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2, pp. 134-143.

¹⁵⁸ Russia's Ministry of Finance (2012).

¹⁵⁹ Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), p. 74-75; Shenfeldt, A. (2016). *Anti-Corruption Compliance of Development Assistance Donor Organisations: The Case Of Russia*. Working Papers International Relations, NRU Higher School of Economics. Available at [<https://wp.hse.ru/data/2016/12/27/1114779796/28IR2016.pdf>].

¹⁶⁰ See OECD. *Aid (ODA) by sector and donor*, available at [<https://stats.oecd.org>].

decrees that she deems difficult to retrieve. In order to improve transparency, information on aid – at least development assistance – should be collected and published in centralized manner.¹⁶¹ However, the issue may be one of lacking domestic organizational capabilities rather than unwillingness.

Domestic actors in Russian aid

The 2007 Concept explicitly stated that after a period of gaining experience and building up aid volumes, Russia “would be able to establish a specialized governmental agency”¹⁶². Talk of the creation of RusAid, the counterpart to the American government’s USAID, has been going on since then, but no such central agency has been created as of today.

The organization of international aid remains dispersed among a range of Ministries: Economic Development; Civil Defense, Emergencies and Disaster Relief (EMERCOM); Industry and Trade; Energy; Education and Science; Healthcare and Social Development; Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. The foregoing are reportedly involved in ODA flows¹⁶³, to which the Ministry of Defense is added when considering also military aid. However, the most relevant actors are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The Presidential Administration determines the overall policy by decree.

When Russia re-emerged as a donor, the two leading Ministries had different views on international aid: the Ministry of Finance advocated an approach in line with traditional donorship, founded on pronouncements of altruism and cooperation with international organizations; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the pursuit of mutual interests between donor and recipient, upheld the principle of bilateralism and was thus closer to the attitude of other re-emerging donors involved in South-South Cooperation. Both may be seen from a positive moral point of view.¹⁶⁴ The latter approach is closer to Putin’s state-centered foreign policy and reflects the shift towards bilateralism that was officially marked in the 2014 Concept.¹⁶⁵ The choice of approach resonates with Morgenthau’s realist argument that aid strategy should be decided by foreign policy experts rather than economic policy experts.¹⁶⁶

Plans for RusAID were never implemented: they gained momentum in 2011, when a Russian Agency for International Development (RAMP) was officially proposed, only to fall through the following year. The closest thing to USAID is “The Federal Agency for Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation”, known as *Rossotrudnichestvo*, which would translate to Ruscooperation. The agency was created by

¹⁶¹ Shenfeldt (2016).

¹⁶² 2007 Concept, p. 5.

¹⁶³ Larionova, Rakhmangulov & Berenson (2016), pp. 70-75.

¹⁶⁴ Gray (2014), p. 283-284.

¹⁶⁵ Bakalova, Spanger, & Neumann (2013), pp. 23-27.

¹⁶⁶ See para. 1.1.2.

presidential decree in 2008 and operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose approach to aid is evident in the agency's bilateral activities and participation in BRICS programs. Despite being primarily aimed at enhancing ties with the CIS countries through public diplomacy, educational exchanges, culture and language promotion, Rossotrudnichestvo has representative offices across the globe¹⁶⁷, mostly in the form of cultural centers within Russian embassies, promoting Russia's image through programs in the above-mentioned domains.

The agency's goal is the expansion of Russia's soft power (*мягкая сила*). Putin has often made reference to the concept of soft power as a means to advance Russian national interests¹⁶⁸, as well as Kosachev has. The latter, as then-president of Rossotrudnichestvo, worked to concretize the concept of "Russian World", a community of people that are not necessarily Russian or living in Russia, but that are attracted to it and feel united. Increasing Russian soft power requires re-branding efforts to overcome negative perceptions fueled by the Cold War. Russia's attractiveness, according to Kosachev, lies in its open-mindedness and respect for other countries: he maintains that in contrast with the US, Russia does not force its model of development or impose policy changes tied to aid.¹⁶⁹

Rossotrudnichestvo is not however an organization that comprehensively manages the operational functions of a country's development aid policy, as instead are USAID and similar agencies such as UK Aid and Germany's GIZ, to take the three largest DAC donors of ODA as examples, or even China's recently-founded CIDCA.

Prospects envisaged by scholars for its evolution span from being upgraded to a federal development cooperation agency, being integrated in a newly-created one, or retain its prerogatives in terms of expansion of Russian culture and language abroad and of scientific cooperation, becoming similar to public diplomacy agencies such as the UK's British Council or France's *Alliance Française*.¹⁷⁰ The institutional setup has not changed to this day, attesting to a lack of political will, that seems driven by persisting differences among Ministries rather than by weakness of the centrally-approved policy. The lack of a central aid agency undermines opportunities for donor coordination, as other donor countries may not know what institution is responsible for a given aid type/sector/recipient country and thus where to submit a request for cooperation. Similarly, the lack of public, transparent and comprehensive data on Russian aid (id. for Chinese aid) hinders coordination and may generate a duplication of effort. The latter is not only detrimental in terms of efficacy for the recipient, but also for donors in terms of efficient use of state funds and achievement of foreign policy objectives – if another state is already lead donor in a sector or recipient, it may be

¹⁶⁷ Except for Oceania. See Rossotrudnichestvo website. Available at [<https://rs.gov.ru/en/contacts/inworld>], accessed 17 Apr 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Putin (2012) cited in Beletskaya, M. (2015). Russia: Development Aid Policies and Perspectives. *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1), pp. 1-12.

¹⁶⁹ Dougherty, J. (2013). Russia's "Soft Power" Strategy. MA Thesis. Washington: Georgetown University, pp. 39-52.

¹⁷⁰ De Cordier (2016), p. 29.

more efficient to direct aid activities elsewhere. Data could provide the basis for this redirection, which would ultimately correspond to the implicit or explicit division of respective spheres of influence among donors theorized by Steinwand¹⁷¹, whereby coordination replaces competition and the detrimental phenomenon of aid fragmentation is reduced.

In November 2020, by Presidential Decree Putin created an Interagency Commission for Issues of International Development Assistance (*Межведомственная Комиссия По Вопросам Содействия Международному Развитию*), tasked with coordinating activities of the organs and organizations involved in international development assistance in the economic, political and humanitarian domains, as well as evaluating aid effectiveness and determining priority areas for cooperation with civil society.¹⁷² The chairman of the Commission is the Vice Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, currently Dmitry Kozak.¹⁷³ A similar body (Sub-commission) existed before, under a Governmental commission.¹⁷⁴ Russian analyst Oleg Shakirov writes that the creation of a new Commission shows that the Presidential Administration acknowledges that the existing mechanisms for coordination have not been sufficient. He also notes that the state does not provide clear information on its international aid activities to the public, and that more transparency is needed not only to ensure citizens' information, but also to strengthen Russia's image as an international donor and improve governance.¹⁷⁵ It is worth noting that not only has the composition of the Interagency Commission been expanded in comparison to the Sub-commission, so that it includes a wider number of representatives of Ministries, public agencies and state-owned companies, but also that by placing it under the Presidential Administration rather than the Government, Putin has moved Russian international aid policy even closer than before to Russian foreign policy.

2.2.3 Competing with the United States and China

The United States was the unrivalled main player in the international aid domain for decades; its position today is challenged by the rise of China as a donor. The US and China are undoubtedly the two major actors in the field. They have well-defined aid philosophies, plus their aid volumes and geographic coverage in terms of aid recipients dwarf Russian aid.

¹⁷¹ See para 2.1.1.

¹⁷² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 5 November 2020. *О Межведомственной комиссии по вопросам содействия международному развитию* [On the Interagency Commission on Issues of International Development Assistance], Положение [Statute], art. 5. Author's translation of the Russian name of the commission, since there does not seem to be an official translation in English as of May 2021.

¹⁷³ Order of the President of the Russian Federation 7 December 2020. *О председателе Межведомственной комиссии по вопросам содействия международному развитию* [About the chairman of the Interagency Commission for Issues of International Development Assistance].

¹⁷⁴ Russian Government Website. *Подкомиссия по вопросам содействия международному развитию Правительственной комиссии по экономическому развитию и интеграции* [Sub-commission on Issues of International Development Assistance, of the Governmental Commission for economic development and integration], available at [<http://government.ru/departments/582/about/>], accessed 29 May 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Shakirov, O. (2020, Nov 9). Загранице мы поможем [Abroad we will help]. *Коммерсантъ*, available at [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4565039>].

Main figures

The US is the first DAC donor of ODA, reaching \$34.3 billion in 2018, 89% of which was provided bilaterally.¹⁷⁶ For the US, data is also available regarding aid more broadly intended: foreign assistance is defined by USAID as the sum of economic and military assistance, and includes aid to developed recipients: in 2018 the sum disbursed amounted to \$47 billion.¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, not only Russia but also China are still beneficiaries of American aid, receiving respectively \$160 million mainly in the energy sector and \$34 million for environmental policy and democracy support.¹⁷⁸ Figures have lowered in 2019 and 2020 but have not zeroed either.

China does not abide by DAC reporting standards, therefore only broad comparisons can be made between flows that are not defined in the same way. The Chinese government has issued in 2021 a White Paper where official data is provided for the period 2013-2018, though only in aggregate form; Chinese aid is reported to target primarily least developed countries (LDCs) and consist of concessional loans, interest-free loans and grants.¹⁷⁹ In contrast, least developed countries only receive less than 7% (on average, 2011-2018) of Russia's bilateral ODA, compared to DAC average of 23.8%; roughly 30% of US bilateral ODA goes to LDCs.¹⁸⁰ Until 2011, Chinese aid statistics were not published because they were deemed classified information.¹⁸¹ According to OECD estimates, China provided ODA-like aid only for \$4.4 billion in 2018¹⁸², but as mentioned, China mostly distributes its aid through OOF-like flows. According to data studied by AidData Research Lab, China's total official commitments (ODA+OOF) outranked those of the United States in 2009-2014: for instance, in 2014 China totaled \$37.3 billion, the US 29.4. 140 countries received Chinese ODA or OOF in 2009-2014. In this period, Russia was the first recipient country of China's other official flows, mostly in the energy sector.¹⁸³ For comparison, Russia gave bilateral ODA to 111 countries in 2011-2014, 120 if the whole period of available data 2011-2019 is considered, but only 43 in 2018.¹⁸⁴ In 2018, the US reported disbursing overall foreign assistance to 207 countries¹⁸⁵ and provided bilateral ODA to 128 DAC-list countries; in 2009-2014 the US gave ODA to 147 DAC-list countries.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁶ OECD. (2019). *Development Co-operation Report 2019: A Fairer, Greener, Safer Tomorrow*. Paris: OECD, p. 102.

¹⁷⁷ USAID Website. *Foreign Aid Explorer. Trends*. Available at [<https://explorer.usaid.gov/#2018>], accessed 18 Apr 21.

¹⁷⁸ USAID Website. *Foreign Aid Explorer. By Country*. Available at [<https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd>], accessed 18 Apr 21.

¹⁷⁹ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2021). *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*. Hereafter, 2021 White Paper. Available at [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202101/10/content_WS5ffa6bbbc6d0f72576943922.html].

¹⁸⁰ See OECD Website. *Development Cooperation Profiles*.

¹⁸¹ Regilme, S. S. F. Jr & Hodzi, O. (2021). Comparing US and Chinese Foreign Aid in the Era of Rising Powers. *The International Spectator*. Published online at: [doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1855904].

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁸³ AidData. *China's Global Development Footprint*. This project covers Chinese aid up to 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Author's calculations based on OECD data, see note 124.

¹⁸⁵ USAID Website. *Foreign Aid Explorer. Trends*.

¹⁸⁶ See note 124.

Main actors

The institutional and regulatory framework of US foreign assistance is clearly defined and quite centralized. ODA and economic foreign assistance are channeled through USAID (US Agency for International Development), which is the central body for foreign development aid of the federal government and is the largest spender among American institutional aid actors. When it was founded in 1961, it was the first agency of its kind. Federal Departments, mainly those of Defense, State, Health and Human Services, and Treasury, as well as other agencies, e.g., the African Development Foundation and the Environmental Protection Agency, also allocate aid out of their budgets, for a total of 22 additional actors beside USAID.¹⁸⁷

China, on the other hand, created its central agency CIDCA (China International Development Cooperation Agency) only in 2018, under the State Council. It replaced a dispersed framework of smaller agencies situated at the level of single ministries, that was a breeding ground for corruption and poor management. The new central agency has been tasked with coordinating planning and management of foreign aid activities, as well as enhancing their adherence to foreign policy objectives.¹⁸⁸ China was able to integrate multiple bodies into one specialized agency, an endeavor that Russia has been struggling with for more than a decade, unable to create RusAid nor centralize aid programs under Rossotrudnichestvo. Nevertheless, the agency is still very young: its responsibilities are yet to be fully clarified, its staff is limited, its budget is a small fraction of the foreign budget of the Ministry of Commerce, to which it is still very much linked.¹⁸⁹

Aid philosophies and donor interests

Aid volumes and institutional structure are elements of disparity with Russian aid, that certainly impact Russia's ability to exert influence in third countries through aid as a tool of foreign policy, since it competes with wealthier donors willing to give more and who are better organized. But arguably the main difference between US, Chinese, and to a certain degree Russian aid, is the underlying philosophy and strategic interests driving aid allocation. The narrative whereby such philosophy is projected also affects the donor's external influence, especially as it may function as a mechanism of soft power.

The US is considered the forerunner of development aid programs and the history of foreign aid is generally considered to have started with the Marshall Plan. During the Cold War, foreign assistance was meant to strengthen alliances to contain communist expansion; then, it backed the promotion of democratic capitalism to ensure a favorable external environment, and later

¹⁸⁷ USAID Website. *Foreign Aid Explorer*. By Agency. Available at [<https://explorer.usaid.gov/agencies>]; USAID Website. *USAID History*. Available at [<https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/usaid-history>], accessed 18 April 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Regilme & Hodzi (2021), p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ Kurtzer, J. (2020, Nov 17). China's Humanitarian Aid: Cooperation amidst Competition. *CSIS*. Available at [<https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-humanitarian-aid-cooperation-amidst-competition>].

counterterrorism for national and international security purposes. The American foreign aid model has been anticipated in previous paragraphs whenever the Western traditional donorship model was mentioned. Indeed, the US is the main architect of such model, which is based on ODA standards and the institutional framework of the DAC, and entails the upholding of democracy, civil society empowerment, human rights and environment protection, and market economy expansion. These values – together with claims of altruism – serve as a legitimizing factor in the North-South directionality that is embodied by US aid flows. However, their credibility has been hurt by byproducts of foreign assistance rendered to states engaged with the US in the War on Terror, such as domestic repression and human rights violations by recipient governments, who targeted not only non-state terror groups but also political enemies. The trend of US withdrawal from global governance institutions also does not play in favor of such legitimizing narrative in the eyes of recipient countries. Beneficiaries of American aid are varied and ODA is quite equally divided among states, NGOs, IOs and other actors, so that the American foreign aid model is said to reflect the pluralistic character of its society.¹⁹⁰ Further, public-private partnerships, where NGOs, corporations or philanthropic sources provide most of the funds and USAID its expertise, have been organized in a system (Global Development Alliance) that is peculiar to US foreign assistance and is missing in the Chinese and Russian approaches to aid.¹⁹¹

In 2018, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), that is the US government's development bank, was created with the aim of supporting American private companies investing in emerging markets and complementing the work of USAID. Its approach is portrayed as different from China's, insofar as it fosters economically viable investment by the private sector as opposed to "state-directed investment which often leaves countries saddled with debt"¹⁹² (elsewhere defined as "unsustainable and irresponsible"¹⁹³ investment).

American economic assistance is concentrated in the health, education and humanitarian sectors, rather than large infrastructure; the former are indeed the ones that garner most support domestically. Nevertheless, Andrew Natsios, a former USAID Administrator, argues that the one of the strengths of US aid programs lies in the empowerment of the local territory and development of local human capital¹⁹⁴ – which goes a long way in enhancing soft power and is a missing element in China's model.

The creation of the DFC in addition to the well-established USAID, with investments in technology, infrastructure and energy as its first priorities¹⁹⁵, shows that the US is adapting its

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 8-9, 12-15.

¹⁹¹ Natsios, A.S. (2020). Foreign Aid in an Era of Great Power Competition. *Prism*, 8(4), p. 108.

¹⁹² US DFC website. *Overview*. Available at [<https://www.dfc.gov/who-we-are/overview>], accessed 20 April 2021.

¹⁹³ US DFC website. *About us*. Available at [<https://www.dfc.gov/who-we-are>], accessed 20 April 2021.

¹⁹⁴ Natsios (2020), p. 110.

¹⁹⁵ US DFC. *DFC's Roadmap for Impact. January 2020 – December 2025*.

approach to challenges posed by new donors and are actively competing with China for lead donorship in the infrastructure sector.

China's development cooperation is explicitly defined as a form of South-South cooperation, of mutual assistance between developing countries, "essentially different from North-South cooperation"¹⁹⁶. China's development cooperation is rooted in its foreign policy concept of a "global community of shared future"¹⁹⁷ for mankind, which envisions all countries as "members of a global village with shared future"¹⁹⁸ and aims to make international relations more equitable. States are the primary beneficiaries of Chinese aid. The principles that inform Chinese aid have to do with respect for sovereignty, non-interference and implementation of programs that are mutually beneficial, aimed at development, and that foster recipients' independence while ensuring delivery. China's ties with the Third World are rooted in the Cold War international system, when China sought a leading role outside the East-West confrontation. Reportedly, the first instances of Chinese foreign aid, in North Korea and Vietnam, were aimed at resisting American and French influence through foreign aid in Asia. Until the end of the Cold War, China's aid was motivated by ideological and geopolitical objectives. Since it re-emerged as a donor, it has given priority to economic arguments. Investment, trade deals, export credits are considered as an integral part of foreign aid, in accordance with the approach of mutually beneficial cooperation. Officially China is not setting out to export its economic development model to other countries, but in practice it directs most aid to the agriculture and infrastructure sectors, reflecting its own path to development.¹⁹⁹ Aid to the agriculture sector is disbursed with a view to China's long-term food security; this is particularly true for Africa, where Chinese aid flows abound in response to geopolitical interests, such as provision of natural resources, land for agricultural production, strategic access to sea and ports. The main development cooperation project is currently the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to which a full paragraph is devoted in the 2021 White Paper. It is a mix of international aid and trade investment across Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean. On account of its focus on creating connectivity across Eurasia, it has been linked to Mackinder's geopolitics and his theory of the Heartland.²⁰⁰

In line with the principle of non-interference, the basic principles of Western donorship, such as the promotion of good governance and the enhancement of transparency in recipient countries are not objectives; neither is the protection of human rights, which is not even mentioned in the 2021 White Paper. In 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping outlined the commitment to non-conditionality (on that occasion with regard to Africa but it is China's worldwide strategy) as a "five-no" approach:

¹⁹⁶ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2021).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Regilme & Hodzi (2021), pp. 2-6.

²⁰⁰ Chajdas, T. (2018). BRI Initiative: a New Model of Development Aid? In Chaisse, J. & Gorski, J. (eds), *The Belt and Road Initiative* (pp. 416-453). Leiden: Brill | Nijhoff, p. 433

no interference in recipients' development model, no interference in their internal affairs, no impositions, no conditionality on political support, no pursuit of self-interested political advantages. His hopeful call for other countries that operate development programs in Africa to apply the same approach shows that whilst the oft-repeated reasons for expansion of foreign aid, such as increasing market opportunities for Chinese companies and finding new sources of raw materials and agricultural supplies, are definitely crucial, certainly the political will to advance China's own foreign aid model in open contrast with the traditional Western one is no less important.²⁰¹ Indeed, a recurring idea in the 2021 White Paper is that China intends to play a role as a "major and responsible country"²⁰².

Despite the much-advertised rejection of policy conditionality, Chinese aid is in fact generally made conditional on the use of materials, equipment or services supplied by the donor, leading to part of the aid capital being reinvested in China. Further, a study of China's loans to foreign governments shows the use of clauses in contrast with the narrative of South-South Cooperation and non-conditionality: some prohibit the recipient/borrower from restructuring the debt in coordination with the Paris Club (that comprises mainly Western creditor countries), others bind the recipient to strict confidentiality about the terms of the loan, still others afford the lender/donor (China) the possibility to cancel the loan or demand prompt repayment under a series of circumstances, that could be linked to political or economic changes in the recipient – thus running against the claim that Chinese aid is not conditional on policy changes in beneficiary countries.²⁰³ These clauses may be imposed for geopolitical interest: Natsios writes that some countries were compelled to forgo control of ports or other strategic infrastructure to China as a consequence of loan default; from his American perspective, Chinese aid has an extractive nature.²⁰⁴ Another requirement reportedly imposed on aid recipients is the One China Policy, to disincentivize international recognition of Taiwan by beneficiaries of Chinese aid.²⁰⁵

Somewhat in line with the OECD Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, China's White Paper calls for donor cooperation, in its paragraph on tripartite cooperation – i.e., cooperation with the recipient and another donor. However, the kind of cooperation envisaged is on China's terms. Following the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities"²⁰⁶, the Paper describes "North-South cooperation as the main channel for international development cooperation and South-

²⁰¹ Tremann, C. (2018, Sept 26). Beijing Changing Norms of Development, Cautiously. *Ispionline*. Available at [<https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/beijing-changing-norms-development-cautiously-21284>].

²⁰² The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2021).

²⁰³ Gelpert, A., et al. (2021). *How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt Contracts with Foreign Governments*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Center for Global Development, and AidData at William & Mary.

²⁰⁴ Natsios (2020), p. 108.

²⁰⁵ Regilme & Hodzi (2021), p. 4.

²⁰⁶ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2021).

South cooperation as its complement”²⁰⁷. China welcomes cooperation with Western states (US included) and non-state donors, but also explains that tripartite cooperation should respect “policies, ideas and models of all parties”²⁰⁸, meaning that it should not be made conditional on policy change in the recipient state: ultimately, China is ready to cooperate with Western donors within its own South-South Cooperation model, not within the North-South model.

Concluding remarks: what model for Russian aid?

International aid is a field where competition among great powers unfolds – always has been, considering its vast employment during the Cold War and its contraction only in the 1990s, when it seemed that history had ended²⁰⁹ and Western liberal democracy had prevailed. Aid volume, number of targeted recipients and their geopolitical relevance are all important elements and entail competition among donors, but they are ultimately informed by aid philosophies, where competition takes place at the ideational level rather than on the battered, poverty-stricken territories where the ideology finds realization through concrete programs and projects. In a way, such competition among international aid models is different than the other dynamics of donor competition, where multiple donors fight to secure that their aid intervention is larger and thus more influential than that of their competitors in the same recipient country or sector, thus achieving lead donorship. Instead, the former not only has the capacity to attract recipients, but may also draw like-minded fellow donors closer and strengthen alliances among richer powers that share similar views of the world.

The Russian international aid approach, as outlined in this chapter, does not fully side with either the Western model or the Chinese one, but possesses elements of both, overlapping different approaches. On the one hand, Russia submits data to the OECD, it arguably re-appeared on the international aid stage so as to be recognized as part of the Global North and redeem its image tarnished by its position as a recipient of Western aid, again arguably it was recruited as a donor by Western-led international organizations, and it does not classify its international aid as South-South Cooperation. On the other hand, it uses aid as a tool of foreign policy without specifically implying altruistic purposes, as Western donors do, but giving pride of place to its national interests, and it does not set out to bring democracy, policy reforms or a specific economic development model in recipient countries. Provided that the quantitative data illustrated here has limitations, the global reach of Russian aid seems to be much lesser than that of its two main competitors. It has indeed been argued that in several cases what Russia sought by giving aid was diplomatic status symbol²¹⁰, that does not necessarily require focus on least developing countries nor great expenditure, even if aid is motivated by geopolitical interests. Ultimately, Russia’s limited economic means compared to

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*, 16, pp. 3-18.

²¹⁰ De Cordier (2016).

American and Chinese economic resources deployed in aid programs, the dispersive organization of aid among domestic institutions, and the ambiguous challenge to traditional donorship, definitely not as clear as China's, hamper the definition of a distinctive Russian aid model.

Chapter III - Russia's international health assistance

3.1 General overview

Health is ranked high among the priority areas of international development assistance according to the 2007 Concept, which underscores the emphasis on preventing the spread of infectious diseases.²¹¹ Health aid may or may not be counted as ODA, depending on the characteristics of the specific flow; it often is, especially when it addresses infectious diseases that are endemic in less developed countries or when it is mediated by international actors such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), the Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, New Born, and Child Health.²¹² Nevertheless, bilateral aid and developed recipients have played an increasingly important role in recent years, as Russia has enhanced its bilateral donor capabilities and has come to use aid as a means to re-establish a great power position. The Soviet Union had been a leading player in the field of global health and the Russian Federation has striven to regain that role since it re-emerged as an aid donor in the mid-2000s.

3.1.1 International health aid of the USSR

Notably, in the 1960s and 70s the USSR cooperated with the US and WHO on fighting communicable diseases, particularly smallpox and polio. As part of its global health activities, the USSR sent Soviet medical professionals to areas in need and provided training to foreign students and doctors at Soviet universities.²¹³

Moreover, a remarkable portion of health aid activities by the USSR was constituted by vaccine diplomacy and vaccine science diplomacy, terms that entered the literature in 2001 but describe actions that have been undertaken since the discovery of the very first vaccine in 1798. The former is defined as the reliance on vaccine use or delivery in global health diplomacy, while the latter is the subset of vaccine diplomacy that is led by scientists – rather than diplomats or health policy experts – who collaborate on vaccine development. Vaccines are reported to be unrivalled among public health interventions in terms of life-saving capacity. Historically, scientists involved in vaccine science diplomacy have even belonged to countries that were engaged in ideological confrontation or overt hostilities; this was indeed the case of US-USSR vaccine science diplomacy that blossomed at the height of the Cold War, which is arguably the run-up to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. In 1956-1959, collaboration among American and Soviet virologists in the USSR led to the development and testing on 100 million people of a prototype oral polio vaccine that

²¹¹ 2007 Concept, p. 8.

²¹² Russia's Ministry of Finance (2012), pp. 3-7. The Muskoka initiative (launched by the G8) spanned the period 2010-2015, but Russia is still funding projects in this framework. See for instance, a project in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan & Vietnam for 2019-2021, at [https://www.ecdan.org/assets/russia_32.pdf].

²¹³ Twigg (2010), p. 34.

contributed to the efforts towards global²¹⁴ eradication. In 1962-1966, the Soviets provided 450 million doses of an innovative freeze-dried smallpox vaccine to developing countries with the financial support of the US, leading to the successful global eradication of smallpox in 1979. These two collaborative efforts are deemed to be among the greatest accomplishments in global health of the 20th century.²¹⁵

3.1.2 Transition of the Russian Federation from health aid recipient to donor

During its time as a net recipient of aid, Russia received health aid in terms of medical supplies, professional training and projects targeting specific diseases. One area of great vulnerability in Russia's national health outlook is the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is growing to this day²¹⁶, and to which much aid was directed. Indeed, one of Russia's first leadership initiatives in global health was the reimbursement in 2006-2010 of \$217 million that GFATM had allocated to the country during the post-soviet transition period.²¹⁷

Throughout the period 1992-2002, USAID provided health assistance to Russia,²¹⁸ which was rebranded as cooperation and then partnership as Russia's economic conditions improved. Amongst seminars and events organized or supported by USAID to build Russia's donorship capacity,²¹⁹ US-Russia joint projects were developed to bolster medical capabilities within Russia and to strengthen its capacity to support developing countries. For instance, the first of these joint initiatives, the Strategic Health Partnership Initiative (SHPI) launched in 2007, saw USAID partnering with Russia's Ministry of Health on HIV and other infectious diseases and successfully deploy Russian medical professionals to African and Central Asian countries, to develop laboratory services and the ability to manufacture vaccines.²²⁰ USAID's ousting in 2012 led to a lack of funding for dozens of previously subsidized social welfare programs and NGOs. US-Russia health cooperation continued in a more equal institutional avenue, that is the US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC) established by American President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2009 in an effort to "reset" bilateral relations. The Health Working Group of the BPC sustained collaboration in four priority areas until 2013: "healthy lifestyles and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child

²¹⁴ Today, polio is nearly eliminated, but still endemic in two countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan.

²¹⁵ Hotez, P. J. (2014). "Vaccine Diplomacy": Historical Perspectives and Future Directions. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, 8(6), pp. 1-7.

²¹⁶ Bennetts, M. (2020, May 11). The epidemic Russia doesn't want to talk about. *Politico*. Available at [<https://www.politico.eu/article/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-aids-in-russia-but-putin-was-afraid-to-ask/>].

²¹⁷ Korepanov, D. V. & Komagaeva, J. (2012). Russia as an International Development Aid Partner. Assistance Efforts in Global Health. In J. Twigg (ed.). *Russia's Emerging Global Health Leadership* (pp. 9-33). Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 24-25.

²¹⁸ Tarnoff, C. (2002). U.S. Assistance to the Former Soviet Union 1991-2001: A History of Administration and Congressional Action. Washington: Congressional Research Service – The Library of Congress.

²¹⁹ See Gray's "recruited donor" argument, para. 2.2.2.

²²⁰ Korepanov & Komagaeva (2012), pp. 29-30.

health, scientific and research collaboration, and global health”²²¹. However, the work of the BPC stalled due to the Ukraine conflict in 2014 and never resumed; the US redirected funds earmarked for BPC activities to support economic and institutional reforms in Ukraine.²²²

As argued before, Russia’s re-emergence as an aid donor was linked to its G8 Presidency in 2006. For the first time in the history of the G8, health – specifically the fight against infectious diseases – was ranked as a priority of the summit, at Putin’s prompting, next to energy and education.²²³ Indeed, these also became the three sector priorities of the 2007 Concept. The only G8 Health Ministers’ meeting in history was held in Moscow in 2006. On that occasion, the need for donor coordination to “enhance international aid effectiveness to support the fight against communicable diseases”²²⁴ was recognized, in line with Western principles of international donorship. Aware of the outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-1) that were increasing in the years prior to the 2006 Summit, G8 leaders directed much focus to surveillance and monitoring to prevent human pandemics of such infectious diseases. Commitments were also made to support the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, polio, measles and other preventable diseases. Russia pledged financial support to World Bank-led initiatives to fight malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa and to tackle infectious diseases in Central Asia, provided funds to the GFATM, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and committed funds to detect and address H5N1 outbreaks.²²⁵ Russia’s role at the 2006 G8 is considered one of the best examples of its global health leadership.²²⁶ Subsequent G8 summits covered health to a lesser extent and meetings of Health Ministers were not summoned until the Ebola outbreak in 2014 created the necessity; meetings have become rather regular since 2015.²²⁷ However, by that time the framework had already been changed to the G7 and stopped being a platform for Russia’s global health leadership. Due to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, Russia’s G8 participation ended in 2014, when Russia was supposed to host the Summit in Sochi.

A significant display of global health leadership is Russia’s hosting of high-level meetings, such as the Eastern Europe and Central Asian AIDS Conference (all six editions in 2006-2018, jointly organized by Rospotrebnadzor and UNAIDS), the First WHO Global Ministerial Conference on

²²¹ US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission. *2013 Joint Report*, p. 19.

²²² US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission website. Available at [<https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/ustrussiabilat/index.htm>], accessed 10 May 2021.

²²³ Guebert, J. (2012). Russia’s Global Health Leadership. In J. Twigg (ed.). *Russia’s Emerging Global Health Leadership* (pp. 1-8). Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 4.

²²⁴ G8. *Statement by the G8 Health Ministers*. Moscow, 28 April 2006, art. 7.

²²⁵ G8. *Fight against infectious diseases*. St.Petersburg, 16 July 2006.

²²⁶ Guebert (2012), p. 5.

²²⁷ G7 Information Centre website. *G7/8 Health Ministers’ and Related Meetings*. Available at [<http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/healthmins/>], accessed 11 May 2021.

Healthy Lifestyles and NCDs in 2011, the First WHO Global Ministerial Conference on Ending TB in 2017, among others. Hosting these meetings allows Russia to influence global health priorities.²²⁸

Russia was also one of the initiators of the Advance Market Commitment for pneumococcal vaccines, whereby six participating donors provide funding to support the development and production of such vaccines and their provision to low-income countries.²²⁹

Motivations for Russia's international health assistance and efforts to showcase leadership in global health are arguably linked to its national interests. Specifically, to prevent cross-border spread of infectious diseases into Russia's territory, ensure stability of its neighborhood, with geopolitical and economic consequences for Russia, address pressing health threats within the country (e.g., HIV/AIDS, high mortality due to tobacco and alcohol consumption) and attract attention to the achievements in the sector made in the post-Soviet period (e.g., improved maternal and child health). The primary target of Russian health assistance is Central Asia, on account of fears that migrant workers may import communicable diseases.²³⁰ Further, considering the overall focus of Russian aid towards the region, strategic efforts to integrate economic and trade relations across it through the EAEU and the historically shared heritage of Soviet medical structures and education, the allocation of health aid may be seen as guided by geopolitical motivations.

3.1.3 Pharma-2020 national strategy

Since 2011, another avenue for global health dialogue has been the meeting of BRICS health ministers during the annual summits. BRICS countries represent roughly 42% of the world population²³¹ and their healthcare expenditure has been growing much faster than that of G7 countries. BRICS' reliance on Western pharmaceutical MNCs ("Big Pharma") and their patented drugs varies from country to country and is highest in Brazil. However, considering both generic and patented drugs, Russia is the most heavily dependent on pharmaceutical imports²³² – which, incidentally, represent the first category of imported products (4.1% of total imports in Russia in 2019)²³³. To address this structural production deficit, Russia launched in 2009 a strategic investment program dubbed Pharma-2020, to which \$4 billion were pledged in 2011. The plan aimed to bolster Russia's pharmaceutical industry, with the following main targets for 2020: increase the share of

²²⁸ Twigg (2013), pp. 35-36; Morrison, S. J. & Twigg, J. (2019). Putin and Global health. Friend or Foe? *CSIS Briefs*. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

²²⁹ Korepanov & Komagaeva (2012), p. 24. See also, GAVI Website. *Pneumococcal AMC*. Available at [<https://www.gavi.org/investing-gavi/innovative-financing/pneumococcal-amc>], accessed 1 June 2021.

²³⁰ Twigg, J. (2013). Russia, the United States, and Global Health. Russia Ascends. In K. E. Bliss (ed.), *The Changing Landscape of Global Health Diplomacy* (pp. 32-41). Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 37.

²³¹ BRICS Brasil 2019 Website. *What is BRICS?* Available at [<http://brics2019.itamaraty.gov.br/en/about-brics/what-is-brics>], accessed 13 May 2021.

²³² Rodwin, V. G., Fabre, G., Ayoub, R. F. (2018). BRIC health systems and Big Pharma: a challenge for health policy and management. *International Journal Health Policy Management*, 7(3), pp. 201–206.

²³³ Santander Trade Website. *Russian Foreign Trade in Figures*. Available at [<https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/russia/foreign-trade-in-figures>], accessed 14 May 2021.

locally-produced medicines from 25% to 50% by 2020, produce 90% of vital medicines in Russia, modernize roughly 160 companies – that were still using Soviet standards – to ensure their compliance with Good Manufacturing Practice standards.²³⁴ For instance, the latter standards are a requisite for WHO approval of emergency use of medicines and vaccines during an epidemic or pandemic; being on the Emergency Use Listing (EUL) compiled by an international regulatory body such as WHO is proof of the reliability of said medicines.²³⁵ Further, the strategy committed to establish research centers and increase the share of innovative rather than generic local production to 60%.

This import substitution strategy prompted some Big Pharma companies to set up manufacturing and R&D laboratories in Russia in order to retain market share in the country.²³⁶ Outcomes as of 2018 showed that the effort to innovate, rather than follow “inertia”²³⁷ which would have left the Russian pharmaceutical market to foreign MNCs, paid off to a certain extent, although the ambitious goals were not fully met: domestically-produced medicines accounted for 30% of the overall market (target 50%), while 81.1% of vital medicines are now produced in Russia (target 90%); the market itself increased by 4 times; 78 MNCs localized production by partnering with Russian firms – with arguably relevant advantages in terms of technology transfer and development of Russian human capital and competencies in biotechnology – while 7 MNCs built their own plants.²³⁸ Such re-localization is deemed to be the result of stricter regulations that excluded foreign companies from public tenders and are considered the most effective tool of Pharma-2020.²³⁹

The strategy has been extended until 2024, while Pharma-2030 is being developed.²⁴⁰ According to Russia’s Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry Sergey Tsib, the new strategy will shift the focus from import-substitution to export-orientation, focus on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) threatening the Russian population (e.g., oncological and cardiovascular ones), and boost the development of modern vaccines.²⁴¹ Since a common pharmaceutical market in the EAEU was

²³⁴ Peach, G. (2011). Russia pledges \$4 billion for Pharma-2020 plan. *Nature Medicine*, 17(5), p. 517

²³⁵ WHO Website. *Regulation and Prequalification*. Available at [https://www.who.int/teams/regulation-prequalification/eul/eul-vaccines], accessed 25 May 2021.

²³⁶ Twigg (2013), p. 39.

²³⁷ Batanyova, T. (2018, Oct 7). От импорта к экспорту. Стратегия “Фарма-2020” дала импульс к развитию отечественной фарминдустрии [From import to export. Strategy “Pharma-2020” gave impulse to the development of national pharma industry]. *Российская газета*. Available at [https://rg.ru/2018/10/07/farma-2020-dala-impuls-k-razvitiu-otechestvennoj-farmindustry.html].

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Privolnev, Y. (2016). Domestic Manufacturing In Russia: Measuring The Success Of The Pharma 2020 Program. *Value in Health*, 19(7), p. A447.

²⁴⁰ Alexin, A. (2019, Dec 1). Со своими таблетками. Госпрограмма “Фарма-2020” продлена. [With one’s own tablets. State’s program “Pharma-2020” extended]. *Российская газета*. Available at [https://rg.ru/2019/12/01/gosprogramma-farma-2020-prodlena-do-2024-goda.html]. On a broader level, the main document of Russia’s national health policy is the Health Care Development 2018-2025. See WHO. (2018). *Russian Federation. Country Cooperation Strategy at a glance*. WHO/CCU/18.02/Russia.

²⁴¹ Batanyova (2018).

launched in 2018, continuous work has been devoted to the harmonization of rules in the region. Subsidies will be provided by the State, with a focus on the development of new drugs.²⁴²

In his 2021 address to the nation, Putin underscored the vital importance of achieving by 2030 or earlier “Russia’s independence in the production of the entire range of vaccines and pharmaceutical substances”²⁴³, giving preference to equipment and components made in Russia. He further stated that if a new infectious disease – like the COVID-19 – should start to spread, Russia would have to be ready to deploy testing systems in four days and have the capacity to manufacture a Russian-developed vaccine for domestic mass vaccination. These objectives will be pursued through nationwide investments.²⁴⁴

3.1.4 Russia’s response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa

In 2014-2015, Russia responded to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa with direct humanitarian aid (for which \$5.2 million were provided),²⁴⁵ multilateral aid through WHO, and then through WB, UNICEF and the UN Ebola response fund.²⁴⁶ Russia partnered with WHO to provide medical devices to Guinea and Sierra Leone, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).²⁴⁷ Rostec, a Russian state-owned company specialized in defense and high-tech industrial products, studied a new model of protective masks to be sent to Africa to prevent the spread of Ebola.²⁴⁸

Russia’s health aid was not limited to humanitarian aid and essential medical supplies, but it also included the deployment to Guinea of a team of “epidemiologists, virologists, and bacteriologists”²⁴⁹ by Rospotrebnadzor (Russia’s Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing). The team operated with a mobile laboratory that was shipped via aircraft by the EMERCOM Ministry and undertook the activities of scientific research, diagnostics, prevention and treatment for which \$3.95 million had been earmarked.²⁵⁰ In Guinea, Rusal – Russian company that operates bauxite mines and alumina refineries in the African country

²⁴² Vasilieva, K. (2020, Nov 21). Поддержку получают проекты по исследованию и созданию новых молекул [Projects for research and creation of new molecules will receive support]. *Коммерсантъ*. Available at [https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4583530].

²⁴³ President of the Russian Federation. (2021). *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly*. Moscow, 21 Apr 2021.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ The Moscow Times. (2014, Oct 17). *Russia Allocates More Than \$19 Million to Fight Deadly Ebola Virus*. Available at [http://oldtmt.vedomosti.ru/news/article/russia-allocates-more-than-19-million-to-fight-deadly-ebola-virus/509651.html].

²⁴⁶ Government of the Russian Federation. *On Russia’s participation in the international efforts against the Ebola virus*. Decision 19 January 2015. Available at [http://government.ru/en/docs/16561/].

²⁴⁷ Russia’s Ministry of Finance (2015) and WHO Sierra Leone. (2014, Aug 1). *WHO and Embassy of Russia donate consignment of items to support Ebola outbreak response*. Available at [https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-and-embassy-russia-donate-consignment-items-support-ebola-outbreak-response].

²⁴⁸ Rostec. (2014, Aug 15). «Авиационное оборудование» поставит в Африку маски для защиты от лихорадки Эбола [“Aviation equipment” will deliver to Africa masks for protection against Ebola fever]. Available at [https://rostec.ru/news/4514291/].

²⁴⁹ Roudik, P. (2015). *Russian Federation: Legal Responses to Health Emergencies*. US Library of Congress Legal Reports. Available at [https://www.loc.gov/law/help/health-emergencies/russia.php], art. VI.

²⁵⁰ The Moscow Times (2014). See also Russia’s Ministry of Finance (2015), p. 7.

– set up a field hospital donated by Russia’s Ministry of Defense, and then invested \$10 million to open a Centre for Epidemic and Microbiological Research and Treatment (CEMRT), where the vaccine Gam Evac Combi was tested on 2000 volunteers by 2018, upon approval by Guinean authorities.²⁵¹ The vaccine was developed by the Gamaleya Federal Research Centre for Epidemiology and Microbiology, a research institution under Russia’s Ministry of Health. The latest outbreak of Ebola in Guinea happened in February 2021. Upon Guinea’s request, Russia was ready to provide its vaccine,²⁵² which is reported to have successfully passed the 2018 testing.²⁵³ WHO had already begun a ring-vaccination campaign in the country using Ervebo,²⁵⁴ a vaccine manufactured by German MNC Merck, and no further information has been released by Rospotrebnadzor regarding Ebola vaccine supplies to Guinea.

3.1.5 Concluding remarks: global health leader or threat?

Despite the achievements in reducing mortality in Russia due to TB or NCDs (e.g., heart disease), tackling NCDs risk factors such as unhealthy lifestyles, alcohol and tobacco consumption, addressing HIV/AIDS in high-level international meetings organized in Moscow, developing the domestic pharmaceutical industry with a view to exporting, responding to epidemics abroad as in the Ebola case, still Russia is considered under certain respects a “global health security threat”²⁵⁵.

All of the former initiatives were partly aimed at improving the domestic health outlook and preventing the spread of infectious diseases from foreign countries into Russia, and thus were linked to national security interests, but they were also intended to prove Russia’s renewed position as a donor country, a global health leader, and a great power.

However, a number of shortcomings, both at the domestic level and at the international level, may undermine Russia’s attempt at global health leadership. In particular, Russia has one of the highest rates of drug-resistant TB cases,²⁵⁶ along with its post-Soviet neighboring countries, and it is one of the areas of the world where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is increasing.²⁵⁷ The situation is so dire

²⁵¹ Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2017, Aug 17). *Press release on the post-registration clinical trials of the Russian Ebola vaccine Gam Evac Combi in Guinea*. Available at [https://www.mid.ru/en/main_en/-/asset_publisher/G51iJnfMMNKX/content/id/2838077]; Pharmaceutical Technology. (2018, Dec 14). *Russia and Rusal complete Ebola vaccinations in Guinea*. Available at [<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/rusal-ebola-vaccinations-in-guinea/>].

²⁵² TASS. (2021, Mar 13) *Russia may supply Ebola vaccine to Guinea - Consumer Rights watchdog*. Available at [<https://tass.com/society/1265663>].

²⁵³ Russia’s Ministry of Health. (2019, Oct 23). *Министр Вероника Скворцова выступила на форуме «Россия – Африка»* [Minister Veronika Skvortsova spoke at the Russia-Africa forum]. Press release. Available at [<https://minzdrav.gov.ru/news/2019/08/01/12141-delegatsiya-minzdrava-rossii-prinyala-uchastie-v-zasedanii-mezhpravitelstvennoy-rossiysko-gvineyskoy-komissii>].

²⁵⁴ WHO Guinea. (2021, Feb 23) *Ebola vaccination starts in Guinea to curb new outbreak*. Available at [<https://www.afro.who.int/news/ebola-vaccination-starts-guinea-curb-new-outbreak>].

²⁵⁵ Morrison & Twigg (2019), p. 1.

²⁵⁶ WHO Website. *Tuberculosis*. Available at [<https://www.who.int/tb/areas-of-work/drug-resistant-tb/global-situation/en/>], accessed 15 May 2021.

²⁵⁷ Morrison & Twigg (2019), p. 4.

that studies show that migrant workers – who are feared as spreaders of infectious diseases – are more at risk of catching HIV or TB in Russia than in their Central Asian home countries.²⁵⁸ Russia's import substitution strategy is deemed to delay the supply of high-quality drugs such as the pre-exposure prophylaxis pills used to prevent HIV infections, which are yet to be produced in Russia, while the social causes of the epidemic are not adequately addressed; reportedly, sex education to young generations is lacking and harm reduction via needle/syringe programs and methadone treatment for drug addicts are banned, leading to increasing contagion among the poor.²⁵⁹

Further damaging Russia's quest for global health leadership are the health disinformation campaigns. Indeed, Russia has been accused by the US and EU alike²⁶⁰ of spreading health disinformation through Twitter bots and trolls, swamping social media with lies purposely to weaken its adversaries, boosting anti-vaccine stances to erode confidence in vaccination, especially in Western societies. Russia is reported to capitalize on American supporters of conspiracy theories to divide Western societies from within, by giving space on its state-owned, foreign-language, news and media outlets to people who spread false information regarding, for instance, autism as a byproduct of vaccinations or Ebola being a US-manufactured virus; these allegations are then backed by massive resonance on Twitter, either through automated tweets (bots) or accounts that hide their identities (trolls).²⁶¹

3.2 Russia's international health assistance – COVID-19 first phase

COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2; it was first reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and it was declared a pandemic by WHO in March 2020: by then, the disease had spread to every continent.²⁶² Severe damage was caused by the pandemic. As of May 2021, more than 3.3 million people died.²⁶³ In 2020 the global economy underwent the worst recession since World War II.²⁶⁴ As of 2021, states all over the world still impose lockdowns intermittently, shutting down all non-essential economy activity when new waves of infections hit; cross-border travel restrictions have not been fully lifted yet and are just now starting to ease, as the more fortunate states begin to reap the benefits of vaccination campaigns.

²⁵⁸ Twigg (2013), p. 37.

²⁵⁹ Bennetts (2020).

²⁶⁰ EPRS. (2020). *Countering the health "infodemic"*; US Senate – Committee on Foreign Relations. *Hearing*. 5 Mar 2020. Washington: US Government Publishing Office.

²⁶¹ Broad, W. J. (2020, Apr 13). Putin's Long War Against American Science. *The New York Times*. Available at [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/science/putin-russia-disinformation-health-coronavirus.html>]; Broniatowski, D. A., et al. (2018). Weaponized Health Communication: Twitter Bots and Russian Trolls Amplify the Vaccine Debate. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108, pp. 1378-1384.

²⁶² WHO Website. *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020*. Available at [<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>].

²⁶³ WHO Website. *WHO COVID-19 Dashboard*. Available at [<https://covid19.who.int/>], accessed 18 May 2021.

²⁶⁴ World Bank (2021). *Global Economic Prospects*. Washington: IBRD / The World Bank.

As soon as the scale of the pandemic became evident in March 2020, it was clear that it would affect global politics and the world order.²⁶⁵ It has been argued to be the “defining Black Swan event of the early 21st century”²⁶⁶ – although the definition of Black Swan is that of an unexpected and extremely impactful event, for which explanations are suggested in hindsight, while a pandemic caused by a lethal virus had been long feared.²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the great majority of states were caught unprepared: hospitals were overwhelmed and essential medical devices to protect healthcare workers, let alone the wider population, lacked.

The pandemic has intensified great power rivalry between the US and its two rivals, China and Russia. Donor competition has been one of the mechanisms of such rivalry, whereby donor countries have sought to expand their area of influence by providing well-publicized COVID-19 related international aid. China and Russia have been more active than the US in this sense, despite being re-emerging donors vis-à-vis the largest and most experienced ODA donor on the global stage.

As the world faced shortages of essential medical supplies, humanitarian aid consisting of protective gear and medical equipment – so-called mask diplomacy – was a characterizing feature of 2020. This type of aid falls within the ODA category, when provided to developing countries and partly or fully donated.²⁶⁸ However, as the pandemic ravaged the whole world, new trends emerged such as traditional and rich donor countries, hard-hit by COVID-19, becoming recipients of aid, while poorer countries that are still ODA recipients, but were less strongly affected by the pandemic, became aid donors – halting that North-South directionality of aid that according to Hattori allows traditional donors to impose a moral hierarchy over poorer countries.²⁶⁹

Nevertheless, it was apparent since the beginning that the geopolitical balance would be tipped by the discovery of a vaccine or a cure for COVID-19. A race to become the first country to make that discovery started immediately. Mask donations, despite being essential, were a palliative that provided temporary relief to an unending problem, and therefore only ascribed temporary influence to the donor that could soon be replaced by the country who would supply a vaccine and therefore offer a definitive solution.

All of the assistance provided throughout the pandemic, including to traditional donors, falls within the broader category of International Aid Public Policies (IAPP). Given the scarcity of masks and vaccines during the pandemic, not only their donation but also their sale by states may be considered as an asymmetrical exchange, and thus as part of IAPP. In the following sections, the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic will be divided into two phases: a first one

²⁶⁵ Kissinger, H. (2020, Apr 3). The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order. *The Wall Street Journal*. Available at [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>].

²⁶⁶ Natsios (2020), p. 101.

²⁶⁷ See, for instance, the focus on prevention of human pandemics agreed at the 2006 G8 Summit, para 3.1.1.

²⁶⁸ OECD. (2021). *Frequently Asked Questions on the ODA eligibility of COVID-19 related activities*. Paris: OECD.

²⁶⁹ See para 1.2.1

characterized by mask diplomacy, corresponding primarily to 2020 starting in February and particularly intense in the months of March and April, and a second phase characterized by vaccine diplomacy, starting in late 2020 – August to be precise, when the Russian vaccine was announced.

3.2.1 Russia's humanitarian aid – COVID-19 first phase

Russia began providing humanitarian aid to address the spread of COVID-19 on February 1-2, 2020: the first recipients were China, which was the most affected country at that time and received a variety of supplies from Russia, a few CIS countries²⁷⁰, Mongolia, and North Korea, which mostly received testing kits. By the end of April, aid had been delivered to 25 countries, in the form of testing kits, PPE, medicine or medical equipment supplies, teams of doctors to support local ones. Data collected by the Center for Advanced Governance (CAG) shows that by February 2021 the number of aid recipients via bilateral (state and non-state) and multilateral mechanisms (UN, UNDP, WHO) had risen to 55 countries, across 5 continents²⁷¹ for a total 165 aid deliveries: testing kits and masks were the most frequent type of aid delivered, respectively on 80 and 39 occasions (see fig. 5).

Specifically, in the data set, out of 158 bilateral deliveries (the preferred mechanism, in accordance with the 2014 Concept), 123 are labeled as “governmental”, while the remaining 35 “non-governmental”.²⁷² Nevertheless, looking at the source of these non-governmental deliveries, they may not all fall within the traditional category of private aid. Indeed, a few might be funded by public budget and thus be considered as part of International Aid Public Policies (IAPP): for instance, donations by Russian embassy diplomats, aid deliveries by State-owned or partly state-owned companies or state-linked entities, such as Rosoboronexport (the state intermediary for arms export), VTB Bank, Rosatom (nuclear energy corporation), the Russian Social and Business Promotion Center, the Russian Peace Fond (*РФМ*), Zarubezhneft (operating in the oil and gas sector outside of Russia) through a subsidiary in the recipient country, that is Bosnia-Herzegovina, then the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre and Gazprom through a subsidiary in Serbia, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (*РДИ*), the Russian Federation Council's Committee for Public Support towards Residents of South-East Ukraine, and the majority party Russia United.

Donations that more clearly fit into the private aid category were made by the NGO Russian Humanitarian Mission (*РГМ*) and several other Russian non-profits, as well as a few non-state-owned companies, two of them being pharmaceutical companies.

²⁷⁰ Specifically, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. See the following data set: Центр перспективных управленческих решений [Center for Advanced Governance]. (2021). *Российская гуманитарная помощь зарубежным странам для противодействия распространению новой коронавирусной инфекции* [Russian humanitarian aid to foreign countries to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus infection]. Available at [http://data-in.ru/data-catalog/datasets/133/]. Hereafter, CAG data set (2021).

²⁷¹ Considering for Oceania the multilateral aid provided by Russia to Nauru in May 2020.

²⁷² CAG data set (2021).

The Russian Orthodox Church (*ПРЦ*), a family of Orthodox philanthropists, and the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (*ИПОС*) also sent aid, respectively to Belarus, Italy and Syria. Indeed, the Russian Orthodox Church plays an important role in Russia's foreign policy: the concept of *Russky mir* (Russian World) was first developed by the Church, which has committees to coordinate its activities with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and lends moral and ideological arguments to Russia's foreign policy both in terms of general orientation and with regard to specific issues, such as Syria for instance. Religious diplomacy is a relevant source of Russian soft power.²⁷³

Another non-state actor that provided humanitarian aid is Evropolis, a company linked to the Wagner Group, a quasi-private military contractor present in the 2014 conflict in Ukraine and in many African countries that receive Russian aid, and which is said to be supported by the Russian government. The aid was donated to Syria, where Russian mercenaries allegedly mix war and business opportunities; the move was met with much international criticism as a "publicity stunt"²⁷⁴. The same may have occurred in Sudan via M Invest, another entity linked to the Wagner Group, but there are not any official reports.²⁷⁵

All in all, besides donations by the Orthodox community and small contributions by non-profits and non-state-owned companies, the great majority of aid – whether labeled governmental or non-governmental in the data set – is part of the state strategy and funded by the public budget, thus falls within the IAPP category. The higher number of Russian bilateral aid deliveries compared to multilateral ones supported by Russia is consistent with the preference for bilateral aid expressed in the 2014 Concept.

Governmental aid deliveries were not centralized – indeed Russia lacks a central aid agency – but instead fragmented among several domestic state actors (fig.4).

The main state actors involved in humanitarian aid delivery were Rospotrebnadzor, the EMERCOM Ministry, the Ministry of Defense, which are the same ones that delivered aid to West Africa during the Ebola epidemic²⁷⁶; then the Ministry of Health, its Federal Medical-Biological Agency, company Rusal (which again had gained experience from the Ebola outbreak and delivered COVID-19 aid to Guinea where it operates); then parliamentary, regional and city government bodies.

Rossotrudnichestvo, which is supposed to be the counterpart to USAID and CIDCA, showed no future as a central aid agency: it delivered COVID-19 aid only on one occasion, when it provided

²⁷³ Petro, N. N. (2018). The Russian Orthodox Church. In A. Tsygankov (ed). *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*. (pp. 217-232). London: Routledge; Tafuro Ambrosetti, E. (2020) Branding the Country and Its Leader: Soft Power Made in Russia. In A. Ferrari & E. Tafuro Ambrosetti. (eds.) *Forward to the Past? New/Old Theatres of Russia's International Projection*. (pp. 48-67). Milan: ISPI.

²⁷⁴ Mackinnon, A. (2020, July 22). Russia's Shadowy Mercenaries Offer Humanitarian Aid to Clean Image. *Foreign Policy*. Available at [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/22/wagner-group-russia-syria-libya-mercenaries/>].

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ See para. 3.1.4.

humanitarian aid in the form of disinfectant through the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Cambodia. Conversely, Rospotrebnadzor emerged as the principal channel for humanitarian aid, with the highest number of aid deliveries (77). However, it may be a consequence of the fact that the emergency pertained to the health domain, rather than a specific choice aimed at future centralization of aid through this agency.

Indeed, one of the competences of Rospotrebnadzor is human wellbeing, and it has the scientific facilities and capabilities to monitor the epidemiological situation. It also exchanged information with its foreign counterparts (similar agencies or departments of Health Ministries).²⁷⁷

Rospotrebnadzor	EMERCOM Ministry	Ministry of Defense	Ministry of Health	Federal Medical-Biological Agency	Other state-backed aid	Multilateral aid	Private aid (non-IAPP)
Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Belarus, Costa Rica, Cuba, DRC, Guatemala, Guinea, Dominican Republic, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Moldova, Mongolia, Nicaragua, North Korea, Palestine, Panama, Peru, Salvador, Serbia, South Africa, South Ossetia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk), Venezuela	Angola, Afghanistan, Cabo Verde, CAR, China, Republic of Congo, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Ukraine (Lugansk), Zambia, Zimbabwe	Abkhazia, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guinea, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Syria, South Ossetia	Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, South Ossetia	Azerbaijan, Nicaragua	Algeria, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Guatemala, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Costa Rica, Moldova, Myanmar, Namibia, Palestine, Peru, Serbia, Senegal, Syria, United States, Uzbekistan, Ukraine (Donetsk), Venezuela, South Africa, South Ossetia	Belarus, Venezuela, Djibouti, Iran, Kenya, Nauru	Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Venezuela, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Peru, Serbia, Syria

Figure 4: Recipient countries of Russia's COVID-19 humanitarian aid by primary aid provider (Feb.2020-Feb. 2021). Author's elaboration of CAG data.²⁷⁸

The EMERCOM and Defense Ministries organized the logistics operations of many aid deliveries, either being the primary aid provider or supporting other Russian actors.²⁷⁹ The

²⁷⁷ Degtarev, D. A. (2020). *Regional Responses to Covid-19: Challenges and Prospects*. Policy Brief 24 Dec 2020. North-East Asia Development Cooperation Forum.

²⁷⁸ The same delivery or multiple deliveries to the same country may have been coordinated by more than one actor, and thus the same recipient country may appear in different columns. See CAG data set (2021).

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

deployment of military aircraft and personnel was met with diffidence in the West, especially in recipient countries belonging to the NATO bloc, that is in the US and Italy. Both received humanitarian aid in March-April 2020, in operations that were filmed and much advertised on Russian news outlets; RT (the English-language Russian state media) live streamed on YouTube the delivery to the US.²⁸⁰ The broadcast and advertisement of aid deliveries targeted not only foreign audiences, but also internal ones: a government that increases international prestige and visibility, and spreads the donor's values, attracts domestic constituencies in donor countries. In the US, the arrival of the Russian military was perceived as an act of propaganda to showcase Russia as a great power vis-à-vis the weakening US;²⁸¹ in Italy, as a geopolitical move to boost Russia's image against the backdrop of EU inaction, or even as hiding undesirable military intelligence operations.²⁸²

While reputational and geopolitical motives were naturally at the root of Russia's international assistance, in keeping with its great power ambitions, the military deployment may be more closely linked to structural reasons. Because of the lack of a central agency for Russian aid, other agencies and Ministries are necessarily involved in aid deliveries. The concentration of R&D capabilities in the Defense Ministry, particularly in the sectors of virology and bacteriology, is another important factor that explains the presence of the military.²⁸³ The possibility to have access to first-hand information, with constant updates provided by officials of the donor country who work in aid programs and thus are deployed on the ground in recipient countries, is generally one of the donors' motivations.²⁸⁴ In the case of the COVID-19 emergency, this aspect gained even more prominence, particularly with a view to vaccine development, for which data is fundamental. Similarly, the Ministry of Defense was essential with regard to Ebola, not only for its participation in the delivery of aid, but also in terms of data collection for vaccine development. Clinical trials for the Ebola vaccine developed by Gamaleya were conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense²⁸⁵, which has inherited from Soviet times expertise in the health sector, to address biological and bacteriological threats, and even specifically against Ebola.²⁸⁶ First-hand data from the regions that

²⁸⁰ RT YouTube Channel. *COVID-19 / Russian humanitarian aid arrives in NYC*. 1 Apr 2020. Available at [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgqt4MYQ6-Y>]. See also, RT. (2020, Mar 22) *Russian military planes with medics & supplies land in coronavirus-hit Italy (VIDEO)*. Available at [<https://www.rt.com/russia/483796-russian-military-coronavirus-aid-italy/>].

²⁸¹ Troianovski, A. (2020, Apr 2). Turning the Tables, Russia Sends Virus Aid to U.S. *The New York Times*. Available at [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/coronavirus-us-russia-aid.html>].

²⁸² Iacoboni, J. (2020, Mar 25). Militari di Mosca acquartierati nella foresteria dell'esercito italiano, i timori di un'"occupazione" russa in Italia [Moscow's military headquartered in the Italian army's guest-rooms, fears of a Russian "occupation" in Italy]. *La Stampa*. Available at [<https://www.lastampa.it/topnews/primo-piano/2020/03/25/news/militari-di-mosca-acquartierati-nella-foresteria-dell-esercito-italiano-i-timori-di-un-occupazione-russa-in-italia-1.38635908>].

²⁸³ Pellicciari, I. (2020). Perché il Cremlino ha per ora vinto la gara degli aiuti a Roma [Why the Kremlin has won the aid race in Rome so far]. *Limes Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica*, 4/2020, pp. 93-94.

²⁸⁴ Pellicciari (2017), p. 304.

²⁸⁵ Khlyustova, Y. (2016, Jan 13). Вакцина под завесой секретности [Vaccine under a curtain of secrecy]. *Gazeta.ru*. Available at [https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2016/01/13_a_8019845.shtml].

²⁸⁶ Batanyova, T. (2014, Aug 4). У России есть лекарство от лихорадки Эбола [Russia has a cure for Ebola fever]. *Российская газета*. Available at [<https://rg.ru/2014/08/04/ebola-site.html>].

were experiencing severe outbreaks would provide first-mover advantage to Russian scientists studying a vaccine for COVID-19, the tool that would ascribe global health leadership to the country who first developed it. Assistance provided to China in early February, consisted not only of a 23 tons cargo full of medicine and protective gear (2 million surgical masks, protective suits, gloves, googles), but also of teams of Russian medical specialists tasked with research for vaccine development.²⁸⁷ Data collection for this purpose was hypothesized also with regard to Russia's humanitarian mission to Italy in late March 2020, when Russian military doctors were deployed to Lombardy, the hardest-hit region in Italy and the one in the Western world where COVID-19 first began to spread exponentially.²⁸⁸

In addition to the official press releases used by the Center for Advanced Governance to create the data set on which the following map is based, according to unofficial reports Russia sent humanitarian aid to Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Mozambique (not in fig.4-5).²⁸⁹

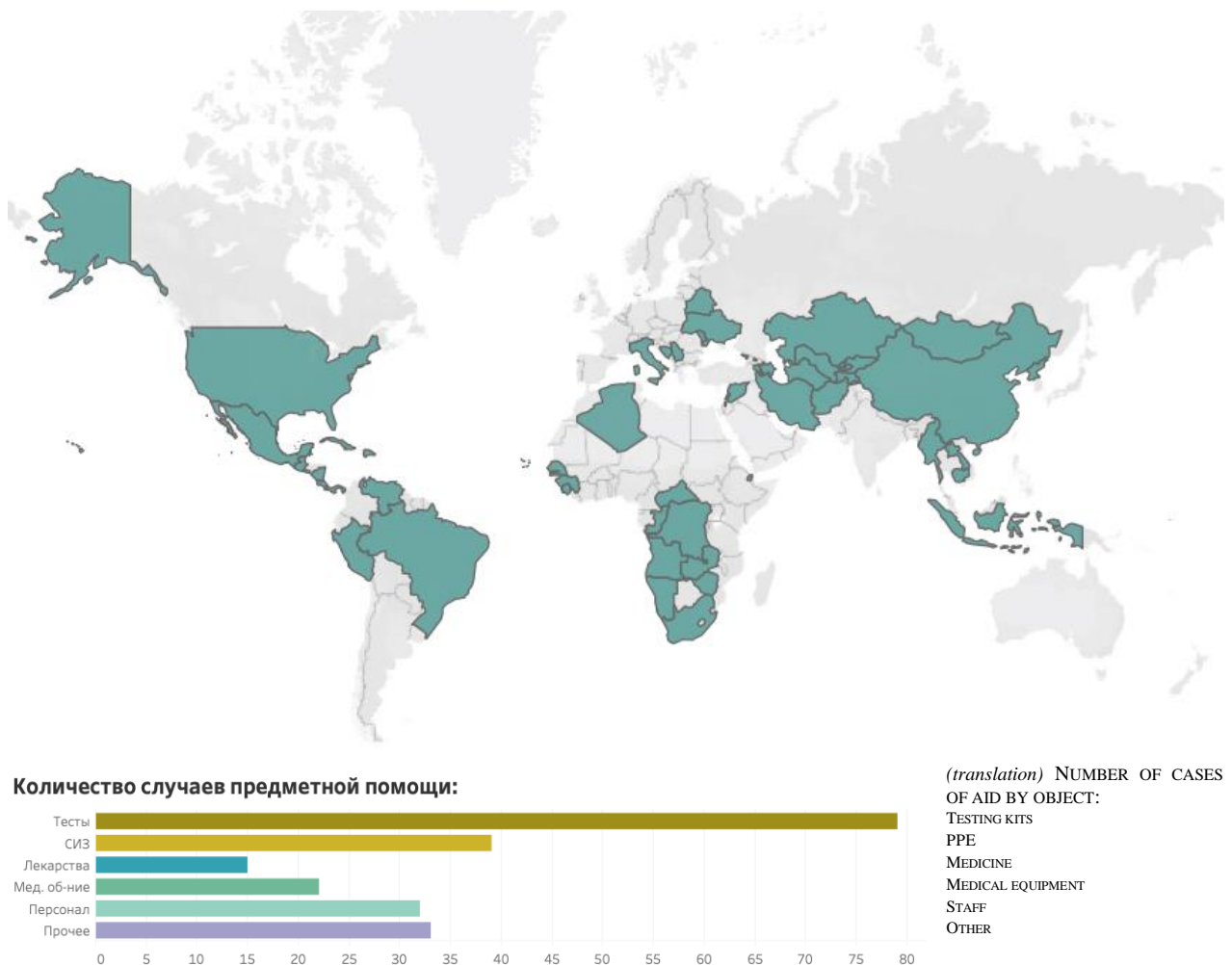


Figure 5. COVID-19 humanitarian aid provided by Russian state and non-state actors (Feb. 2020-Feb. 2021). Source: CAG.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Degterev (2020).

²⁸⁸ Pellicciari (2020), p. 95.

²⁸⁹ Sindle, E. (2021). COVID-19 Assistance to Africa: From Russia With Love. *Africa Watch: Covid-19 Edition*. Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analysis, pp. 8-10.

²⁹⁰ Центр перспективных управленческих решений [Center for Advanced Governance] Website. *Карта гуманитарной помощи. Кому и как помогла Россия для борьбы с пандемией?* [Map of humanitarian aid. Whom

In the past decade, all of the countries in fig. 5 had already received Russian ODA, with varying degrees of continuity, except for the US and Italy (cfr. fig. 3). Considering the top 10 recipients of Russian ODA,²⁹¹ all but Mozambique received aid from Russian state actors. In particular, humanitarian aid to Central Asia and Africa as part of this first phase of Russian health assistance comes as no surprise.

Denis Degterev mentions the principle of “neighborhood first responder”²⁹², whereby as a rule in international relations, neighboring states are the first to provide assistance in case of emergency. Indeed, 54% of aid deliveries were sent to a group of neighboring countries comprising all CIS countries, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donetsk and Lugansk, China, Mongolia and North Korea. As outlined in para. 2.2.2, the CIS countries and the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the priority of the 2014 Concept.

The second largest recipient group (15% of aid deliveries) encompasses Africa and the Middle East. In Africa, Russia’s humanitarian aid adds to a growing presence in the continent through strategic investments in the energy and raw materials sectors by state-owned companies, military agreements and Russian boots on the ground, as well as ODA flows. In the Middle East, Russia is militarily present in Syria and arguably planning to stay in the Mediterranean in the long term.²⁹³

Russian aid to China in the early days of the pandemic was reciprocated in April 2020 when a humanitarian aid cargo of roughly the same weight as the Russian one was delivered by China, along with a team of medical experts. The exchange of aid is described as Sino-Russian mutual cooperation;²⁹⁴ indeed, the two powers cooperate in many other areas. China’s reciprocation of the gift made by Russia differentiates this instance of aid delivery from the traditional donor-recipient relationship, which is by definition unequal and based on the suspension of the social obligation to counter-give. By promptly and visibly reciprocating, China avoided falling into a subordinate position vis-à-vis Russia in the health domain. According to the theory of the gift,²⁹⁵ this would be a case of reciprocal recognition, whereby gift-giving practices can lay the foundations for the creation of a community of equals and for conflict reduction.

Much more peculiar cases were those of Italy and the US. Both aid deliveries arrived aboard Russian military aircraft that read on the side the slogan “From Russia With Love”. The involvement of the Defense Ministry was not positively perceived by media in these NATO countries, as mentioned above. Moreover, both countries are traditional and large ODA donors, turned recipients

and how did Russia help to fight the pandemic?]. Available at [<https://cpur.ru/russian-anti-covid-aid-2021-map/>], accessed 20 May 2021.

²⁹¹ See para. 2.2.2.

²⁹² Degterev (2020).

²⁹³ See para. 2.2.2.

²⁹⁴ Degterev (2020).

²⁹⁵ See para 1.2.1.

during the COVID-19 emergency. The Italian case will be analyzed in para. 3.2.3. As for the US, according to American media reports Russia sent 4000 masks (very few compared to the 2 million delivered to China), more suited to the military than to healthcare workers, and then a higher number of respirators, disinfectant, gloves and medical clothing. The utility of the humanitarian aid was questioned, not only with regard to the masks but also concerning 45 ventilators that could not be used because of the different voltage used in the US and Russia, and that had caused fires leading to the death of several Russian patients.²⁹⁶ Two further elements undermined the positive effect that the mission could have had in terms of public diplomacy: news reports, which deemed the aid useless, relayed that it had been half paid for by the US (\$660.000 were billed to the US), so that Russia's humanitarian goodwill appeared to be a less important motive for the aid delivery. However, it is common for ODA not to be completely free: the transaction is generally a loan with a grant element that can be as low as 10% for the richest among DAC-list countries. The second element is that it was uncovered that the aid delivery had been funded by the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and a few ventilators had been provided by a subsidiary of Rostec: both entities were (and are still)²⁹⁷ under US sanctions in relation to Russia's violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine in 2014, again striking at any aspiration Russia might have had to improve its reputation as a humanitarian actor. In terms of social obligations arising in the donor-recipient relationship, the US was quick to reciprocate the aid, as China did. In late May 2020, the US donated \$5.6 million in humanitarian aid to Russia, part of which consisted of 200 ventilators.²⁹⁸ Surely, counter-giving by China and the US was motivated by the stated intention to cooperate, maintain good relations or build better ones, maybe even gratitude if one stays within the social values system, but these reciprocations may be largely motivated by the willingness to quickly shed the image of recipient countries, as it symbolizes a material and moral hierarchy that has a weakening effect on the recipient²⁹⁹ - similarly to Russia refunding the GFATM for its AIDS-related multilateral aid, when it reappeared in the global health arena.

The other targets of Russia's mask diplomacy in Europe were Republika Srpska and Serbia; the latter is Russia's closest ally in the Balkans and one of the top 10 recipients of Russian ODA.

²⁹⁶ Flaherty, A. et al (2020, May 1). Russia bills US \$660K for aid that included gas masks, household cleaning gloves. *ABCNews*. Available at [https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/russia-bills-us-660k-aid-included-gas-masks/story?id=70451912]; Eckel, M. (2020, May 13). The Strange Story Of A Russian Ventilator Shipment To The U.S. Just Got Stranger. *RFERL*. Available at [https://www.rferl.org/a/strange-story-russian-ventilator-shipment-to-the-u-s-just-got-stranger/30610356.html].

²⁹⁷ US Office of Foreign Assets Control Website. *Sanctions List Search*. Available at [https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov], accessed 21 May 2021.

²⁹⁸ US Embassy & Consulates in Russia. (2020, May 21). *Delivery of U.S. Ventilators to Russia*. Available at [https://ru.usembassy.gov/delivery-of-u-s-ventilators-to-russia/].

²⁹⁹ See para. 1.2.1.

Besides the case of rich aid recipients (US, Italy), the other new trend that emerged during the pandemic is that of poorer donors. With regard to Russia, an example can be found in health aid provided by Vietnam, an historical Russian ally but also a lower middle income country still on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, which sent 200.000 masks to Russia in April 2020.³⁰⁰

Mask diplomacy lost momentum as the pandemic progressed: industrial facilities across the world turned to manufacturing COVID-19 supplies (masks and the like), as in war-time production, until shortages ceased to be an issue in the developed world and the public opinion increasingly focused on vaccines. Nevertheless, humanitarian aid continues to be delivered as variants of the virus emerge causing new and deadly waves of COVID-19. During the latest outbreak in India, in April 2021, Russia provided medical aid, “in the spirit of friendship and an especially privileged and strategic partnership”³⁰¹.

3.2.2 Donor competition: US and China

In early February 2020, the US sent 17.8 tons of medical supplies (e.g., masks, suits, respirators) to China.³⁰² As COVID-19 became a global pandemic in March, the US was late in both its domestic reaction and global response. The US Trump Administration downplayed the threat until a full-blown pandemic hit the country and the US was unable to quickly provide foreign countries with medical equipment, because it was necessary for its domestic response: it had become a scarce resource worldwide and even in the first economy of the world. At the end of March, the US earmarked \$274 million for emergency health and humanitarian funding, channeled through USAID and multilateral organizations across at least 63 states.³⁰³ However, this financial assistance did not involve the direct delivery of much-needed medical supplies – the core of mask diplomacy – but it rather financed communication campaigns to educate people on the disease, prevention, cases surveillance and contact-tracing, water and sanitation. It was reported that in early March USAID provided PPE to a number of developing countries from its emergency international stockpile, but the government asked it to stop shortly after, given the scarcity in the US. USAID even delivered PPE from its warehouse in Dubai (UAE) to Oregon (US). Allegedly, US aid workers were asked not to buy PPE for foreign countries unless it was produced in the country that needed it. President Donald Trump’s lack of interest in mask diplomacy was even clearer when he demanded the prohibition of

³⁰⁰ Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. *Press releases 14 Apr 2020 and 17 Apr 2020*; OECD. (2020). *DAC List of ODA Recipients*.

³⁰¹ Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2021, Apr 28). *О направлении медицинской помощи Республике Индии* [About the sending of medical aid to the Republic of India]. Press release. Available at [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4715108].

³⁰² US DoS. (2020, Feb 7). *The United States Announces Assistance To Combat the Novel Coronavirus*. Press Statement.

³⁰³ US DoS. (2020, Mar 27). *The United States Is Leading the Humanitarian and Health Assistance Response to COVID-19*. Fact Sheet.

US exports of masks.³⁰⁴ In early April, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency approved a temporary rule that prevented scarce PPE (masks, respirators and gloves) necessary within the US from being exported, implementing Trump's policy.³⁰⁵ In May 2020, Trump announced the withdrawal from the WHO and halted US contributions, in a move that could be set within the US overall decreasing commitment to multilateralism, but that also showed specifically a lack of donor coordination. The decision was reversed in January 2021 by US President Joe Biden.

According to Fact Sheets published by the US Department of State, medical supplies were first delivered to foreign countries only in May, when ventilators were provided to South Africa, and in June to Russia.³⁰⁶ By contrast, half of Russia's COVID-19 related aid deliveries were made just in February-May 2020,³⁰⁷ when the situation was direst and most countries unprepared. By November 2020, USAID had delivered 8,000 ventilators to 37 countries.³⁰⁸ Since the start of the pandemic, the US has committed more than \$1.5 billion in COVID-19 related aid for 120 countries, through the State Department and USAID.³⁰⁹

US international health assistance was very much centralized through the State Department and USAID, but other entities contributed too: the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense (DoD). The defense, which plays a significant role in Russia's COVID-19 related aid, is therefore involved to a certain degree also in American aid. As of October 2020, the DoD delivered more than \$105 million worth of aid to 139 countries, through its Humanitarian Assistance and Response Operations (HARO) team, which reports to have provided not only financial aid, but also equipment and expertise.³¹⁰ Proving to the DoD's involvement, the latest shipment of medical aid (to India in late April 2021, arrived in the same couple of days as the Russian aid) was delivered by US Air Force, thus by military aircraft.³¹¹

³⁰⁴ Jakes, L. (2020, Apr 16). U.S. Sends Funds to Needy Nations to Fight the Virus, but Maybe Not for Masks. *The New York Times*. Available at [<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/us/politics/coronavirus-foreign-aid-protective-equipment.html>].

³⁰⁵ *Prioritization and Allocation of Certain Scarce or Threatened Health and Medical Resources for Domestic Use*. 44 CFR § 328 (2020, April 10).

³⁰⁶ US DoS. (2020, June 18). *UPDATE: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19*. Fact Sheet.

³⁰⁷ See CAG data set as per note 262.

³⁰⁸ USAID Website. *Saving lives with ventilators*. 2 Nov 2020. Available at [<https://www.usaid.gov/coronavirus/fact-sheets/saving-lives-ventilators>].

³⁰⁹ US DoS Website. *Foreign Assistance for Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Available at [<https://www.state.gov/foreign-assistance-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>], accessed 21 May 2021.

³¹⁰ Garamone, J. (2020, Oct 9). DOD Uses International Contacts to Help Allies, Partners Combat COVID-19. *US Department of Defense News*. Available at [<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2378223/dod-uses-international-contacts-to-help-allies-partners-combat-covid-19/source/GovDelivery/>].

³¹¹ Lopez Todd, C. (2021, Apr 30). U.S. Sends Medical Supplies to India to Help in COVID-19 Fight. *US Department of Defense News*. Available at [<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2590200/us-sends-medical-supplies-to-india-to-help-in-covid-19-fight/>].

The increased focus on foreign assistance for COVID-19 is of strategic importance to the Biden Administration, which took office in 2021. Aiming to restore America's leadership in global crises, in April 2021 it increased by 10% the funding for USAID, prioritizing health, to which \$10 billion will be devoted in the fiscal year 2022. It is now too late for the US to reap the same reputational benefits as Russia and China from COVID-19 material aid – the opportunity for mask diplomacy had to be seized at the beginning, in the moment of highest need. The competition among donors has now shifted to vaccines and to taking the lead in future prevention. Indeed, the strategic objective set for USAID is to support research and build prevention and detection capabilities, as well as resilience, through its aid programs.³¹²

China was able to reverse the damage to its reputation suffered because of its early mismanagement of the pandemic – i.e., efforts to hide the rising epidemic in November 2019, delay in alerting the international community, reticence to share COVID-19 related data – by filling the leadership void left by the US and traditional donors preoccupied with their domestic health emergencies, thus asserting itself as a global health leader. Not only was China the first country to bring domestic COVID-19 cases down to a manageable level and thus begin the post-pandemic economic recovery, but it also led global health assistance by providing material aid to almost every foreign country. In fact, when China began to emerge out of the pandemic in the second half of March 2020, the rest of the world was falling deep into it. China could showcase its experience as a model of domestic pandemic management, and it also had the production capacity to supply the rest of the world with global public goods in the form of much needed surgical masks, respirators, ventilators, protective suits, testing kits and medicine. The supply capacity was in part preexistent and in part rapidly built up to fight COVID-19; most of the producers of protective masks were already based in China. Further, medical teams were sent abroad to support doctors in at least 43 countries; being the first country affected by the disease, medical teams from China could share relevant experience.³¹³ In an attempt to drive global coordination, diplomatic video-call conferences were led by China to share information and experience.³¹⁴

At the outset, when COVID-19 was an epidemic limited to China, the country had sought international aid, receiving funds and equipment from more than 58 countries, both traditional donors and BRI partners – aid deliveries to China from the US and Russia have been presented in this paragraph. Then, starting in late February 2020, China turned to the role of donor. Its COVID-19 material aid has reached almost every country in the world, including G7 powers and areas of specific

³¹² US Office of Management and Budget. (2021, Apr 9). *The President's FY 2022 Discretionary Request*.

³¹³ Rudolf, M. (2021). China's health diplomacy during Covid-19: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in action. *SWP Comment*, 9/2021. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

³¹⁴ Campbell, K. M. & Doshi, R. (2020, Mar 18). The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order. *Foreign Affairs*. Available at [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-03-18/coronavirus-could-reshape-global-order>].

geopolitical interest to the US (Latin America, Middle East) and Russia (Central Asia), filling in for the absent US and the smaller volume of Russia's contributions. In Europe, the narrative of Chinese mask diplomacy was bolstered particularly by early aid to Italy and Spain. Aid was delivered to the latter by the BRI train rather than by aircraft, in a move that required more time but also had a greater visual impact on the public opinion.³¹⁵ Further, the fact that like many other recipients Spain is not a BRI partner, although talks of Chinese-Spanish strategic partnership have been underway since 2018,³¹⁶ lends support to the claim that a strategic goal of China's aid is to gain a position where its influence is not established yet.³¹⁷

Chinese aid was delivered via a range of state and non-state actors: central government and Communist Party, Chinese local entities, the army, state-owned companies already operating in aid recipient countries in Africa, telecom company Huawei (in countries where it is strategically expanding the 5G network), foundations, NGOs and Chinese expats.³¹⁸

China was presented by Chinese diplomats and China-aligned news outlets as “a rescuer that is the equal of the aid recipient countries”³¹⁹, thus stressing the narrative of cooperation among equals that is characteristic of the country's South-South cooperation philosophy. Further in line with China's overall aid strategy, in May 2020, at the 73rd World Health Assembly of the WHO, China committed to take responsibility for global public health, thus acting as a responsible international great power – a stated objective of its aid strategy – that strives to build a “global community of health for all”³²⁰. On that occasion, it announced \$2 billion in international aid to be distributed over two years, as well as cooperation with 30 African hospitals and making available COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good, once China developed them.³²¹ In general, stated motivations of Chinese mask diplomacy were gratitude for the initial solidarity of other countries and willingness to act as a responsible power and to increase future cooperation.³²² Indeed, on the latter point, it should be noted that China's health assistance was linked to the BRI as part of the “Health Silk Road”, a concept that comprises health cooperation initiatives launched in bilateral, regional and multilateral formats, and that allows China to enshrine health assistance in its wider aid framework, linking material aid

³¹⁵ Shepard, W. (2020, Mar 27). China's 'Health Silk Road' Gets A Boost From COVID-19. *Forbes*. Available at [https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2020/03/27/chinas-health-silk-road-gets-a-boost-from-covid-19/?sh=95a114e6043d].

³¹⁶ Green Belt and Road Initiative Center. (2019, June 26). *Spain*. Available at [https://green-bri.org/tag/spain/].

³¹⁷ Pellicciari, I. (2020). Guerra (e pace) degli Aiuti nel dopo-Covid-19 [War and Peace of Aid after COVID-19]. In A. Campi. *Dopo. Come la pandemia può cambiare la politica, l'economia, la comunicazione e le relazioni internazionali* [How the pandemic may change politics, economy, communication and international relations]. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

³¹⁸ Rudolf (2021).

³¹⁹ Rudolf (2021), p. 4.

³²⁰ President of the People's Republic of China. (2020). *Fighting COVID-19 Through Solidarity and Cooperation. Building a Global Community of Health for All*. Statement, Virtual 73rd World Health Assembly, Beijing, 18 May 2020.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Kobierecka, A. & Kobierecki, M. M. (2021). Coronavirus diplomacy: Chinese medical assistance and its diplomatic implications. *International Politics*, published online at [doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00273-1], pp. 13-14.

deliveries with debt suspension and post-pandemic economic cooperation in other sectors, such as infrastructure, digital economy, energy. Health appeared on the BRI agenda in 2015, while the concept of Health Silk Road was first used in a 2017 China-WHO Memorandum of Understanding on Health Sector Cooperation within BRI.³²³

As for other donors, not all Chinese aid was donated, but part of it was paid for by recipient countries. Official statements often do not distinguish between donations and sales, but as outlined at the beginning of section 3.2, under circumstances of scarcity both may be analyzed as aid.

Concerning Russia's areas of geopolitical influence (or ambitions thereof) and donor competition in mask diplomacy, the following aspects emerge from the analysis of donors' responses.

In its Near Abroad, Russia's mask diplomacy was timely, as it started in early February when cases of COVID-19 had not yet been recorded in the region (the first was in March 2020 in Kazakhstan) and continued in the following months. Russia-led regional organization such as EAEU, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and CIS provided platforms for policy coordination and information exchange (based for instance on Russian doctors' experience in missions to Italy and Serbia).³²⁴ Nevertheless, Russia was not in a position to provide sufficient aid to these countries, as it was fighting the pandemic at home and its economy was suffering from the decrease of global gas demand and the oil price war with Saudi Arabia. Further, a demographic variable such as the dwindling number of migrant workers from Central Asia, who were unable to move to Russia in Spring 2020 because of border closures or who moved back to their home countries because of lockdowns, curtailed Russia's soft power and leverage on Central Asian governments.³²⁵ In turn, China was able to provide more humanitarian aid as well as financial aid. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could afford to tap into their sovereign wealth funds to a certain degree, but the other countries are heavily indebted to China and sought its help soon. For instance, Kyrgyzstan asked first for China's debt relief, rather than Russia's help.³²⁶

With regard to Africa, Russian aid began to arrive in late April in Algeria and Djibouti, while the other African recipient countries had to wait until May or even following months, despite the fact that some assistance requests had been submitted to Russia at least in the second half of April.³²⁷ At that point Russia was facing a worsening pandemic at home and was late in its response to Africa,

³²³ Rudolf (2021), pp. 4-5.

³²⁴ Degterev (2020), pp. 4-5.

³²⁵ Stronski, P. (2020, July 8). Coronavirus in the Caucasus and Central Asia. *Carnegie Moscow Center*. Available at [<https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/coronavirus-in-caucasus-and-central-asia-pub-81898>].

³²⁶ Stronski, P. (2020, Sept 3). COVID-19 Exposes the Fragility of Central Asia. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at [<https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/09/03/covid-19-exposes-fragility-of-central-asia-pub-82660>]; Stronski, P. (2020). *There Goes the Neighborhood: The Limits of Russian Integration in Eurasia*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 10.

³²⁷ Tchoubar, P. (2020, Apr 29). Covid-19: A test for Russia's African ambitions. *ECFR*. Available at [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_covid_19_a_test_for_russias_african_ambitions/].

while China had already taken the lead.³²⁸ China's material aid showcased its commitment to cooperate with African countries and to act as a responsible power. Another major issue exacerbated by the pandemic is the debt burden on African states, to which China contributes greatly with BRI. Next to its successful mask diplomacy, China's credibility as a donor was strengthened by debt relief programs in the framework of its COVID-19 international response. African countries have benefitted from China's participation to the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative for Poorest Countries (through which it has deferred debt repayment for \$1.3 billion globally)³²⁹ and from debt relief provided by Chinese institutional lenders; among them, CIDCA, which managed debt relief to 15 African countries through the Forum on Africa-China Cooperation.³³⁰

In the Balkans, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina received Russian governmental humanitarian aid starting in April, and non-governmental aid already in March. Bosnia-Herzegovina as a federal entity did not receive aid, which was instead delivered directly to the sub-entity Republika Srpska, which is controlled by the Serb majority and thus has special relations with Russia. A Russian military mission was deployed there for two weeks, but permission for its return in early May was denied by the Republika. Conversely, Russian military were allowed to stay in Serbia for six weeks, officially to disinfect facilities and help set up field hospitals. The volume of Russia's aid to Serbia was remarkable, almost equal to the aid given to Italy which was in a much worse health emergency,³³¹ but the reception was not as warm as the one reserved to Chinese aid: while Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic was not present at the arrival of Russian cargos and thanked Putin via Twitter and a telephone call, he showed greater appreciation to the Chinese, by greeting Chinese doctors in person at the airport and even kissing the Chinese flag.³³² Not only has China been investing heavily in the country, but it was also argued that by this move Vucic aimed to attract more assistance from other donors such as the EU – as it did happen – thus leveraging the dynamics of donor competition to the advantage of the recipient country. Still, the Serbian response showed quite a shift for Moscow's geopolitical influence in the region to Beijing's advantage.

³²⁸ Procopio, M. (2020, Apr 7). China's Health Diplomacy in Africa: Pitfalls Behind the Leading Role. *Ispionline*. Available at [https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/chinas-health-diplomacy-africa-pitfalls-behind-leading-role-25694].

³²⁹ President of the People's Republic of China. (2021). *Working Together to Build a Global Community of Health for All. Remarks at the Global Health Summit*. 21 May 2021. Available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1877666.shtml].

³³⁰ Acker, K., Brautigam, D., Wang, Y. (2021). Global Debt Relief Dashboard: Tracking Chinese Debt Relief in the COVID-19 Era. *China Africa Research Initiative (CARI)*. Available at [http://www.sais-cari.org/debt-relief], accessed 22 May 2021.

³³¹ Samorukov, M. (2020). *Ventilator Diplomacy in the Balkans*. Carnegie Moscow Center. 8 July 2020. Available at [https://carnegie.ru/2020/07/08/ventilator-diplomacy-in-balkans-pub-81895].

³³² Vuksanovic, V. (2020, July 16). *From Russia With Love? Serbia's Lukewarm Reception of Russian Aid and Its Geopolitical Implications*. LSE Ideas. Available at [https://lseideas.medium.com/from-russia-with-love-serbias-lukewarm-reception-of-russian-aid-and-its-geopolitical-implications-a911b3ec09a7].

3.2.3 From Russia with Love – to Italy

Russia's COVID-19 material aid to Italy has been addressed in para. 3.2.1 alongside Russian aid to the US, with reference to the peculiarity of rich and traditional donors becoming aid recipients and the negative perception by these countries' public opinion with regard to the involvement of Russian military aircraft and personnel.

Amidst the slow and limited response by EU member states to Italy's request for PPE through the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which was submitted at the end of February, assistance by non-EU states was more timely: China was the first donor, with the Chinese Red Cross sending 30 tons of equipment, e.g. ventilators and masks, as early as March 12, 2020. Chinese deliveries continued, either donated or purchased, and encompassed also a material aid delivery channeled to Italy through the EU.³³³ Russia's strictly bilateral assistance followed suit: on March 22, 2020 the Ministry of Defense in cooperation with Rospotrebnadzor sent a team of 100 military, with medical equipment and a mobile laboratory for analysis and diagnostics. Amongst them, a group of doctors (epidemiologists, virologists, resuscitators, therapists) treated patients; other military helped disinfect the areas of Bergamo and Brescia, in the hard-hit Lombardy region. Additional material aid was sent in the following days by the Ministry of Defense and RDIF as well as other state-linked aid (through the Russian Peace Fond) and non-state aid sent by the Orthodox community to the Apulia region, which has strong religious ties with the Orthodox Christians.³³⁴ The Russian military team that arrived on March 22 was deployed to Italy for almost eight weeks (more than in Balkan countries).

US aid was pledged only on April 10, almost a full month after China's and about 20 days after Russia's. It consisted of various forms of aid, from financial and technical support to multilateral organizations, NGOs, and businesses, to the reliance on the existing presence of American military in Italy. However, the delivery of medical equipment was subject to the condition that it not be needed for the domestic response³³⁵ – on that same day, the temporary rule preventing scarce PPE (masks, respirators and gloves) from being exported was adopted, thus limiting humanitarian aid to Italy.

Countries that are usually ODA recipients (DAC-List countries) also sent aid to Italy: this is the case of poor donors and rich recipients, that inverts the traditional North-South donor-recipient

³³³ Reuters. (2020, Mar 12). *China sends medical supplies, experts to help Italy battle coronavirus*. Available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy-respirators-idUSKBN2101IM>]; European Commission. (2020, Apr 6). *Coronavirus: Chinese aid to the EU delivered to Italy*. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_600]

³³⁴ CAG data set (2021).

³³⁵ President of the United States. (2020, April 10). *Memorandum on Providing COVID-19 Assistance to the Italian Republic*.

relationship.³³⁶ Albania, Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Ukraine, who are also specifically recipients of Italian ODA, sent bilateral or multilateral aid by mid-April 2020.³³⁷

Arguably, the main drivers of Chinese aid to Italy may be the same ones behind the aid sent to other foreign countries: economic cooperation, (Italy has signed a BRI Memorandum, thus aid is seen as part of the Health Silk Road), desire to shed the perception that China was responsible for the spread of the disease, gratitude for prior Italian aid. Russian humanitarian aid to Italy should be considered not only in relation to the desire for great power recognition and ambitions to be a global health leader, and with regard to data collection purposes, but also specifically in relation to Italy's EU membership and Italy's special relations with Russia.

Despite strong economic ties, EU-Russia relations have stalled since the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea in 2014. Arguably, the cracks became apparent earlier, upon the EU's failure to export its democratic model and values to Russia and Russia's increased assertiveness in foreign policy. In keeping with its view of international politics "as a series of tête-à-têtes between great powers"³³⁸ and in response to this deadlock, Russia has cultivated bilateral relations with EU member states, who have different attitudes towards Russia, rooted in different geopolitical dynamics determined chiefly by historical factors and geographical characteristics. A 2007 study by Leonard and Popescu classified EU member states into 5 categories according to their stance vis à vis Russia, on a spectrum where at one extreme lie the states that see Russia as a potential partner, whilst at the other one are those that see it as a threat. The categories are trojan horses, strategic partners, friendly pragmatists, frosty pragmatists, new cold warriors.³³⁹ Since 2007, the exact classification of a state into one of these categories may have varied, and after 2014 all countries have become more wary of Russia, but the broader view of Russia as a partner or a threat (either to democracy and human rights in general or directly to themselves) is long-term in most cases.³⁴⁰

Italy was considered – and perceived itself – as a strategic partner to Russia in 2007. In the following years, as Italy maintained a cooperative relationship with Russia, promoting a conciliatory approach to the Georgian war in 2008 and criticizing EU sanctions after 2014, some studies portrayed it as a partner to Russia on a similar level as Hungary, Greece and Cyprus, which are generally

³³⁶ Pellicciari (2020).

³³⁷ Cfr. Ricci Sargentini, M. & Soave, I. (2020, April 16). Coronavirus, la mappa degli aiuti: ecco i Paesi che hanno sostenuto l'Italia [Coronavirus, map of the aid: here's the countries that supported Italy]. *Corriere della Sera*. Available at [\[https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_aprile_09/coronavirus-mappa-aiuti-ecco-paesi-che-hanno-sostenuto-l-italia-12ffb40a-79ba-11ea-afb4-c5f49a569528.shtml\]](https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_aprile_09/coronavirus-mappa-aiuti-ecco-paesi-che-hanno-sostenuto-l-italia-12ffb40a-79ba-11ea-afb4-c5f49a569528.shtml); OECD (2020), *DAC List*; Data on ODA from Italy is available at [\[https://stats.oecd.org/\]](https://stats.oecd.org/).

³³⁸ Leonard, M. & Popescu, N. (2007). *A Power Audit of EU-Russia relations*. London: ECFR, p. 14.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Cfr. Liik, K. (2018). *Winning the normative war with Russia. An EU-Russia Power Audit*. London: ECFR. Note that after the invasion of Ukraine, Romania and countries neighboring Russia such as Finland, Estonia and Latvia may be added to the group of new cold warriors that in 2007 comprised Poland and Lithuania, who fear for the EU and their country's military security. Still, none of these countries ever saw Russia as a strategic partner, but had a pragmatic stance already in 2007.

accused of being trojan horses that undermine the unity of EU foreign policy by furthering Russian foreign policy interests.³⁴¹ Trade and energy relations constitute the backbone of Italian-Russian relations, but engaging with Russia has become even more necessary since Russia's return to the Mediterranean, with its active military presence in Syria and particularly its role in the Libyan civil war, which is a priority of Italian foreign policy and bears great consequences for domestic politics.³⁴²

In terms of domestic political returns, the Kremlin would have improved its standing and legitimacy by providing aid to Italy, as Italian culture and trade are very popular in Russia at the grassroots level.³⁴³

The aid deliveries to Italy should thus be considered in light of Russia's interest in its long-standing partnership with Italy. In March 2020, media reports showed a catastrophic situation in the Lombardy region that was likely unmatched in Europe. Nevertheless, other EU member states were facing shortages of medical equipment (Spain in particular), they had sent requests for international assistance.³⁴⁴ Two scenarios may be hypothesized to explain why Russia sent aid only to Italy.

On the one hand, Russia did receive an Italian request for assistance; it could be that other states did not seek Russia's assistance, because of EU sanctions on Russia or simply on account of the general deterioration of EU-Russia relations. Still, they were in need and all accepted Chinese aid.³⁴⁵ This scenario would be further proof of the relevance of international aid in terms of foreign policy. The special Italian-Russian relationship would still explain the aid to Italy.

On the other hand, Russia's availability of medical supplies was hardly comparable to China's greater availability, and it could be that Russia did not have the capacity to assist more European countries, even if they asked. Still, after Italy, countries outside Europe continued to receive Russian humanitarian aid. In this scenario, it would seem that the reason why Russia would provide its medical aid only to Italy is inextricably linked to the donor's geopolitical interests (encompassing a range of factors, political, strategic, economic, symbolic ones) and the special relationship outlined above, at least as one of the drivers of Russia's action.

³⁴¹ See, for instance, Carbone, M. (2008). Russia's Trojan Horse in Europe? *Italian Politics*, 24, pp. 135-151; Guschin, A. V., et al. (2015). The Ukrainian Challenge for Russia. *RIAC Working Paper 24/2015*. Moscow: RIAC; Orenstein, M. A. & Kelemen, R. D. (2016). Trojan Horses in EU Foreign Policy. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55, pp. 87-102.

³⁴² Siddi, M. (2018). Italy's 'Middle Power' Approach to Russia. *The International Spectator*. Published online at [DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2018.1519765].

³⁴³ Pellicciari (2020), 91-93.

³⁴⁴ Notably, many requests were made to the main multilateral mechanism for civil emergency response in the Euro-Atlantic area, which is the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC). Incidentally, EADRCC was created following Russia's proposal in 1998, and brings together NATO and Partnership for Peace countries. Nevertheless, since NATO and Russia halted cooperation in 2014, Russia has not used the mechanism. This is hardly a reason for lack of Russian bilateral assistance to Western states other than Italy and US: China does not work with the EADRCC either.

³⁴⁵ Map of Chinese aid in Rudolf (2021).

3.2.4 Concluding remarks

China's mask diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic encroached upon areas of American and Russian geopolitical influence. The US were not involved in the early mask diplomacy and only provided financial aid: in terms of funds invested (\$1.5 billion), such financial aid was likely superior to the monetary value of Russian material aid, but in terms of increase in the donor's soft power it could not be compared to the supply of medical equipment in time of need. Even when not in large amounts, highly-publicized Russian humanitarian aid (as well as the Chinese) had a great symbolic value, which can be a factor of geopolitical influence, especially compared to the US limit on exports of PPE and the like. From a foreign policy viewpoint, the pay-off of Russia's material aid suffered from donor competition with China, who could afford to distribute a higher volume of aid to more countries due to structural factors – superior economic resources, large presence of mask producers in China – a clearer and long-term oriented aid strategy, whereby recipient countries' indebtedness plays a major role, and the time variable, given that China got the pandemic under control sooner and was more free to direct its health assistance abroad. This is not to say that Russia is openly competing with China: since the Ukraine war and annexation of Crimea in 2014, relations between the two countries have seen an expansion of security, economic and energy cooperation, which is bound to continue.³⁴⁶ Further, both challenge the established international order, that they see as informed by US hegemony. Sino-Russian relations are described by Putin as a “multifaceted strategic partnership”³⁴⁷ and “genuinely close”³⁴⁸. Nevertheless, in terms of reputational dividends via soft power and of geopolitical influence in the rest of the world, mask diplomacy and the related aid has implied dynamics of donor competition.

3.3 Russia's international health assistance – COVID-19 second phase

A vaccine can be a tool of influence for a state in at least two ways. As of itself, it may increase soft power, insofar as it represents the country's scientific advancements and leading medical expertise, therefore attracting less advanced countries towards the developer country's system and values and thus creating greater affinity. When delivered as international humanitarian aid to foreign countries, it may again be a tool of soft power, via the mechanism described in para 1.2.2, or of outright influence, if delivery is used to reward an ally or recruit a new one.

³⁴⁶ Gabuev, A. (2020, Apr 23). The Pandemic Could Tighten China's Grip on Eurasia. *Foreign Policy*. Available at [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/23/coronavirus-pandemic-china-eurasia-russia-influence/>].

³⁴⁷ President of the Russian Federation. (2019). *Transcript of the Valdai International Discussion Club session*. Available at [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61719>].

³⁴⁸ President of the Russian Federation. (2021). *Address for the launch of construction of new power units at Tianwan and Xudapu nuclear power plants*. Available at [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65606>].

COVID-19 vaccines are essential not only to tackle a disease threatening lives, but also to restart the economy at a time when the health crisis has caused a global economic recession threatening livelihoods. This gives an immense bargaining power to the developer, be it a state or a private pharmaceutical company, that can harness it to gain geopolitical influence or make profits. Indeed, states that had the R&D capabilities to try and develop a vaccine largely subsidized their public or private research centers, while the other states scrambled to secure supply of vaccines, even before they were approved by national or international health authorities. Possibly, the state or private actor who discovered the vaccine first would have been able to shape the world order by making distributional choices, determining which countries would emerge from the pandemic sooner than others.³⁴⁹ Quite a few vaccines were developed in different countries around the same time. In the US, they have been used primarily to immunize the domestic population, while Russia and China have also exported them to foreign countries. These international sales represent the bulk of COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy. Even though they were mainly sold rather than donated, in light of vaccine scarcity at the global level the sale may be envisaged as an asymmetrical exchange flow typical of International Aid Public Policies.

The dynamics of geopolitical competition among states with regard to COVID-19 vaccines have been described by Lorenza Errighi as a threefold global race: to develop, to buy and to distribute vaccines.³⁵⁰ Through the lenses of international aid theory, while the procurement concerns recipient countries' policies, development and distribution are relevant to the donor's perspective.

3.3.1 Vaccine development: state (East) vs private sector (West)

Sputnik V vs Western vaccines

On August 11, 2020, Putin announced that Russia was the first country in the world to register a vaccine for COVID-19. The official name is Gam-COVID-Vac, but it is widely known by its commercial name Sputnik V. It was developed by Gamaleya (research center under the Ministry of Health), building also on experience gained with the Ebola vaccine.³⁵¹ It is reported that the “race to develop” was internal as well: Gamaleya and Rospotrebnadzor's laboratory Vector (a former USSR biological weapons laboratory) retained data from one another in the early months of the pandemic, in a competition allegedly exploited by Putin to pressure both labs to accelerate their research and thus win the global race.³⁵² Despite claims by Putin that the results of clinical trials showed “high

³⁴⁹ Furlong, A. (2020, July 27). The ultimate geopolitical game - distributing a coronavirus vaccine. *Politico*. Available at [<https://www.politico.eu/article/the-ultimate-geopolitical-game-distributing-a-coronavirus-vaccine/>].

³⁵⁰ Errighi, L. (2021). COVID-19 and the Global Vaccine Race. *IAI Commentaries*, 21(19).

³⁵¹ Jones, I. & Roy, P. (2021). Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine candidate appears safe and effective. *The Lancet*, 397(10275), pp. 642 – 643.

³⁵² Twigg, J. (2020, Aug 12). Vaccine Dreams and Russian Reality. *Council on Foreign Relations-Think Global Health*. Available at [<https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/vaccine-dreams-and-russian-reality>].

effectiveness and security”³⁵³, the vaccine’s quick development sparked skepticism across the Western world and also within Russia; in particular the Russian Association of Clinical Research Organizations asked to delay registration until completion of phase 3 clinical trials. Despite Russia’s efforts to boost its pharmaceutical industry (see Pharma-2020 and -2030 strategies)³⁵⁴, according to international experts Russia still lacks a recent history and reputation for developing high-quality innovative drugs, which undermines its credibility, and faces production issues as it has not yet updated pharmaceutical industrial facilities sufficiently to be on par with Western developers, or with BRICS pharma powerhouses such as India and China.³⁵⁵ Upon eliciting international criticism, it was clarified that the registration was a conditional registration certificate that would only be confirmed after positive results from phase 3.³⁵⁶ In November 2020, Russia launched a domestic mass vaccination campaign, whilst results of phase 3 trials, that involved volunteers in Russia, Belarus, UAE and Venezuela, were published on the leading medical journal *The Lancet* only on February 2, 2021, reporting a 91.6% efficacy.³⁵⁷ A commentary published a few days later on the same journal took note of the international criticism for lack of transparency and corner-cutting in the development process, but also assessed that the outcome of phase 3 trials was clearly reported and “the scientific principle of vaccination [...] demonstrated”³⁵⁸.

However, the Gamaleya-developed jab is still awaiting approval of its application to be on the WHO Emergency Use Listing (EUL) of COVID-19 vaccines, submitted in October 2020. The very first vaccine added to the list, on December, 31, 2020 was actually the one developed jointly by American MNC Pfizer and German company BioNTech, then in the following months other vaccines were added, produced by western Big Pharma companies, that is British-Swedish MNC AstraZeneca which developed a vaccine with the University of Oxford (approved also in versions produced in South Korea and India), American MNC Johnson&Johnson, American MNC Moderna. Chinese vaccines produced by partly-state-owned company Sinopharm and private company Sinovac were also added to the WHO EUL in May 2021.³⁵⁹ In terms of discovery, Sputnik V preceded Pfizer-BioNTech by just three months; moreover, by the time the latter was announced, its phase 3 trials

³⁵³ RBC. (2020, Aug 11). *Путин объявил о регистрации вакцины от коронавируса в России* [Putin announced the registration of a vaccine against coronavirus in Russia]. Available at [<https://www.rbc.ru/society/11/08/2020/5f3256989a79472274d74d9b>].

³⁵⁴ See para. 3.1.3.

³⁵⁵ Twigg (2020).

³⁵⁶ Reeve, P. & Salzman, S. (2020, Aug 20). Russia announces expanded trials for coronavirus vaccine approved 10 days ago. *ABCNews*. Available at [<https://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-announces-expanded-trials-coronavirus-vaccine-approved-10/story?id=72497297>].

³⁵⁷ Logunov, D. Y. et al. (2021). Safety and efficacy of an rAd26 and rAd5 vector-based heterologous prime-boost COVID-19 vaccine: an interim analysis of a randomised controlled phase 3 trial in Russia. *The Lancet*, 397(10275), pp. 671 – 681.

³⁵⁸ Jones & Roy (2021), p. 643.

³⁵⁹ WHO. (2021) *Status of COVID-19 Vaccines within WHO EUL/PQ evaluation process. 18 May 2021*. Available at [https://extranet.who.int/pqweb/sites/default/files/documents/Status_COVID_VAX_18May2021.pdf], accessed 25 May 2021.

had already been concluded, while they had not in Sputnik V's case.³⁶⁰ Arriving first in the race to develop had its downsides, as the announcement of Sputnik V's discovery was perceived as rushed and undermined the credibility of the vaccine, both at the international level and at the level of domestic public opinion – where a general lack of confidence in vaccines and little perception of risk among the population, given that a lockdown as strict as in the West was not imposed, have contributed to a low domestic vaccination rate.³⁶¹

The February 2, 2021 Lancet article states that funding was provided by the Moscow City Health Department, Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), and Sberbank (Russian state-owned bank): a full-fledged state operation. Although not advertised on the vaccine's official website,³⁶² the Ministry of Defense played an important role in the development of Sputnik V, as had been with the Ebola vaccine developed by Gamaleya. The deployment of military doctors in humanitarian aid deliveries during the first phase of Russia's international response can be seen in light of the involvement of the Ministry of Defense in vaccine research. Preclinical studies were conducted at Gamaleya as well as at the 48th Central Scientific Research Institute (48 ЦНИИ – research center on issues related to the fight against dangerous infectious diseases and for biological security)³⁶³ of the Ministry of Defense.³⁶⁴ Clinical trials were undertaken in June 2020 at Burdenko Military hospital, by Gamaleya in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense, and at Sechenov University.³⁶⁵

Western states also provided funding for vaccine research in their countries: Pfizer-BioNTech received funding from Germany in the early phase of development,³⁶⁶ Oxford-Astrazeneca from the

³⁶⁰ Pfizer. (2020, Nov 18). *Pfizer and Biontech Conclude Phase 3 Study of Covid-19 Vaccine Candidate, Meeting All Primary Efficacy Endpoints*. Available at [<https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/pfizer-and-biontech-conclude-phase-3-study-covid-19-vaccine>].

³⁶¹ Zafesova, A. (2021, Mar 9). Sputnik V: il lato politico del vaccino di Putin [The Political Side to Putin's Vaccine]. *Affari Internazionali*. Available at [<https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2021/03/sputnik-v-cosa-ce-dietro-il-vaccino-di-putin/>]. As of 25 May 2021, only 25 million Russians, which is around 10% of the population, have received at least the first dose, compared to 49% of Americans. See, Our World in Data. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations*. Available at [<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=~RUS>], accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁶² Sputnik V Official Website. Available at [<https://sputnikvaccine.com>], accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁶³ Russia's Ministry of Defense. *48 Центральный научно-исследовательский институт Министерства обороны Российской Федерации* [48 Central Scientific Research Institute of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation]. Available at [<https://ens.mil.ru/science/SRI/information.htm?id=12024@morfOrgScience>], accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁶⁴ Russia's Ministry of Defense. (2020, Aug 11). *Получен патент Российской Федерации на изобретение в отношении вакцины от нового коронавируса COVID-19* [Patent of the Russian Federation received for the invention in relation to the vaccine against the novel coronavirus COVID-19]. Available at [https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12306617@egNews].

³⁶⁵ Russia's Ministry of Defense. (2020, June 18). *Минобороны России приступило к испытанию российской вакцины от COVID-19* [The Ministry of Defense of Russia started the trial of the Russian vaccine against COVID-19]. Available at [https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12297855@egNews].

³⁶⁶ Griffin, R. & Armstrong, D. (2020, Nov 9). Pfizer Vaccine's Funding Came From Berlin, Not Washington. *Bloomberg*. Available at [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-09/pfizer-vaccine-s-funding-came-from-berlin-not-washington>].

UK,³⁶⁷ Johnson&Johnson and Moderna from the US,³⁶⁸ but still the role of the state was that of indirect support to private companies, not of direct control, as production was then funded and managed by the companies themselves. The state ownership of the whole process, from development to distribution (assessed in the next paragraph), is a characteristic that Russia shares with China. Indeed, besides Sinopharm which is state-owned, the Sinovac vaccine (Coronavac) development is reported on the Lancet to be fully funded by the Chinese government.³⁶⁹

The early discovery of a vaccine afforded the state-developer (Russia, China) an opportunity to reap the political returns not only in international relations, but also internally, in terms of domestic support for the government, whose credibility had been weakened by the health crisis. On the contrary, in the Western world where development of COVID-19 vaccines had been led by private initiative, no state could take full credit for the vaccine. Even less could any Western state use it for geopolitical purposes: first, they had to secure supply from private pharmaceutical companies – as states were in a race for vaccine procurement – and only then they could think about exports or donations. While Russia and China, by directly controlling the vaccine development and production, could strike supply deals with other sovereign states (vaccine diplomacy deals), thus setting the exchange against the backdrop of their foreign policy, the Western actors with the corresponding deal-making capacity were Big Pharma companies, that strike business deals rather than diplomacy-oriented ones. Moreover, Western states chose to secure supply for their citizens first, in order to slow down the pandemic at home before they started exporting vaccine doses. In the case of the EU, centralized procurement for domestic use was even complicated by lengthy negotiations over contracts. The EU's inability to secure sufficient and timely supply created a crisis of political legitimacy, exacerbated when some member states began negotiating directly with private companies or even turned to the Russian or Chinese alternatives.³⁷⁰

The different approaches to vaccine R&D (state-led or private initiative) may be rooted in structural factors related to the economy and specifically to the pharmaceutical industry: state control of strategic assets in Russia, where the pharmaceutical sector is growing, but not yet able to compete with Big Pharma nor quite up to date in terms of industrial facilities; the state's fundamental role in China's socialist market economy; highly developed private MNCs in Western market economies.

³⁶⁷ Voysey, M. et al. (2021). Safety and efficacy of the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine (AZD1222) against SARS-CoV-2: an interim analysis of four randomised controlled trials in Brazil, South Africa, and the UK. *The Lancet*, 397(10269), pp. 99-111.

³⁶⁸ Sadoff, J. et al. (2021). Safety and Efficacy of Single-Dose Ad26.COV2.S Vaccine against Covid-19. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Published online at [DOI:10.1056/NEJMoa2101544]; Badel, L. R. et al. (2021). Efficacy and Safety of the mRNA-1273 SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 384, pp. 403-416.

³⁶⁹ Zhang, Y. et al. (2020). Safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of an inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine in healthy adults aged 18–59 years: a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, phase 1/2 clinical trial. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 21(2), pp.181-192.

³⁷⁰ Pellicciari, I. (2021). Nella partita dei vaccini l'Italia è in fuorigioco [In the vaccine game Italy is offside]. *Limes Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica*, 3/2021, pp. 79-83.

These features are mirrored in the donors' approaches to international aid, as seen in chapter II: Russia's closest aid ties, especially in Africa, are those with countries where Russian state-owned companies target strategic resources; China privileges large state-led projects in recipient countries; the US fosters private companies penetration in recipient countries as a strategic objective (through the DFC).

Other Russian COVID-19 vaccines

Other state-sponsored vaccines have been approved in Russia, but for the time being they are only used in the domestic vaccination campaign: Vector has created EpiVacCorona, Gamaleya has devised a single-shot version of its vaccine, dubbed Sputnik Light, the Chumakov Center at the Russian Academy of Sciences has developed CoviVac.³⁷¹

Since March 2021, Russia holds another record in vaccine development, as its Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance *Rosselkhoznadzor* announced that Russia was the first country to have registered a COVID-19 vaccine for animals (Cornivac-Cov), developed by a federal institution. Vaccination of pets and farm animals started in Russia on May 26, 2021.³⁷² The vaccine is intended for domestic use, at least initially, but *Rosselkhoznadzor* said that it has received requests from companies in 12 foreign countries (in the EU, CIS, Asia, South America).³⁷³ The agency's press release cited cases of COVID-19 detected in animals as the reason for this vaccination campaign. Animals are also a possible origin of the virus. This theory would locate the origin of the virus in Wuhan, but likely in order not to put the blame on China, *Rosselkhoznadzor*'s press release reminds that the WHO has not found scientific evidence of this yet. Indeed, the complete history of the origin of the virus has not been confirmed yet and it is a bone of political contention between the US and China. The registration of the vaccine for animals in Russia does not seem to be linked to the question of the origin, but could be seen – beyond the motive of domestic necessity – as a display of Russia's scientific advancement and global health leadership, with clear soft power implications. Whether it will also become a tool of International Aid Public Policies and will be delivered abroad as Sputnik V has been, remains to be seen in the next months.

³⁷¹ Zimmer, C., Corum, J., Wee, S. (2021). Coronavirus Vaccine Tracker. *The New York Times*. Update: 25 May 2021. Available at [<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/science/coronavirus-vaccine-tracker.html#gamaleya>], accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁷² *Rosselkhoznadzor*. (2021, May 26). *В России стартовала вакцинация животных против новой коронавирусной инфекции* [Vaccination of animals against the novel coronavirus infection started in Russia]. Available at [<https://fsvps.gov.ru/fsvps/news/41987.html>].

³⁷³ *Rosselkhoznadzor*. (2021, Mar 31). *В России зарегистрирована первая в мире вакцина против COVID-19 для животных* [The first vaccine in the world against COVID-19 for animals was registered in Russia]. Available at [<https://fsvps.gov.ru/fsvps/news/40810.html>].

3.3.2 Sputnik V distribution

Global reach

International sales of Sputnik V are managed by RDIF, the Russian sovereign wealth fund created in 2011 at the initiative of the President and the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. An investment channel called “RDIF. Healthcare” was launched in December 2020, making healthcare a strategic priority of the fund’s operations.³⁷⁴ RDIF was involved on some occasions in the delivery of medical equipment during the phase of mask diplomacy, but it does not seem to be on track to fill the role of a central aid agency, or even just to become involved in all-around humanitarian aid. Indeed, it does not even have a representative on the Interagency Commission created in November 2020, nor on the previous Sub-commission.

As of this writing, Sputnik V has been approved for use in 67 countries outside Russia (fig. 6).³⁷⁵ More than 90% of these countries are on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, which shows that the Russian vaccine is more popular amongst developing countries. In terms of continuity in the aid relationships that Russia has established with these countries, 55% have received Russian ODA at some point before and after 2015; 25% received Russian ODA only before 2015; at least 50% received humanitarian aid to tackle COVID-19 in 2020 or 2021.³⁷⁶ These countries have at the same time struggled to obtain access to Western vaccines, which are more expensive and were unavailable due to massive and early purchases by developed countries.

While production agreements with foreign companies and registration of the vaccine by foreign state health regulators are reported by RDIF on Sputnik V’s website, the actual deliveries of doses are not reported in any comprehensive manner. According to data collected by the Russian edition of *Forbes*, 15 to 16 million have been exported to 45 countries by May 19, 2021.³⁷⁷

A search on TASS.ru (the Russian state news agency), focusing on Russia’s top 10 ODA recipients, shows that as of May 30, 2021, 6 of them received Sputnik V doses, although volumes of the deliveries are either small (between 15.000 and 40.000) or undisclosed. Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Armenia, Serbia, and Guinea have received doses, while deliveries to North Korea are prevented by closed borders. Syria is in talks to purchase the vaccine, but media also reported that Sputnik V doses were financed by Israel for use by Syria in exchange for the release of a prisoner.³⁷⁸ Guinea received

³⁷⁴ RDIF Website. Available at [<https://rdif.ru>], accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁷⁵ Zimmer, Corum, Wee (2021), accessed 25 May 2021. As of June 4, 2021, the Brazilian health regulator (Anvisa) also approved Sputnik V, making the number rise to 67.

³⁷⁶ Cfr OECD dataset and information collected in para 3.2.1 (not considering unconfirmed mask aid to Egypt and Morocco, who have also approved Sputnik V: % would rise to 53%).

³⁷⁷ Lomskaya, T. (2021, May 25). Дипломатический иммунитет: кто и в каком количестве покупает российскую вакцину [Diplomatic immunity: who and in what quantity buys the Russian vaccine]. *Forbes*. Available at [<https://www.forbes.ru/biznes/429873-diplomaticheskii-immunitet-kto-i-v-kakom-kolichestve-pokupaet-rossiyskuyu-vakcinu>].

³⁷⁸ Times of Israel. (2021, Feb 25) *Syria gets vaccines from ‘friendly country’ after Israel said to pay for doses*. Available at [<https://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-gets-vaccines-from-friendly-country-after-israel-said-to-pay-for-doses/>].

10.000 doses by Rusal,³⁷⁹ which was involved in aid also during Ebola and COVID-19 mask diplomacy. Mozambique and Tajikistan have not approved Sputnik V yet, while Cuba, which is Russia's top ODA recipient, is relying on its own vaccines.

According to Forbes, Argentina, Mexico and Hungary are the countries that already received the largest quantity of doses, respectively 6.5, 2.4 and 2 million. The biggest supply contracts have been signed by Turkey, Mexico and Argentina.³⁸⁰

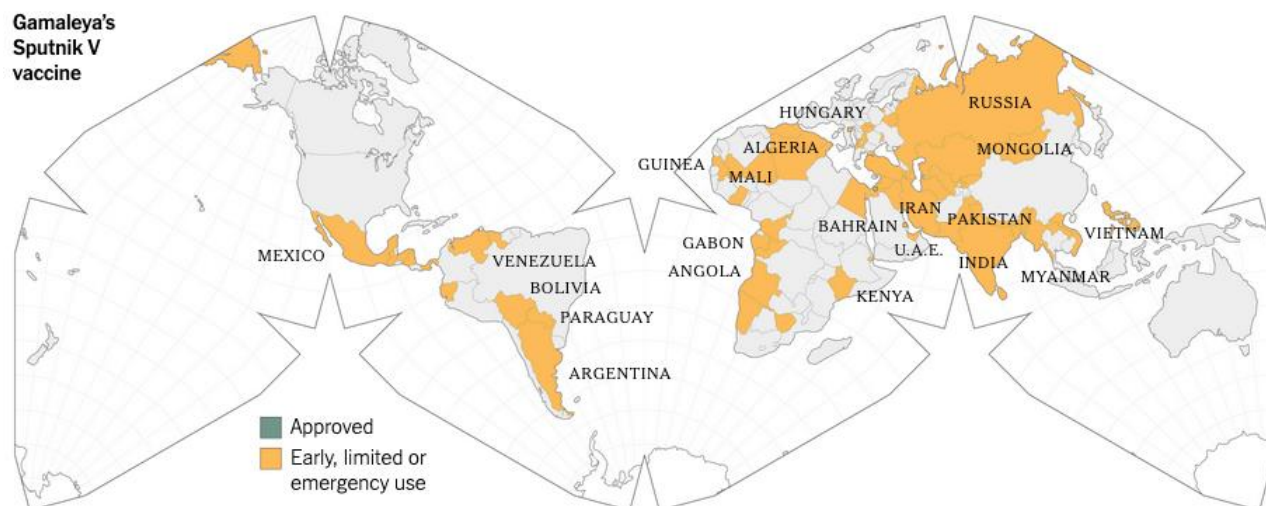


Figure 6: Map of countries that have registered Sputnik V by 25 May 2021. Not all names are displayed. Source: The New York Times.³⁸¹

The name of the vaccine was chosen by RDIF director Kirill Dmitriev, with a view to international competition: the reference indeed is to the satellite named Sputnik that was launched by Russia in 1957, allowing it to be the first country to place a satellite in orbit and thus win the space race that had begun in the mid-1950s. “V” is for “vaccine”.³⁸² As soon as the vaccine was announced, Russia launched a strong propaganda campaign, reminiscent of Soviet propaganda and therefore one of the reasons why Sputnik V is perceived abroad as a geopolitical weapon and is mistrusted by the domestic population. The Sputnik V campaign targets international audiences through a multilingual commercial website and social media presence, especially via a dedicated Twitter profile opened as early as November 2020. Tweets focus on Sputnik V being the first vaccine in the world to have been discovered, on its reliability and on how foreign countries that use Sputnik V are able to ease restrictions and come back to life, but the tweets also aggressively attack competing vaccines and western media.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ Rusal. (2021, Mar 25). *RUSAL delivers Sputnik V vaccine to Guinea*. Available at [<https://rusal.ru/en/press-center/press-releases/rusal-delivers-sputnik-v-vaccine-to-guinea/>].

³⁸⁰ Lomskaya (2021).

³⁸¹ Zimmer, Corum, Wee (2021), accessed 25 May 2021.

³⁸² Yaffa, J. (2021, Feb 1). The Sputnik V vaccine and Russia's race to immunity. *The New Yorker*. Available at [<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/08/the-sputnik-v-vaccine-and-russias-race-to-immunity>].

³⁸³ Sputnik V Twitter Profile. Available at [<https://twitter.com/sputnikvaccine>], accessed 25 May 2021.

To enhance Sputnik V's credibility, Russia sought the approval of the scientific community, hence the publication of the trial results on an international academic journal, while results of EpiVacCorona, that is administered to the domestic population, were published only on a Russian-language journal, which is also linked to Rospotrebnadzor and therefore not very much trusted as an independent reviewer.³⁸⁴ However, the main source of credibility is the use of the vaccine by foreign countries, especially Western ones.

In the EU, where vaccine supply for member states is being managed centrally by the Commission, which has negotiated contracts with pharmaceutical companies, the European Medicines Authority (EMA) has not approved yet the use of Sputnik V. However, Russia has used its bilateral relations with EU member states to overcome the hurdle. Hungary, according to scholars one of Russia's trojan horses advancing Russian viewpoints inside the EU,³⁸⁵ has bought and administered Sputnik V to its population, leveraging its right to grant emergency approval to the vaccine. Slovakian Prime Minister Igor Matovic negotiated a secret bilateral deal for 2 million doses of Sputnik V, but the arrival of 200.000 doses in March caused an internal political crisis that forced him to resign. Claims by the Slovakian pharmaceutical regulator that the doses received did not correspond to those used for the clinical studies published on *The Lancet*, seemed to undermine Russia's vaccine diplomacy. However, on May 26, 2020, Slovakia announced that it will, after all, use the doses, making it the second country in the EU to approve Sputnik V without awaiting EMA's decision.³⁸⁶ Even though Slovakia does not plan to acquire more doses before EMA's approval, it is a great reputational win for Russia. Via Sputnik V's twitter profile, Russia's RDIF blamed the delay in the use of the doses on a "disinformation war"³⁸⁷ against the Russian vaccine. Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany and local Italian entities are reported to have been negotiating or to have pre-ordered Sputnik V doses.

In non-EU European countries, Sputnik V has been registered and used in Albania, Republika Srpska, San Marino and Serbia. Amongst them, the latter two countries have received the highest number of doses and they provide a valuable platform to increase credibility and trust towards the Russian vaccine.

Serbia has been vaccinating its people with Western, Chinese and Russian vaccines; it has also used Sputnik V for its very own vaccine diplomacy with a view to regional geopolitics, as it donated doses to North Macedonia and Montenegro, whilst welcoming foreigners to get vaccinated

³⁸⁴ Meduza. (2021, Mar 27). *Sputnik V's Ugly Cousin*. Available at [<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/03/27/sputnik-v-s-ugly-cousin>].

³⁸⁵ Orenstein & Kelemen (2016).

³⁸⁶ ABCNews. (2021, May 26). *Slovakia becomes 2nd EU country to approve Russia's Sputnik*. Available at [<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/slovakia-2nd-eu-country-approve-russias-sputnik-77914781>].

³⁸⁷ Sputnik V Twitter profile. *Tweet 26 May 2021*. Available at [<https://twitter.com/sputnikvaccine/status/1397534223301582853>].

in Serbia.³⁸⁸ By proxy, Serbia's vaccine diplomacy using Sputnik V may increase Russia's soft power in the Balkans. Indeed, Croatia was reported to be in talks with Russia to purchase Sputnik V before EMA's approval. Use of the jab by neighboring countries such as Hungary and Serbia and their higher vaccination rate, boosted the perception of the vaccine as reliable and likely prompted Croatia's move.³⁸⁹

San Marino – an independent micro-state within Italy's borders – began its vaccination campaign with Sputnik V in March 2021, after failing to secure enough supplies from the Italian government, which was struggling to meet vaccine demand from its own Regions while facing the third wave of COVID-19 infections. By late May, San Marino had completed the campaign, having fully vaccinated (meaning with both doses) more than 70% of its population; to reach this objective it used Sputnik V for 88.6% of administered doses. As the domestic target was achieved, San Marino opened vaccinations with Sputnik V to foreign tourists (except Italian ones), which means that EU citizens travelling to the micro-state could receive the Russian vaccine even before approval by EMA.³⁹⁰ The positive judgement by San Marino's authorities, who remarked that "it is a vaccine one can trust"³⁹¹, and the speedy campaign showed the world – especially Italy – that a European state deemed Sputnik V to be trustworthy and that Russia is present and ready to help where the EU – from which Italy depends for its vaccine supply – is not.

San Marino's population is slightly over 30.000 – it did not require a great supply capacity and its demand was easily met by Russia. The scenario is different with large states: production capacity is probably Russia's biggest issue with regard to Sputnik V.

The issue of production capacity

The vaccine is manufactured at seven production facilities in Russia (Gamaleya, Binnopharm, Biokad, Generium, Lecco, Pharmstandard, and the R-Pharm factory built specially for Sputnik V production)³⁹², but RDIF has made deals with foreign countries to produce it abroad as well, not only

³⁸⁸ Vuksanovic, V. (2021, Apr 16). In the Balkans, Serbia Has Its Own Vaccine Diplomacy. CEPA. Available at [https://cepa.org/in-the-balkans-serbia-has-its-own-vaccine-diplomacy/].

³⁸⁹ Reuters. (2021). *Croatia says it may buy Russian COVID-19 vaccine without waiting for EU*. 17 Feb 2021. Available at [https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-croatia-vaccine-idUSL1N2KN0MH].

³⁹⁰ Istituto per la Sicurezza Sociale of San Marino. *Conclusa la campagna massiva di vaccinazione anti-covid* [Mass vaccination campaign against completed]. 21 May 2021. Available at [https://vaccinocovid.iss.sm/immunizzato-70percento-san%20marino-anticovid].

³⁹¹ Author's translation, San Marino' Public Health Director Sergio Rabini quoted in Sputnik News. (2021, Mar 28). *"Italia, c'è da fidarsi": San Marino giudica positiva esperienza con Sputnik V* ["Italy, it can be trusted": San Marino judges positively the experience with Sputnik V]. Available at [https://it.sputniknews.com/20210328/san-marino-giudica-positiva-lesperienza-col-vaccino-russo-sputnik-v-10336992.html].

³⁹² Russia's Ministry of Health. *Регистрационное удостоверение* [Sputnik V Registration Certificate]. Updated 30 Dec 2021. Available at [https://grls.rosminzdrav.ru/Grls_View_v2.aspx?routingGuid=6c1f7501-7067-45b3-a56d-95e25db89e97&t]; Interfax. (2021, Apr 2). *Произведенная за рубежом вакцина "Спутник V" сможет поступать в РФ* [Vaccine Sputnik V produced abroad will be able to arrive in Russia]. Available at [https://www.interfax.ru/russia/759208].

for export purposes but also for Russian domestic use.³⁹³ Serbia has begun Sputnik V production in June 2021; Vucic had stated that he aims to turn Serbia into a “powerhouse in vaccine production”³⁹⁴ in the next decade; to achieve this goal he will leverage Russia’s and China’s technology transfers.

As of May 2020, RDIF has reported to have signed production agreements with companies from many foreign countries. Among them, China, India, South Korea and Brazil are poised to play the biggest part.³⁹⁵ Although the Brazilian Health Surveillance Agency had banned Sputnik V imports in April 2021, citing unsatisfying conditions at plants in Russia, it then authorized the vaccine in June 2021 and production in Brazil has started and it is aimed at exporting to neighboring countries.³⁹⁶ Despite the temporary reputational setback for Sputnik V caused by the ban, exports in South America could still increase Russian soft power in the region, where an Argentinian company is already producing Sputnik V. Companies owned by the respective states in Belarus (Belmedpreparaty), Kazakhstan (Karaganda Pharmaceutical Complex), and Serbia (Torlak Institute) are producing Sputnik V too, while private or state companies in Germany, Egypt, Italy, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey will also be involved in the production. RDIF press releases call these agreements “technology transfers”.³⁹⁷ Companies in Armenia, Algeria, Bangladesh, France, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Spain, UAE, and Venezuela also expressed their interest to be involved.³⁹⁸

Production capacity is an issue that could potentially undermine the whole project of vaccine diplomacy undertaken by Russia since August 2020. It was to be expected, given the complexity of the process to manufacture a vaccine and the lack of up-to-date industrial facilities in the pharmaceutical sector. Updating them has been a strategic objective of the Russian government for a decade, as enshrined in its Pharma-2020 strategy. However, Russia’s declared ambitions to inoculate 700 million people with Sputnik V in 2021 (thus more than 500 people abroad)³⁹⁹ were too grand: RDIF does not publish statistics, but media reports relay that out of the 205 million doses that Russia agreed to export, enough to vaccinate 100 million people, only 15 to 16 million doses have actually

³⁹³ Interfax (2021).

³⁹⁴ Ansa. (2021, Apr 15). *Vaccines: Sputnik production in Serbia to begin in June*. Available at [https://www.ansa.it/nuova_europa/en/news/sections/news/2021/04/15/vaccines-sputnik-production-in-serbia-to-begin-in-june_c9c705f2-5bc5-442a-8221-6cd6834ff09f.html].

³⁹⁵ Dyakonova, O. & Kozlovsky, S. (2021, May 13). Экспансия "Спутника": где производят и уже используют российскую вакцину от коронавируса [Sputnik’s expansion: where the russian vaccine against coronavirus is produced and already used]. *BBC News Russian Edition*. Available at [https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-56675724].

³⁹⁶ Mann, R. (2021, May 2021). Brazil’s União Química completes first batch of Russian Covid-19 Sputnik V vaccine. *The Rio Times*. Available at [https://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/miscellaneous/covid-19/brazils-uniao-quimica-completes-first-batch-of-russian-covid-19-sputnik-v-vaccine/]; Reuters. (2021, June 5). *Brazil’s Anvisa Approves Russian Sputnik V vaccine, with conditions*. Available at [https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-health-regulator-technical-staff-recommend-conditions-any-approval-2021-06-04/].

³⁹⁷ See, RDIF Website. *Press Releases*. Available at [https://rdif.ru/Eng_Press/], accessed 26 May 2021.

³⁹⁸ Dyakonova & Kozlovsky (2021).

³⁹⁹ Kazantseva, K. (2021, Feb 2). Россия обеспечит 700 млн человек «Спутником V» в 2021 году [Russia provides Sputnik V to 700 million people in 2021]. *Gazeta.ru*. Available at [https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2021/02/02/n_15569942.shtml].

been delivered.⁴⁰⁰ By way of comparison, as of May 2021, Pfizer-BioNTech has reported to have delivered 430 million doses of its vaccine to 91 countries, which shows a much higher production capacity.⁴⁰¹ China has exported 252 million doses.⁴⁰²

In Russia, RDIF has invested more than \$100 million in the construction of new industrial facilities for vaccine production – an amount dwarfed by the US investment for the same purpose, which was 12 times higher.⁴⁰³ New plants are being constructed and old ones repurposed by Generium, but it takes time to build them and then to get production up to speed: the new factory built specially by R-Pharm aimed to manufacture 10 million doses by March, but it was only able to make 1 million, due to the complexity of learning a new process and the need not only for expanded facilities but also for experienced staff.⁴⁰⁴

Sputnik V in Italy

As an EU member state, Italy's purchase of vaccines against COVID-19 depends on the EU Vaccines Strategy and the related central procurement mechanism. Even if Russia were to donate doses, Italy would have to wait for EMA's decision on Sputnik V. These conditions are not binding, as the practice of Hungary and Slovakia has shown, but they retain high political meaning. Their breach hurts the credibility of the EU abroad and strikes at its internal cohesion.

The issue of whether to purchase Sputnik V came to the fore of the political debate in the early months of 2021, particularly in March when Italy was addressing the third wave of infections with a lockdown, and its domestic vaccination campaign was struggling to gather pace because of limited availability of doses. Some Italian local entities asked to explore the opportunity to buy the Russian jab. San Marino's example had an impact on the public opinion, as promptly underlined by Russian-state media.⁴⁰⁵ Sputnik V has proved to be a divisive issue not only in Italy, but also in France, Germany and Spain, where some regions challenged central governments by negotiating or signing advance purchase agreements with RDIF, conditional on EMA's decision – as the Campania region did in Italy in March 2021, although apparently with the support of Italian diplomatic channels.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁰ Lomskeya (2021).

⁴⁰¹ Pfizer. (2021, May 4). *Pfizer Reports Strong First-Quarter 2021 Results*. Available at [<https://investors.pfizer.com/investor-news/press-release-details/2021/PFIZER-REPORTS-STRONG-FIRST-QUARTER-2021-RESULTS/default.aspx>].

⁴⁰² McCarthy, N. (2021, May 19). America First? Covid-19 Production & Exports. *Statista*. Available at [<https://www.statista.com/chart/24555/vaccine-doses-produced-and-exported/>].

⁴⁰³ Benedyczak, J. (2021). Russia's Problems in the Vaccine Race. *The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin*, 30(1726).

⁴⁰⁴ Ivanova, P. & Nikolskaya, P. (2021, May 14). Big promises, few doses: why Russia's struggling to make Sputnik V doses. *Reuters*. Available at [<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/big-promises-few-doses-why-russias-struggling-make-sputnik-v-doses-2021-05-14/>].

⁴⁰⁵ Safronova, A. (2021, Mar 27). Here's why a handful of small Italian communities want Russia's Sputnik V – and why they can't get it. *RT*. Available at [<https://on.rt.com/b4of>].

⁴⁰⁶ Martuscelli, C. & Gehrke, L. (2021, Apr 14). Russia's Sputnik vaccine injects divisions into EU. *Politico*. Available at [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-sputnik-coronavirus-vaccine-divisions-eu/>]; Ansa. (2021, Mar 26). *Vaccini: la Campania compra lo Sputnik* [Vaccines: Campania buys Sputnik]. Available at

However, the discussion on Sputnik V seemed to subside as more doses of Western vaccines acquired by the EU became available in April-May.

In Italy, Gamaleya and RDIF have a partnership with the Italian National Institute of Infectious Diseases Spallanzani where clinical trials with Sputnik V began in April 2021 – an example of vaccine science diplomacy, which takes place at the level of scientists. Russia has undertaken vaccine diplomacy through technology transfer also in Italy, where the Italian-Russian Chamber of Commerce has brokered a deal between a private pharmaceutical company (Adienne) and RDIF to manufacture the vaccine. Production is conditional on approval by the Italian health regulator (AIFA), doses will not be available before the end of 2021, and the initial claim that 10 million doses would be produced was later retracted by the company's CEO, who remarked the complexity of launching the process of vaccine production and that a smaller amount will be made in the first months.⁴⁰⁷ This case shows that delocalizing manufacturing is not a solution to Russia's production limits in the short term. The pay-off in the short term is more reputational than practical, as the announcement of production in an advanced economy enhances Sputnik V's credibility. Its production in Italy, when it will start, could either depoliticize the vaccine, since the Italian Draghi government has been very cautious in its approach to Sputnik V and has shown allegiance to the EU and US. This will largely depend on whether the commercial and non-state character of the partnership will be underlined in media discourse. Or, it could have a long-term impact by increasing Italian-Russian cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector, thus increasing Russian soft power in the country and perhaps make Italy look ever more as a trojan horse in Europe for Russia's foreign policy.

3.3.3 Donor competition: US initial absence and China's lead

The US role in vaccine diplomacy has been limited: it has made the strategic choice to vaccinate its own population before starting to export considerable amounts of doses globally – which it is only starting to do in May-June 2021 – betting on the forecast that in the medium-term vaccine production will increase enough for doses to be available all over the world, and that exporting in the early months of availability of a vaccine, as China and Russia have done, will only provide a short-term advantage that will not be relevant in the medium- to long-term. The notable absence of the US in its neighboring region, Latin America, indicates that the US believes that a tactic advantage by other great powers achieved through timely vaccine diplomacy will not be sufficient to eradicate its long-standing influence. Regardless of the veracity of the prediction, which is to be verified in the next

[https://www.ansa.it/campania/notizie/2021/03/26/vaccini-la-campania-compra-lo-sputnik_4e463fc0-281f-4677-89db-5df68049fb82.html].

⁴⁰⁷ Bucci, E. & Capone, L. (2021, Mar 11). Tra propaganda e realtà [Between propaganda and reality]. *Il Foglio*, p. 1.

years, in the short term US foreign policy could suffer from this absence in terms of soft power, to the advantage of Russia and China.⁴⁰⁸

The exception were US exports of Astrazeneca doses, which is awaiting authorization in the US,⁴⁰⁹ to Mexico and Canada in March 2021⁴¹⁰ – another case of “neighborhood first responder”, which may be motivated not only by solidarity and close ties with the two NAFTA countries, but also by the practical necessity to avoid that the disease spreads from neighboring countries.

Russia and China cooperate to some extent in vaccine development and production: clinical trials of a Chinese vaccine have been conducted in Russia, and agreements for Sputnik V production have been signed by three Chinese pharmaceutical companies, for 260 million doses. The earliest batch should be produced starting in May 2021.⁴¹¹ Nevertheless, there is also competition between the two partners, especially for distribution in areas of geopolitical interest. As in the case of mask diplomacy, China sets its vaccine deliveries within the framework of the Health Silk Road, thus linking it to its broader strategy for international aid.

The concept of “global community of health for all” that China promoted during the mask diplomacy phase was reiterated in May 2021 at the G20 Health Summit, where China pledged an additional 3 billion in COVID-19-related international aid, committed to continuing supplies of vaccines, having already provided 300 million doses worldwide, and supported the proposal of the waiver of intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines. In accordance with its cooperation-among-equals philosophy, China announced that it will support technology transfer and joint production by its vaccines companies in developing countries.⁴¹²

China has not released official comprehensive data on its vaccine exports yet, but according to Bridge Consulting, by May 2021 China has delivered 256 million doses to 93 countries, all developing ones except for Singapore.⁴¹³ A comparison of this list with the list of BRI partners (states that have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China)⁴¹⁴ yields that only 6 out of all the vaccine recipients are not BRI countries.

⁴⁰⁸ Fabbri, D. (2021, Mar 2). Speech at Limes online conference “Geopolitica dei vaccini” [Vaccine Geopolitics]. Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G45Vrulpv_M].

⁴⁰⁹ FDA Website. *COVID-19 Vaccines*. Available at [<https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines>], accessed June 5, 2021.

⁴¹⁰ The White House. (2021, June 3). *Statement by President Joe Biden on Global Vaccine Distribution*. Available at [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/03/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-global-vaccine-distribution/>].

⁴¹¹ Wishnick, E. (2021, Feb 23). China and Russia: Vaccine Competitors or Partners? *The Diplomat*. Available at [<https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/china-and-russia-vaccine-competitors-or-partners/>]; Xinhua. (2021, May 8). *Russia to cooperate with China on production of Sputnik V vaccine*. Available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/08/c_139931329.htm].

⁴¹² President of the People’s Republic of China (2021).

⁴¹³ Bridge Consulting Website. *China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker*. Update: 31 May 2021. Available at [<https://bridgebeijing.com/our-publications/our-publications-1/china-covid-19-vaccines-tracker/>].

⁴¹⁴ Namely, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Jordan. See, Belt and Road Portal. *International Cooperation Profiles*. Available at [https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/info/iList.jsp?cat_id=10076], accessed 2 June 2021.

In America's backyard, that is Latin America, China has delivered 77.5 million doses by May 2021, chiefly to Brazil and Chile and mostly purchased. A Brazilian state-owned company is partly manufacturing Sinovac locally, a Mexican company another Chinese vaccine, CanSino.⁴¹⁵ Chinese vaccines are not only part of the Health Silk Road, but may also play a role in the PRC-Taiwan dispute. Paraguay and Belize received Chinese vaccines, although they both have official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and Paraguay denounced pressures to sever ties with Taiwan.⁴¹⁶ Most notably, Guyana renounced to allow the opening of a Taiwan office after PRC's pressure to adhere to the one-China principle in February 2021. A month later, Guyana received thousands of doses of Chinese vaccine,⁴¹⁷ in what looks like a perfect example of inducement through rewards, one of the forms of influence categorized by Dahl (para 1.2.2).

In Latin America, Russia began supplying Sputnik V as early as Christmas 2020: the first recipient country was Argentina. Brazil and Argentina are also producing Sputnik V, with plans for domestic use as well as export to neighboring countries, as many have registered the Russian jab. On June 4, 2021 the start of the production in Argentina, as well as in Serbia, constituted a high-level diplomatic event, attended virtually by Putin and Presidents of Argentina and Serbia.⁴¹⁸ Attesting to the geopolitical nature of the vaccine deals, it is reported that after providing a batch of Sputnik V to Bolivia, Russia started diplomatic talks regarding access to rare earth minerals mines and nuclear cooperation.⁴¹⁹

To date, all CIS countries have received Chinese vaccines. However, at the outset they all started their vaccination campaigns with Sputnik V, except for Kyrgyzstan, which adopted Sinopharm first. Kyrgyzstan is one of the top recipients of Russian ODA, but it is also strongly tied to Chinese aid. The roll-out of the donated Chinese vaccine in the post-Soviet state may be linked to the country's large debt held by China (around 40% of total Kyrgyz debt), which was also the reason why the country turned first to China rather than Russia for debt relief during the mask diplomacy phase. Further, it was suggested that vaccine diplomacy could be a way for China to restore its image in the country, where Sinophobia was on the rise, and protect its investments after the 2020 unrest and change of government.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ Bridge Consulting Website.

⁴¹⁶ Aspinwall, N. (2021, Mar 27). Paraguay Says Chinese Brokers Offered Vaccines for Diplomatic Recognition. *The Diplomat*. Available at [https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/paraguay-says-chinese-brokers-offered-vaccines-for-diplomatic-recognition/].

⁴¹⁷ Cuscito, G. (2021, Mar 2). Speech at Limes online conference "Geopolitica dei vaccini" [Vaccine Geopolitics]. Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G45Vrulpv_M].

⁴¹⁸ President of Russia Twitter profile. *Tweet 4 June 2021*. Available at [https://twitter.com/kremlinrussia/status/1400882988888596480?s=12]

⁴¹⁹ The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021). *What next for Vaccine Diplomacy?* London: The Economist.

⁴²⁰ Sciorati, G. (2021, May 11). The Hidden Costs of China's Free Vaccines to Kyrgyzstan. *Ispionline*. Available at [https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/hidden-costs-chinas-free-vaccines-kyrgyzstan-30388].

In Eastern Europe, Chinese vaccines are used in Hungary. The Czech Republic and Poland were reportedly in talks with China to purchase jabs, but neither has struck supply deals as of May 2021. Despite the fact that Sputnik V is being used by Visegrad Group fellow members Hungary and Slovakia, it is unlikely that Poland will ever purchase Sputnik V, given its geopolitical concerns vis à vis Russia. It is a new cold warrior according to Leonard & Popescu's categories, and a staunch supporter of EU sanctions on Russia.⁴²¹ In the Czech Republic, the debate over whether to purchase the Russian jab has divided the government.

In the Western Balkans, Chinese vaccines are used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro, while Serbia not only uses but is also set to produce Sinopharm. All of these countries have also approved and used Sputnik V, though only Serbia in large quantities.

In Africa, Chinese vaccines have been delivered to 31 states for a total 20 million doses; almost half was given to Morocco, over 3 millions to Egypt, and almost 2 millions to Zimbabwe, while the other states have received much lower volumes.⁴²² Sinovac doses are being packaged in Egypt: it's the so-called "fill and finish", which requires less technological capabilities than production; the latter is also planned in Egypt for local use, along with Sputnik V's production. Egypt is in a strategic position of access to the Mediterranean where Russian military are directly present in Syria and indirectly through mercenaries in Libya, as well as access to the Suez Canal and to the Red Sea, where Russia is looking to expand its presence also by building naval bases.⁴²³

Chinese vaccines are also produced in Indonesia and UAE. The latter is reported to have chosen Chinese vaccines exactly because of the opportunity to have China transfer the production technology.⁴²⁴

Africa is the continent that has received the least amount of any vaccines and thus has the lowest vaccination rate. The COVAX Facility, led by GAVI, WHO, CEPI and UNICEF, has been created as a multilateral mechanism to ensure global equitable access to vaccines against COVID-19. All participating countries will all be eligible through COVAX for doses of vaccines approved by WHO EUL, but high-income and upper-middle-income ones will have to pay for the doses, while the lower-income ones, which are 92 countries, will benefit from the COVAX AMC. Through this mechanism, ODA from rich state donors and private aid will fund the manufacturing and delivery of vaccines to low-income countries, who in turn will share some of the costs, if they are able to. By the end of 2021, COVAX aims to ensure access to 2 billion doses worldwide, of which 1 billion will be

⁴²¹ See Leonard & Popescu (2007); Liik (2018).

⁴²² Bridge Consulting Website.

⁴²³ See para. 2.2.2, *Geopolitical relevance: Official Development Assistance*.

⁴²⁴ Zhao, S. (Apr 29, 2021). Why China's vaccine diplomacy is winning. *EastAsia Forum*. Available at [<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/04/29/why-chinas-vaccine-diplomacy-is-winning/>].

reserved to poor countries. COVAX funds the production of vaccines also before they are approved, in order to meet demand as soon as they are added to the WHO EUL.⁴²⁵

The US joined COVAX under Biden's Administration in January 2021, as Trump had refused to when the initiative was launched in April 2020. By May 2021, the US have pledged \$ 4 billion for COVAX in 2021-2022 (announced in February)⁴²⁶ and plan to donate 80 million doses by the end of June 2021.⁴²⁷ On June 3, 2021 Biden announced that the first 25 million of the promised amount of doses will be allocated: 75% through COVAX and 25% bilaterally.⁴²⁸ On June 10, Biden announced that the US will donate 500 million doses to 92 low- and lower middle-income countries through COVAX; the first 200 million are planned to be delivered by the end of 2021, starting in August.⁴²⁹ Multilateral donations through COVAX are the mechanism preferred by the US for vaccine diplomacy, while Russia and China have mostly struck bilateral deals.

Nonetheless, China joined COVAX in October 2020 and has committed to provide 10 million doses of Chinese vaccines through the mechanism. Still, it is a small fraction (1.3%) compared to the total 732 million it has agreed to supply bilaterally to foreign countries, either as sales or donations.⁴³⁰

Conversely, to date Russia has not joined COVAX,⁴³¹ despite the fact that it has joined similar mechanisms as a health aid donor before, for instance the pneumococcal vaccine AMC. This absence confirms the relevance of Sputnik V as an instrument of Russian foreign policy, which has seized the opportunity to use it as leverage in bilateral relations. RDIF has signed a deal with UNICEF to supply 220 million doses to COVAX, which is conditional on the currently missing approval of Sputnik V by WHO. Plus, the RDIF-COVAX agreement is of the kind that pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer and Moderna have signed, rather than formal state participation of Russia to the COVAX Facility.⁴³²

⁴²⁵ GAVI Website. *The Gavi COVAX AMC Explained*. Available at [<https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/gavi-covax-amc-explained>], accessed 1 June 2021.

⁴²⁶ The White House. (2021, Feb 18). *Fact Sheet: President Biden to Take Action on Global Health through Support of COVAX and Calling for Health Security Financing*. Available at [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/18/fact-sheet-president-biden-to-take-action-on-global-health-through-support-of-covax-and-calling-for-health-security-financing/>].

⁴²⁷ The White House. (2021, May 17). *Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration is Providing at least 80 million COVID-19 Vaccines for Global Use, Commits to Leading a Multilateral Effort toward Ending the Pandemic*. Available at [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/17/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-is-providing-at-least-80-million-covid-19-vaccines-for-global-use-commits-to-leading-a-multilateral-effort-toward-ending-the-pandemic/>].

⁴²⁸ The White House (2021, June 3).

⁴²⁹ The White House (2021, June 10). *FACT SHEET: President Biden Announces Historic Vaccine Donation: Half a Billion Pfizer Vaccines to the World's Lowest-Income Nations*. Available at [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/10/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-historic-vaccine-donation-half-a-billion-pfizer-vaccines-to-the-worlds-lowest-income-nations/>].

⁴³⁰ Bridge Consulting Website.

⁴³¹ No formal announcement has been made by end of May 2021, as of this writing. For an official list of participants, see *The Gavi COVAX AMC Investment Opportunity Launch Event*. 15 Apr 2021. Available at [<https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/covid/covax/Investment-Opportunity-Launch-Participant-List.pdf>].

⁴³² UNICEF. (2021, May 27). *UNICEF signs supply agreement for Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine*. Available at [<https://www.unicef.org/supply/press-releases/unicef-signs-supply-agreement-sputnik-v-covid-19-vaccine>].

3.3.4 Concluding remarks

A values contest with soft power implications

In the West, the US and the UK were able to secure a high volume of vaccines relative to their population from Western pharmaceutical companies and begin vaccinations in early December 2020. The EU also negotiated contracts for large amounts of doses, but negotiations with companies as well as approval by the health regulator took longer, so that vaccinations started in late December. A slow start undermined the first months of the EU's campaign, as deliveries to the EU were delayed by production and distribution problems.⁴³³ The public opinion in several EU member states, Italy included, began discussing alternatives in fear that the EU would not be able to provide timely supply. Sputnik V, which some European countries were using (especially Hungary, Serbia, and San Marino), was particularly debated.

After Russia submitted a formal application to EMA, since early March the vaccine has been undergoing the agency's rolling review, a procedure to expedite the assessment of medicines during public health crises.⁴³⁴ However, there seems to be no rush in approving the Russian vaccine and EU Commissioner Thierry Breton said in late March that there is "absolutely no need of Sputnik V"⁴³⁵, because the EU will have enough vaccines from already approved suppliers. The comment was received in Moscow as hostile bias.⁴³⁶ The review process has been tainted by the overall deadlock of EU-Russia relations: it is against this background that diffidence towards the Russian vaccine should be analyzed. The 2014 Ukraine conflict, annexation of Crimea and the sanctions war between the West and Russia defined the deterioration of EU-Russia relations, but there are deeper factors. From the Russian perspective, a determining factor is competition for influence in the Post-Soviet space, where the EU enlarged in 2004 and has sought to strengthen relations with non-EU states (through the Eastern Partnership, EaP), which reignited Russia's historical fear of encirclement. Further, the stalemate is rooted in different models of relations promoted by Russia and the EU.

Indeed, after the power vacuum of the 1990s, in the following decades Russia's approach to global issues has been based on strengthening and asserting its sovereignty, thus Russia's view of relations with the EU was that of a partnership among equals. In contrast, the EU's approach to global risks and external relations has been to extend European values, norms and rules to foreign countries, thus relations with Russia were marked by an attempt to "Europeanize" the country. The two visions

⁴³³ The campaign accelerated remarkably in May 2021, see, Pietsch, B. & Ramzy, A. (2021, May 9). Vaccinations are rising in the European Union after a long, slow start. *The New York Times*. Available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/09/world/eu-covid-vaccine.html].

⁴³⁴ EMA. (2021, Mar 4). EMA starts rolling review of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine. *EMA News*. Available at [https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-rolling-review-sputnik-v-covid-19-vaccine].

⁴³⁵ EU Commissioner Thierry Breton quoted in Mancini, D. P. & Foy, H. (2021, Apr 7). EU regulator to probe ethical standards of Sputnik vaccine trials. *The Financial Times*. Available at [https://www.ft.com/content/50031165-1f46-446b-be9a-36d553805fec].

⁴³⁶ Mancini & Foy (2021).

clashed, and this became clear in 2004 when Russia refused the EU's offer to be part of the European Neighborhood Policy (forerunner of EaP). Talk of a strategic partnership between the EU and Russia had become empty several years before 2014.⁴³⁷

According to Aleksander Baunov, similar dynamics underpin the EU's lack of acceptance of Sputnik V. He argues that Western democracies are based on the idea of their "preimushество" (*преимущество*), which means advantage or superiority, which is why they aim to export their political system and values. In contrast, Russian authoritarianism is said to be based on the idea of "ravenstvo" (*равенство*), that is equality, whereby Russia does not demand to be imitated by foreign countries. This would translate into the fact that the EU's response to the health crisis needs to be better than Russia's in order to demonstrate its superiority, while Russia only needs to show that it is on par with the West and that it behaves no worse than Western democracies. While the West needs Western and third countries to use any Western vaccine, but not Sputnik V, because it strives for superiority over the Russian political model, Russia only needs Sputnik V to be approved and used abroad along with Western vaccines, in order to win its fight for equality. Further, Baunov argues that approving Sputnik V and thus putting it on the same level as Western vaccines would mean that Western media and some Western politicians were wrong in their characterization of Sputnik V merely as a propaganda tool, rather than an effective vaccine.⁴³⁸

Indeed, many in the EU did not perceive it as an effective medicine, but rather as a tool of soft power and propaganda, or even a "hybrid weapon to divide and rule"⁴³⁹ deployed for geopolitical purposes. Mistrust of the Russian people towards the vaccine, low Russian domestic vaccination rates and insufficient data sharing from Russian authorities nourished these beliefs.⁴⁴⁰

Moreover, Russia's offer of its vaccine to developing countries when it has not completed yet the vaccination of its own people can be seen from a dual perspective: from the EU's point of view, it shows that the Russian authoritarian government is ready to sacrifice its citizens' immunization, and thus lives, in order to use the vaccine for geopolitical purposes; from the Russian point of view, it shows that Russia is supportive of foreign countries and competes with the EU in the field of values, specifically the value of human life and attention to the underprivileged.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Medvedev, S. (2008). The Stalemate in EU-Russia Relations. In T. Hopf, *Russia's European Choice* (pp. 215-232). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴³⁸ Baunov, A. (2021, Mar 25). Прививки и ценности. Чем российская вакцина угрожает Западу [Vaccinations and values. With what the Russian vaccine threatens the West]. *Carnegie Moscow Center*. Available at [https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84143].

⁴³⁹ Lithuania's Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė quoted in Henley, J. (2021, Apr 30). Is Russia's Covid vaccine anything more than a political weapon?. *The Guardian*. Available at [https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/30/is-russias-covid-vaccine-anything-more-than-a-political-weapon-sputnik-v].

⁴⁴⁰ Henley (2021).

⁴⁴¹ Baunov (2021).

The field of values has always been a prerogative of the EU: the EU has largely constructed its identity around the discourse of “normative-power Europe”, namely a power that is able to change others by spreading its own norms and values of democracy, freedom and human rights – thus the right to life – and define conceptions of what is considered normal and appropriate.⁴⁴²

Data in section 3.3.2 show that Russian vaccine deliveries were generally small in volume, they were directed to quite a few countries – at least 45, mostly developing ones, for a total 15 to 16 million doses – and were highly advertised to the public opinion.

Russia exported around 37% of its production, while China 42% (252 million doses).⁴⁴³ On the contrary, the US export rate is minimal as of May 2021: it has only exported 1% (3 million doses) of domestic vaccine production and plans to increase exports are being announced in May 2021, now that the domestic full vaccination rate has risen to 40%.⁴⁴⁴

About 28% of domestic vaccine production has been exported from the EU,⁴⁴⁵ but at least 2/3 of the 113.5 million doses exported in January-April 2021 went to high-income countries (above all Japan, UK and Canada).⁴⁴⁶ The EU export volume would be high compared to Russia’s, but the perception was not, especially when in March 2021 Brussels tightened export rules for vaccines, in order to pressure pharmaceutical companies to fulfill contractual agreements with the EU first.⁴⁴⁷

While the EU and Western democracies such as the US, UK and Canada secured vaccine supplies for their own populations and have been divided over the waiver of intellectual property rights (IPRs) for COVID-19 vaccines asked by India and South Africa⁴⁴⁸, Russia’s readiness to sell Sputnik V doses to foreign countries before having fully vaccinated its own and its support for the IPRs waiver displayed Russia’s willingness to act as a global health leader, and may have exposed the shortcomings in the Western international health assistance and its adherence to Western values.

Whether or not the waiver may actually improve access to vaccines by the world’s poor (given the lack of production facilities in the developing world, which is one of the arguments advanced by those who oppose the waiver) is a complex discussion, out of the scope of this thesis and perhaps also irrelevant to the values contest outlined above: in principle, access to life-saving treatment during a

⁴⁴² Manners, I., & Diez, T. (2007). Reflecting on Normative Power Europe. In F. Berenskoetter, & M. J. Williams (Eds.), *Power in World Politics* (pp. 173-188). New York: Routledge.

⁴⁴³ McCarthy (2021).

⁴⁴⁴ McCarthy (2021); Our World in Data. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations*. Available at [<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=USA>], accessed 25 May 2021; The White House (2021, May 17).

⁴⁴⁵ McCarthy (2021).

⁴⁴⁶ Rate calculated on data reported in Chrysoloras, N. (2021, Apr 14). EU Vaccine Exports Outstrip Number of Shots Given Its Own People. *Bloomberg*. Available at [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-14/eu-vaccine-exports-outstrip-number-of-shots-given-its-own-people>].

⁴⁴⁷ Vela, J. H. & Heath, R. (2021, Apr 7). Brussels blocks vaccine exports in all but name. *Politico*. Available at [<https://www.politico.eu/article/vaccine-export-block-europe-coronavirus-astrazeneca/>].

⁴⁴⁸ MSF. (2021, Mar 9). *Countries obstructing COVID-19 patent waiver must allow negotiations to start*. Available at [<https://www.msf.org/countries-obstructing-covid-19-patent-waiver-must-allow-negotiations>].

pandemic should be a human right, and by opposing the waiver some European countries make an implicit political statement that is in contrast with the attention to the underprivileged that Baunov attributes to Russia at this time of crisis. The EU Parliament's position on the issue will be defined on June 7-10 but it has been divided so far,⁴⁴⁹ while the US, China and Russia have already expressed their support for the waiver.⁴⁵⁰

Professor Jill Dougherty explained to me in a virtual interview that being the first country to announce the discovery of a vaccine against COVID-19 was an effective move for Russia in terms of soft power, but it was immediately undermined by "Russia's overall negative image around the world when it comes to soft power". Russia has indeed a problem of image as a supplier of reliable products or even as a supplier that can be trusted as to what it says. So, Russia started "with a low level of trust from other countries", which was then increased by the article on The Lancet. Since the journal is European and Europe has a good track record in healthcare, it gave more credibility to Sputnik V: this was an important moment in terms of soft power.⁴⁵¹

Nevertheless, during the interview, a number of issues came up with regard to Russian soft power in vaccine diplomacy. Professor Dougherty says that "there is a lot of emotional value to soft power" which pertains to helping other people in need, for instance in a conflict situation; emotion is "very effective and important in advertising". Then there is the "rational side" to soft power, which leads to asking why the Russian domestic vaccination rate is so low, when Russia has its own vaccine. Either Russia has not been able to produce enough doses, which means that it is not as developed as the US and EU in this area, either there is lack of trust among Russian citizens towards the vaccine produced by the state, which may be a legacy of Soviet times and citizens' diffidence towards what the Soviet state imposed. Either way, Russia's image is undermined. Further, the fact that Sputnik V doses are mostly sold is an aspect that lessens Russian soft power especially when compared to the donations of Western vaccine doses that the Biden Administration is offering: when doses are given for free, there can be no accusations of commercial benefitting from another country's epidemic.⁴⁵²

In this thesis vaccine sales have been considered as a form of International Aid Public Policies, because they are scarce and thus the supplier-buyer (donor-recipient) exchange is asymmetrical. Still, as outlined in para. 1.1.2, the link from international aid to soft power is not automatic, and it may not be in the case of Sputnik V.

⁴⁴⁹ European Parliament (2021, May 19). *MEPs split over waiver for COVID-19 vaccine patents. Press release*. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04116/meps-split-over-waiver-for-covid-19-vaccine-patents].

⁴⁵⁰ Nature editorial. (2021). A patent waiver on COVID vaccines is right and fair. *Nature*, 593, p. 478.

⁴⁵¹ Dougherty, J. (2021, June 10). Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and Global Fellow at the Kennan Institute. *Expert interview*, virtual.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

As Professor Lucio Caracciolo explained to me in a virtual interview, it is difficult to generalize the impact of Russian COVID-19 related aid in terms of soft power, both at the grassroots level and at political elite level: “it varies greatly depending on the recipient country”. Its impact was arguably stronger in Latin America, where Russia is attractive because it is an example of “anti-America”, or in the Balkans, because of the common ethnic Slavic and historical roots that tie the region to Russia, or again in Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Syria which had an history of cooperative relations with the USSR that the Russian Federation is trying to revive. Africa, where Russia is again following in the USSR’s footsteps, especially to gain influence in North Africa, may represent a window for Russian soft power, as it has been under the Chinese “pragmatic” sphere of influence and has somehow been overlooked by the US – indeed, the US Africa Command is not even based in Africa but in Germany, which shows that the American presence is not as established as one might think. The strength of the “brand” of Russian aid, that has implications for increases in soft power, is much weaker in the West. In Italy, for instance, Russian and Chinese aid sent in the first months of 2020 led to a peak of Russophile as well as Sinophile sentiments in the public opinion, which however waned dramatically in the following months because Russia’s and China’s soft power “brands” can hardly stand the long-term test, in contrast to the US “brand”, which is more widely recognized.⁴⁵³

Further, Russia’s image as an example of values in international health assistance is hard to reconcile with its overall course of action. Only to name some of the most alarming factors, in 2020-2021 the world witnessed increasing government repression of Russia’s internal political dissent (in March 2021, the US and EU issued sanctions against Russian officials for the poisoning and arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny)⁴⁵⁴; further centralization of powers in the hands of the President, through the 2020 Constitutional reform that also allowed Putin to potentially rule until 2036; continued violation of Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty by controlling Crimea; heightened cyber-warfare against the US, of which the SolarWinds cyber-attack in 2020 is a major example, as it was undertaken by a group of hackers based in Russia and with alleged ties to the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). Russian authorities have denied any role, but the US issued new sanctions against Russia citing its responsibility for the attack.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Caracciolo, L. (2021, June 9). Professor and Limes Editor in Chief. *Expert interview*, virtual.

⁴⁵⁴ US DoS. (2021, Mar 2). *Imposing Sanctions on Russia for the Poisoning and Imprisonment of Aleksey Navalny*. Press Release. Available at [<https://www.state.gov/imposing-sanctions-on-russia-for-the-poisoning-and-imprisonment-of-aleksey-navalny/>]; Council of the EU. (2021, Mar 2). *Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime: EU sanctions four people responsible for serious human rights violations in Russia*. Press release. Available at [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/02/global-human-rights-sanctions-regime-eu-sanctions-four-people-responsible-for-serious-human-rights-violations-in-russia/>].

⁴⁵⁵ The White House (2021, Apr 15). *Fact Sheet: Imposing Costs for Harmful Foreign Activities by the Russian Government*. Available at [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/15/fact-sheet-imposing-costs-for-harmful-foreign-activities-by-the-russian-government/>].

With regard to cyber-attacks, it may be relevant to the analysis of international aid in terms of foreign policy interests that the latest attack targeted USAID. At the end of May 2021, Microsoft reported that Nobelium, the same Russia-based hacker group behind the attack on SolarWinds, launched a phishing attack from USAID's e-mail accounts, that was aimed at gathering intelligence data and reached 150 organizations in the US and abroad that have relations with USAID; a quarter of them works in the fields of development, humanitarian aid, human rights.⁴⁵⁶ Russian authorities have denied any role in the cyberattack.⁴⁵⁷ Given that the fraudulent e-mails have been sent out to other organizations, the intelligence data gathering seems to aim for the civil society and human rights organizations that cooperate with USAID, rather than the agency itself. However, it is worth relaying the remark made by Microsoft's Tom Burt, who wrote that "Nobelium's activities [...] tend to track with issues of concern to the country from which they are operating"⁴⁵⁸. To date, it is not clear whether the information sought by hackers regards USAID's international aid activity in the world (organizations that received phishing e-mails are from 24 countries) or specifically civil society NGOs and human rights organizations (whose work has been under attack in Russia and limited by the laws on foreign agents and on undesirable organizations).

Considering the growing role of international aid policy in Russian foreign policy – a role that has been increasing since Russia re-emerged as a donor in 2006, was defined in clearer strategic terms in 2014, came to the fore with mask and vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, and may have been further sanctioned in late 2020 by the creation of the Interagency Commission under the Presidential Administration – and considering the deteriorated relations with the US since the failed attempt at a "reset" by Obama and Medvedev, whereby many observers see a new Cold War approaching, the attack by Nobelium could look like an attempt to gather information on USAID's international aid activities. Further, other cyber-attacks in areas of interest to the state were reported to be linked to Russian authorities, namely attacks in the months before November 2020 that targeted companies involved in COVID-19 vaccine research and related clinical trials⁴⁵⁹ – which resonate with the "race to develop" the first vaccine against COVID-19.

A US-Russia bilateral presidential summit is scheduled to take place in Geneva on June 16, 2021 and both sides have confirmed that the cyber-attacks accusations will not disrupt the organization of the meeting. Regardless of the objective of the latest cyber-attack (whether directly USAID or rather the NGOs that cooperate with it), the string of cyber-attacks that Russia is accused

⁴⁵⁶ Burt, T. (2021, May 27). Another Nobelium Cyberattack. *Microsoft blog*. Available at <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2021/05/27/nobelium-cyberattack-nativezone-solarwinds/>.

⁴⁵⁷ TASS. (2021, May 28). Microsoft's allegations unlikely to affect Putin-Biden summit, Kremlin says. Available at <https://tass.com/politics/1295341>. As of June 1, 2021, US authorities have not officially accused Russia.

⁴⁵⁸ Burt (2021).

⁴⁵⁹ Burt, T. (2020, Nov 13). Cyberattacks targeting health care must stop. *Microsoft blog*. Available at <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2020/11/13/health-care-cyberattacks-covid-19-paris-peace-forum/>.

of severely undermines its chances to increase Russian soft power by being perceived as taking the role of bearer of values, a role that the West had temporarily forsaken during the pandemic.

A diplomacy of “vaccine technology transfer”?

Russia’s vaccine diplomacy has reached 67 countries, which have approved Sputnik V. Official data on deliveries has not been released, but unofficial statistics show that at least 45 have received supplies for a total 15 to 16 million doses by mid-May 2021. By way of comparison, again unofficial statistics show that Chinese vaccines have already been delivered to 93 countries by end of May 2021. In the first days of June, the number has quickly risen to 95 and the volume from 256 to 262 million doses.⁴⁶⁰ The United States’ vaccine diplomacy is also gathering pace in May-June 2021, as 580 million doses have been pledged and 25 millions of them allocated (plus, about 3 to 4 million had been sent to Mexico and Canada previously).

Given Russia’s pharmaceutical industrial production constraints, turning to foreign producers has represented a necessity for Russia. Should Russia not be able to provide the vaccine in the moment of highest need and fill the void left by Western countries, its vaccine diplomacy may not be effective for foreign policy purposes. Further, the potential to exploit Sputnik V’s competitive advantage, i.e. its low price (\$10) and easier storage and transportation⁴⁶¹, would be lost. China is already ahead of Russia in vaccine exports, but other donors could surpass it as well. So far, the volume of Russia’s vaccine exports is 5 times that of the US, but as Biden pledged to allocate vaccines to foreign countries in June, also the US will likely get ahead of Russia.

On the one hand, failing to deliver on promises made to developing countries that have signed purchase contracts with RDIF would mightily hurt Russian soft power. On the other hand, delocalizing production could also become an opportunity to extend Russia’s geopolitical influence abroad and increase its soft power. Indeed, delocalization requires the transfer of valuable technology and knowledge, which is yet another aspect of International Aid Public Policies. RDIF is already calling the licensing of Sputnik V to foreign partners “technology transfer deals”⁴⁶². Technology transfer brings progress to the recipient economy and human capital development, and its effects are long-lasting. Russia is arguably in a position where it can develop or deepen relations with recipient countries in the long-term by providing technology (primarily intellectual property and know-how) to manufacture its vaccine, whilst retaining a relationship based on equality – because Russia also

⁴⁶⁰ Increase by 5 June 2021, see Bridge Consulting Website.

⁴⁶¹ RDIF said that its price for international sales of Sputnik V is standard and less than \$10 per dose; prices asked by Big Pharma companies vary and depend on contractual agreements, but only Oxford-Astrazeneca is reported to cost less than Sputnik V. For prices, see, The Week. (2021, Mar 30). *What Covid vaccines cost - and the countries paying over the odds*. Available at [<https://www.theweek.co.uk/951750/what-do-covid-vaccines-cost-who-pays-what>]. Sinovac may cost less than Sputnik V or up to \$38, depending on the purchasing country. Further, Sputnik V can be stored and transported in a regular medical refrigerator, while Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna require extremely low temperatures which complicates logistics. See, Benedyczak (2021).

⁴⁶² Yaffa (2021).

needs these countries to meet both foreign and Russian domestic vaccine demand. The launch of Sputnik V production in Argentina and Serbia was turned into a high-level diplomatic event, at the presence (virtually) of the Presidents of Russia, Argentina and Serbia.

Russia could be seen as empowering developing countries through this form of aid – *vaccine technology transfer* – which would afford Russia stronger links with targeted foreign countries, reputational gains and soft power. Further, this form of aid could contribute to shape Russia's aid approach. Indeed, Russia does not have as much economic power as China, the largest re-emerging donor, but its asset may be technological knowledge in various sectors – defense, energy, countering biological threats, just to name a few that have emerged in this thesis.

Being based on the pursuit of a common interest (production of a vaccine to be used or exported by both countries) for which the donor needs the recipient and vice versa, the donor-recipient relationship would be rooted in equality, consistently with Russia's disinterest in using international aid to export a model of economic development or impose conditions of policy reform, which is instead a characteristic of US and Western aid policies.

Professor Dougherty told me that COVID-19 vaccines is an area where “the US and Russia really could cooperate”. The Biden-Putin Summit in June 2021 may shed light on how this cooperation could take place.⁴⁶³

Indeed, as described in para. 3.1.1., US-Russia vaccine diplomacy has led to some of the greatest successes in global public health.

As pointed out by Professor Dougherty, one issue in vaccine technology transfer is that virology could be a sensitive security area (i.e., biological weapons); however, there does not seem to be particular sensitivity in relation to COVID-19 vaccine technology. Another issue that could undermine Russia's effort to establish these relations between its own pharmaceutical sector and those of foreign countries is related to its image. Specifically, it is linked to the perception that there is a high level of corruption in Russia, which according to Professor Dougherty “damages the soft power image of Russia”: foreign companies, as well as foreign states, could fear that they would import “Russia-style corruption” together with vaccine technology.⁴⁶⁴

China, the other main competing donor, has also been keen on technology transfers for COVID-19 vaccine production and has committed to it at the 2021 G20 Health Summit. Chinese vaccines are produced not only in China, but also in Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, UAE, Serbia, and will be in Egypt. With regard to China's overall aid strategy, the promotion of technology transfer to recipient states is part of the mechanisms envisaged by the 2021 White Paper to support the

⁴⁶³ Dougherty, J. (2021, June 10). Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and Global Fellow at the Kennan Institute. *Expert interview*, virtual.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

endogenous growth of developing countries. Although some cooperation at this level had been undertaken already before the pandemic, the prevalence of Chinese companies and workers involved in aid projects in recipient states, particularly in Africa, has long undermined China's deployment of soft power, as recipients perceived the presence of Chinese workers as lost job opportunities for local populations,⁴⁶⁵ and thus China did not achieve an image as a donor helping human capital development in recipient societies.

In the long-term, vaccine technology transfer could lead to building stable cooperative relations between the pharmaceutical sectors of donor and recipient countries. The transfer of know-how and the related development of human capital may go a long way towards increasing soft power and improving the reputation of Russia and China, while the increasing integration of pharma value chains between donors and recipients could provide a hard tool of influence over recipients. As health becomes ever more evidently a full-fledged component of a state's security policy, relations in this industrial sector could function as a diplomatic channel, as it happens with energy diplomacy, and as it appeared from the launch of production in Argentina and Serbia: not just diplomacy in terms of medical supplies and exports of vaccines to foreign countries at times of crisis, as was the case with mask and vaccine diplomacy, but diplomacy in terms of stable cooperation between industries in donor and recipient countries, in production as well as R&D, and high-level dialogue.

Indeed, as Professor Caracciolo told me, exports of vaccine doses will unlikely be enough for Russia and China to wield influence over foreign countries, but structural aid initiatives may be more effective.⁴⁶⁶

For Professor Dougherty, Russia's "attempt to use soft power at a maximum extent is undermined by the domestic economic and at times political situation and until Russia fixes its domestic problems it will face difficulty becoming an international aid superpower". Thus, Russia would need to first "do the reforms that Putin began in his first incarnation as President", that however ground to a halt when he became President for the second time; "it would help not only his citizens but also Russia's foreign policy and soft power influence". Indeed, Russia still faces "problems in civilian production, of things that the modern world needs", Professor Dougherty says.⁴⁶⁷

As argued above, were Russia not able to export the number of doses it has agreed to, its vaccine diplomacy may fail and Russia's image may emerge as untrustworthy. Its numerous efforts to localize manufacture abroad are hindered by the lengthy process of setting up the complex production of vaccines and by the fact that many developing countries may be facing the same production restraints as Russia, if not worse. By relying, as it plans, on India's more advanced

⁴⁶⁵ See para. 1.2.2, and Blair, Marty & Roessler (2019).

⁴⁶⁶ Caracciolo, L. (2021, June 9). Professor and Limes Editor in Chief. *Expert interview*, virtual.

⁴⁶⁷ Dougherty, J. (2021, June 10). Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and Global Fellow at the Kennan Institute. *Expert interview*, virtual.

industrial facilities for 60% of Sputnik V's foreign production Russia may be able to prevent this failure.

In any case, technology transfers may strengthen relations of both Russia and China with the developing world and create a stable net of cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector. Western countries, as they are not in direct control of Western vaccines developed by private companies, lack the possibility to undertake such technology transfer directly. As of May 2021, the production sites of Western Big Pharma manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines are based in the US and Europe – Astrazeneca seems to be the only one striking a number of manufacturing deals in the developing world, while Johnson&Johnson has one partnership in South Africa.⁴⁶⁸

However, the US seems to be moving in the same direction as Russia and China already are, as Biden announced on May 17, 2021 that the US is cooperating “with the private sector and all possible partners”⁴⁶⁹ to scale up global manufacturing and distribution capabilities. So far, the DFC is investing in an Indian pharmaceutical company to produce WHO-approved vaccines, amongst them American Johnson&Johnson, and is exploring opportunities for partnerships in Africa.⁴⁷⁰ Still, compared to Russia's and China's ability to decide at state-level where and how to forge these partnerships because the vaccine is controlled by the state, the US may face constrained freedom of movement, as its vaccines are controlled by private companies.

At the multilateral level, the WHO has set up a mechanism, the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), and a technology transfer hub for all stakeholders (states, companies, researchers) to share technologies, knowledge, IPRs, data, in order to improve global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines by expanding manufacturing all over the world. However, this multilateral initiative seems to be stalling: to date, China and Russia do not participate, neither does the US nor any major private vaccine producer.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ Pfizer-BioNTech manufactures in the US, Belgium and Germany. Moderna is investing in Spain, France, Belgium, Switzerland, and the US. Beyond the US and Europe. Johnson&Johnson reports to have a partnership with a company in South Africa, while Astrazeneca is reported to have manufacturing deals in a number of countries, among them Thailand, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, South Korea, India. Information accessed on 28 May 2021 at: Pfizer. *Manufacturing and distributing the COVID-19 vaccine*. Available at [<https://www.pfizer.com/science/coronavirus/vaccine/manufacturing-and-distribution>]; Moderna Website. (2021, Apr 29). *Moderna Announces Additional Investments to Increase Global Supply for COVID-19 Vaccine to up to 3 Billion Doses in 2022*. Available at [<https://investors.modernatx.com/news-releases/news-release-details/moderna-announces-additional-investments-increase-global-supply>]; Johnson&Johnson Website. (2021). *From Lab to Vaccine Vial: The Historic Manufacturing Journey of Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine*. Update: Mar 3 2021. Available at [<https://www.jnj.com/innovation/making-johnson-johnson-janssen-covid-19-vaccine>]; Reuters. (2021, May 26). *Factbox: AstraZeneca's deals to produce and supply its COVID-19 vaccine*. Available at [<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/astrazenecas-deals-produce-supply-its-covid-19-vaccine-2021-05-26/>].

⁴⁶⁹ The White House (2021, May 17).

⁴⁷⁰ US DFC. (2021, March 12). *DFC Announces Support for Manufacturing of Vaccines During Quad Summit*. Press release; US DFC. (2021, May 28). *DFC, IFC, Proparco, and DEG to Support COVID-19 Vaccine and Pharma Manufacturing in Africa*. Press release.

⁴⁷¹ WHO Website. *Endorsement of the Solidarity Call to Action*. Available at [<https://www.who.int/initiatives/covid-19-technology-access-pool/endorsements-of-the-solidarity-call-to-action>], accessed June 5, 2021; Zarocostas, J. (2021). What next for a COVID-19 intellectual property waiver?. *The Lancet*, 397(10288), pp. 1871-1872.

What next?

The next pandemic⁴⁷² may find the developing world more strongly tied to the countries that empowered it to progress in the field of vaccine production, so far Russia and China. Materially, this could possibly translate into privileged access to a higher volume of medicine supply for Russia and China than before, while in terms of foreign policy and geopolitical influence it would reduce opportunities for Western influence. Technological cooperation may be especially important for Russia's global ambitions, as it cannot rely on the greater economic power that China has.

Although vaccine diplomacy by Western countries has been limited so far, it is poised to increase as the US is starting to export tens of millions of doses in June 2021 and Western countries are expected to complete domestic vaccination campaigns. In the scenario of a future pandemic where developing countries' pharmaceutical sectors have progressed or are progressing with Russian and Chinese help, even this late opportunity of Western vaccine diplomacy, which is now taking place in June 2021, would have to be re-assessed and could be less effective.

⁴⁷² For potential future pandemics, see for instance GAVI Website. (2021). *The Next Pandemic*. Available at [<https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/next-pandemic>].

Conclusion

The overarching argument of this thesis is that international aid occurs amidst great power rivalry, which translates to donor competition, namely aid is used as a tool of foreign policy by donor countries to advance their geopolitical interests and expand their influence. Specifically, this thesis examined Russia's international aid as an instrument of Russian foreign policy. The dynamics of donor competition were analyzed with regard to international health assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which consisted of mask diplomacy (humanitarian aid) and vaccine diplomacy (vaccine exports).

Since Putin's rise to power in 2000, Russia is back on the global stage after the inward focus of the 1990s, and it is seeking a multipolar world order, great power recognition and influence over its Near Abroad. Pursuing a global foreign policy, it has re-engaged with countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, where its influence had been absent since the Soviet collapse, and it has re-emerged as a global aid donor after being a recipient for more than a decade.

The principles guiding Russia's international aid strategy mirror its foreign policy objectives. Indeed, the declared respect for other states' sovereignty (which reflects multipolarity) determines a lack of policy conditionality of Russian aid, which is instead typical of Western aid and its North-South directionality. Russia aims to present itself as a country that has faced the same development issues as developing countries and can therefore offer the unique perspective on modernization of someone that has experienced both conditions, developing and developed. This attitude bears resemblance to the Soviets' idea of sharing their own path to development with developing countries. Such approach was anti-colonialist as much as today's approach may be seen as non-hierarchical.

Nevertheless, Russia does not embrace the concept of South-South Cooperation, as China does instead, and partly operates within the OECD-DAC: the Russian aid model is said to both challenge and reaffirm the established directionality and architecture of development aid. The attempt to operate as a donor from the Global North showcases the desire to be recognized as a great power. Further, although the volume of Russian aid is dwarfed by US and Chinese aid volumes, it does have a global reach. The main focus is however Russia's Near Abroad, in terms of both stated strategy and aid volume (after Cuba, South and Central Asia is the main recipient of Russian ODA, calculated as average per year in the period for which data has been reported to the DAC). Geopolitical drivers have been pointed out with regard to Russia's top 10 ODA recipients. Other official flows would be relevant too in terms of International Aid Public Policies, but a dearth of data constrains the analysis to a few qualitative examples.

Aid volume, global reach and geopolitical drivers are all elements of donor competition addressed in this thesis: by providing larger amounts of aid, states strive to achieve lead donorship to secure their influence. However, these elements are ultimately informed by aid philosophies, which

for instance comprise policy conditionality for the US, South-South Cooperation for China, non-interference for Russia: here competition takes place at the ideational level and has the soft power ability to attract recipients to one donor or the other.

The analysis of the Russian aid model, comprehensive of material, geopolitical, institutional and ideational factors (volume, recipients, actors, philosophy) appears to show that such model shares elements of both the Western model (US) and the Chinese one.

Russia's international response during the COVID-19 pandemic is not an isolated effort, but should be seen in light of Soviet and Russian attempts at global health leadership.

Russian humanitarian aid during the COVID-19 pandemic was more timely than that of the US, but limited in global reach and volume in comparison to China's. China's mask diplomacy definitely encroached upon areas of American and Russian geopolitical influence. Even when not in large amounts, highly-publicized Russian humanitarian aid (as well as the Chinese, though it was additionally in large quantities) had a great symbolic value, which can be a factor of geopolitical influence, especially compared to the US limit on PPE exports. From a foreign policy viewpoint, the pay-off of Russia's material aid suffered from donor competition with China, who could afford to distribute a higher volume of aid to more countries due to structural factors – superior economic resources, large presence of mask producers in China – a clearer and long-term oriented aid strategy, whereby recipient countries' indebtedness plays a major role, and the time variable, given that China got the pandemic under control sooner and was more free to direct its health assistance abroad.

Geopolitical competition among Russia, China and the US in relation to COVID-19 vaccines took the shape of a "race to develop" and then a "race to distribute" the vaccine. Russia was the first to register a vaccine (Sputnik V), but to date it lacks international recognition from the WHO (it is still under review for Emergency Use Listing). Conversely, Chinese vaccines and Western ones have already been approved by the WHO. Notably, Sputnik V and Chinese vaccines have been developed by state institutions, While American ones by private companies, financed but not controlled by the state. Ownership of the whole process, from development to distribution, affords Russia and China an opportunity to reap the political returns not only in international relations, but also internally, in terms of domestic support for the government. On the contrary, in the Western world no state could take full credit for the vaccine. Even less could any Western state use it for geopolitical purposes: first, they had to secure supply from private pharmaceutical companies – as states were in a "race for procurement" – and only then they could think about exports or donations.

Russian and Chinese vaccine supplies overlap in many areas of geopolitical interest to Russia, which have been addressed in detail in the thesis. Russia's vaccine diplomacy has reached 67 countries, which have approved Sputnik V. Official data on actual distribution has not been released, but unofficial statistics show that at least 45 have received supplies for a total 15 to 16 million doses

by mid-May 2021. By way of comparison, again unofficial statistics show that Chinese vaccines have already been delivered to 93 countries by end of May 2021. In the first days of June, the number has quickly risen to 95 and the volume from 256 to 262 million doses. The United States' vaccine diplomacy is gathering pace only in May-June 2021, as the domestic vaccination rate has considerably increased and the US were able to pledge 580 million doses to be donated to foreign countries, 25 million of which have been allocated, mostly through the multilateral initiative COVAX. Russia and China are mainly operating at the bilateral level, which reflects their overall preference for bilateral aid relations and the challenge to the US-led international order.

By filling the void left by Western democracies in early global vaccine provision, and doing so in a highly-publicized manner, Russia may have not only improved its standing as a global health leader, but also exposed shortcomings in the Western international response and may be effectively competing with the West in the field of values, which has always been a Western prerogative. Arguably, Russia only needs its vaccine to be used alongside Western ones to prove that it is no worse than the West, as it strives for multipolarity and thus *ravenstvo* (equality), while the West needs Western and third countries to use any Western vaccine, but not Sputnik V, because it strives for *preimushestvo* (superiority) over the Russian political model.

Still, the overall course of action of Russia, at both the domestic and international level, presents some alarming factors that do not resonate with the image of Russia as the bearer of those values that the West seemed to have forsaken during the early days of the pandemic.

Further, Russia's pharmaceutical industrial production constraints limit the effectiveness of its vaccine diplomacy. The Pharma-2020 strategy has not prompted enough modernization of old facilities or realization of new ones to compete with American, European, Chinese or Indian capacities. Nevertheless, the delocalization of production in foreign countries, due to necessity, may turn into a strong diplomatic asset, that allows Russia to extend its geopolitical influence abroad and increase its soft power through a type of aid that could be called "vaccine technology transfer". Indeed, delocalization requires the transfer of valuable technology and knowledge, which is yet another aspect of International Aid Public Policies. Further, this form of aid could contribute to shape Russia's aid approach. Indeed, Russia does not have as much economic power as China but its asset may be technological knowledge. Being based on the pursuit of a common interest (production of a vaccine to be used or exported by both countries) for which the donor needs the recipient and vice versa, the donor-recipient relationship would be rooted in equality, consistently with Russia's lack of policy conditionality. Whilst the WHO mechanism for COVID-19 technology transfer (C-TAP) is struggling to gain momentum, China has struck production deals abroad and the US is moving in this direction too. So far American pharmaceutical companies have produced in the US and Europe, but the US is attempting to boost global manufacturing, particularly in India and Africa through its

International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). However, China and Russia may enjoy more freedom of movement in vaccine technology transfer, because the vaccine is an asset of the state while in the US vaccines are controlled by the private sector companies that developed them.

Appendix – Vaccine Geopolitics

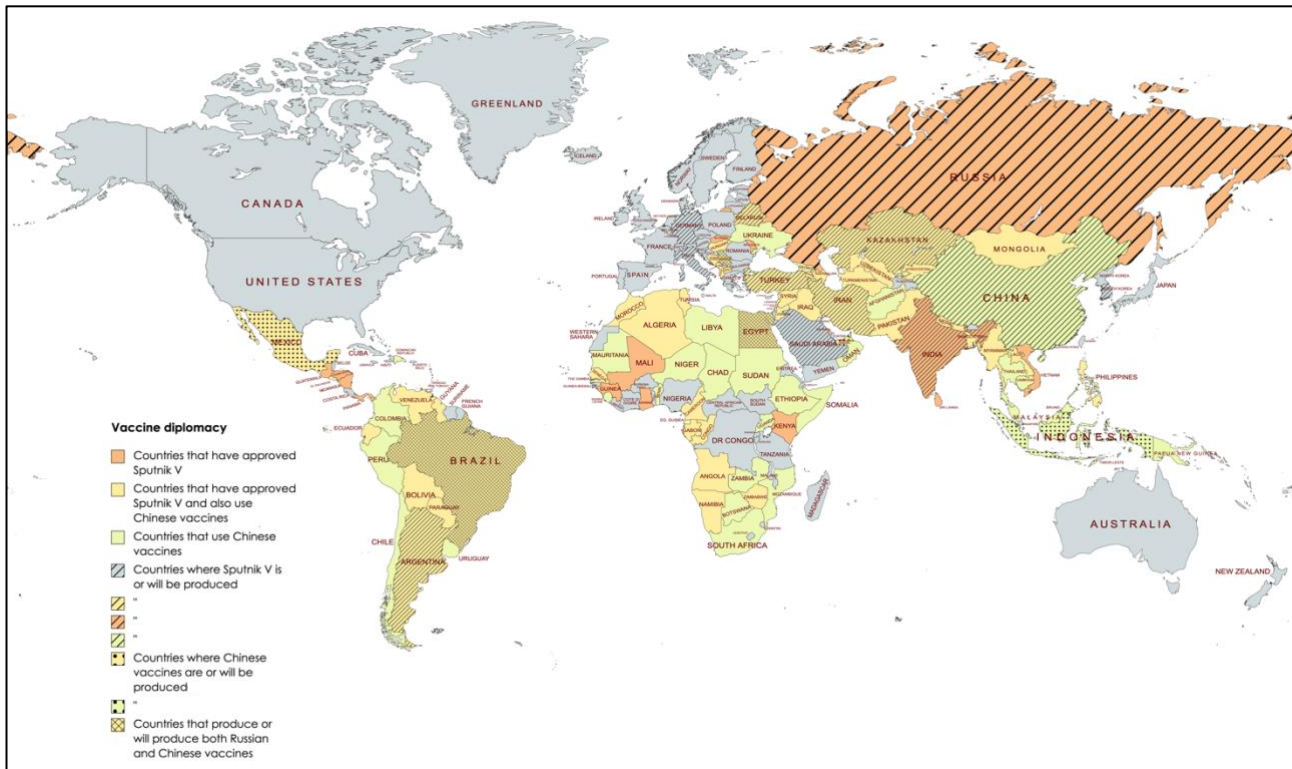


Figure 7: Russian and Chinese vaccines against COVID-19.

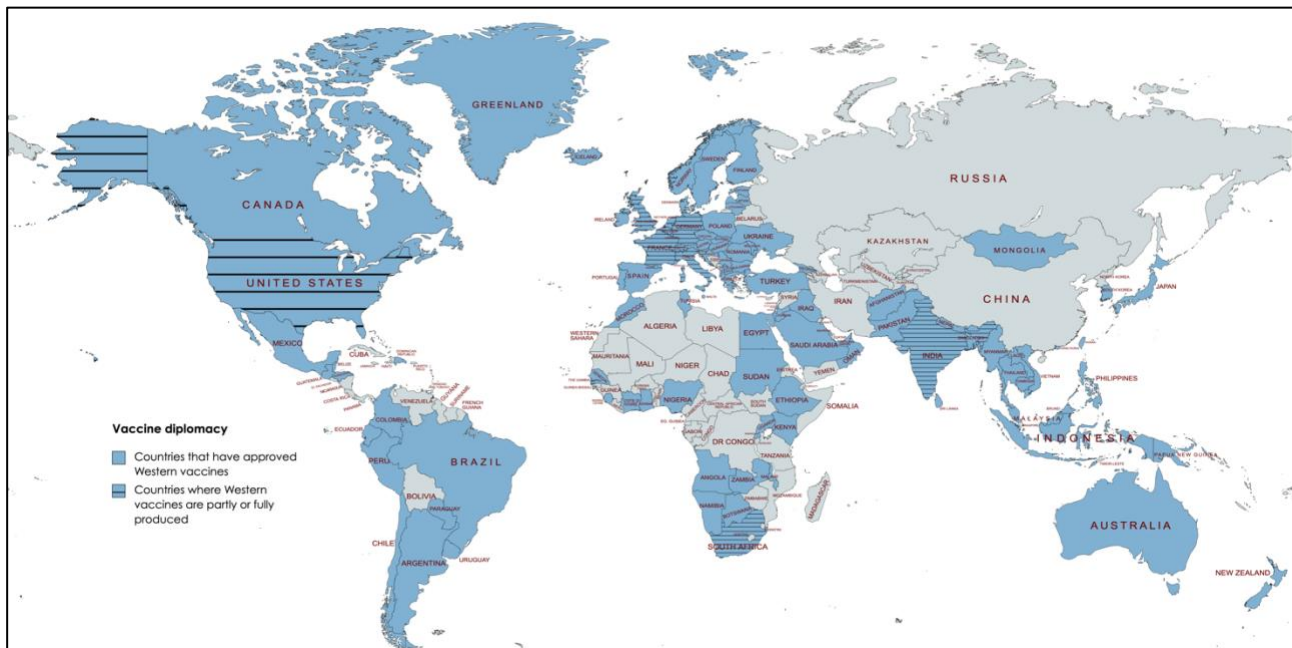


Figure 8: Western vaccines against COVID-19.

Author's elaborations based on information reported in section 3.3.

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Summary

After the fall of the USSR, the Russian Federation retreated from the global stage amidst domestic political instability and deep economic crisis. Its foreign policy ambitions were humbled, Russia could no longer afford to be an aid donor to foreign countries, except for some occasional and limited humanitarian aid or debt relief, and it became a recipient of international aid, which arguably felt like a demeaning experience for a former great power. Since Putin's accession to the presidency in 2000, Russia began to reposition itself as a global player, following the Primakov doctrine according to which Russia should aim to transition the world towards a multipolar order where Russia is the leading player in the post-Soviet space, as opposed to the US-led international order and NATO expansion. As Russia's economic outlook improved and Putin's rule provided political stability, Russia pursued an active and assertive foreign policy on a global level, that led to re-engagement with countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, where its influence had been absent since the Soviet collapse.

The quest for multipolarity, for recognition as a great power, and for influence over its Near Abroad are constants in Russian foreign policy. The first one is reflected in Russia's distinct approach to sovereignty, which makes it stand out before foreign countries as an alternative to the Western model, the second one is aimed for by deploying both hard and soft power, while the third one, from a geopolitical viewpoint, is motivated primarily by security concerns due to geographical features – namely the loss of geostrategic space due to the disintegration of the USSR and the lack of natural barriers at Russia's borders, which easily reignite an ancient fear of encirclement.

Russia's return to the global stage was followed by and linked to Russia's re-emergence as an aid donor. The first public commitment to international aid came at the G8 in Saint Petersburg in 2006; Russia's international aid policy was then officially enshrined in a strategy in 2007 (Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in International Development Assistance), and then in a subsequent Concept in 2014 (Concept of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Area of International Development Assistance) which underlined more clearly the link to Russian foreign policy interests.

Russia's international aid has been widely discussed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, when Russia provided humanitarian aid to foreign countries, even to advanced economies that are traditional aid donors such as the United States and Italy, and then when Russia developed and distributed a vaccine against COVID-19 which is now an important tool of Russian foreign policy. Many countries, even some that are usually aid recipients, provided international aid during the pandemic. China – the largest re-emerging donor – was the leading provider of humanitarian aid, arguably driven by economic and foreign policy interests related to its Belt and Road Initiative, and it developed and is distributing its own vaccines against COVID-19. The material health aid of the

United States – the largest traditional donor – arrived later than China’s and Russia’s, but the US provided large volumes of financial aid; its vaccine distribution to foreign countries is only starting now in May-June 2021, but it is poised to become very relevant, as several companies that developed and manufacture vaccines are based in the US.

Humanitarian aid and vaccine exports during the COVID-19 pandemic, dubbed “mask diplomacy” and “vaccine diplomacy”, were not merely an outcome of altruism - according to the theoretical views presented in this thesis, no international aid is. Instead, the underlying dynamics were those of competition amongst donors for geopolitical spheres of influence.

Indeed, the overarching argument of this thesis is that international aid occurs amidst great power rivalry, which translates to donor competition, namely aid is used as a tool of foreign policy by donor countries to advance their geopolitical interests and expand their influence.

This thesis examines Russia’s international aid as an instrument of Russian foreign policy. The dynamics of donor competition are analyzed in reference to international health assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which consisted of mask diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy.

The content may be summarized as follows:

The first chapter provides a theoretical overview and literature review on foreign aid.

The purpose of the first section (1.1.1) is definitional: the conventional view of foreign aid as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the categories of Other Official Flows (OOF) and private aid are presented, along with the role of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as the pillars of traditional donorship. The main strands of literature that study foreign aid from an economic point of view are described. The literature review on aid allocation introduces history and political-strategic interests of donors as drivers of aid.

Then, in section 1.1.2, the classification of foreign aid is expanded and aid is addressed from a political point of view. The donor’s perspective is adopted, focusing on its foreign policy interests as determinants of aid. Morgenthau’s six categories are presented.

In section 1.1.3 the definition of aid is broadened to the category of International Aid Public Policies (IAPP) proposed by Professor Pellicciari. The definition of aid as IAPP is the one adopted in this thesis. Through this category the political significance of aid can be grasped more clearly than through the conventional definition of foreign aid as ODA. IAPP include asymmetrical exchanges of any kind as long as they are funded by the donor’s public budget and are part of a strategy, and it does not equate the roles of donors and recipients with the groups of advanced economies or developing countries. Roles are interchangeable, depending on the interests that the donor seeks to promote with its international aid. Relying on the IAPP definition allows to examine a broader range of exchanges than just development and humanitarian aid flows (ODA), as part of the overall aid

strategy of a donor country. Thus, the definition of aid arises from the donor-recipient relationship, rather than from the object donated/lent/sold.

The second section (1.2) is devoted to the asymmetrical relationship between donor and recipient that arises as a consequence of one-sided aid flows, and some analytical tools to understand it are suggested.

In section 1.2.1, the theory of the gift applied to international aid gives insights with regard to the unbalance in the relationship, characterized by North-South directionality that by suspending reciprocation (counter-gifting) transforms a material hierarchy into a moral one. The unreciprocated nature of international aid practices determines the ambiguity of the donor-recipient relationship, where the recipient perceives not only a material debt, but also a debt of development, civilization and capacity towards donors. Indebtedness justifies donors' intervention in the domestic affairs of recipient countries and the request of domestic reforms.

In section 1.2.2, a few forms of influence (that is ultimately a peaceful proxy for intervention) envisaged by Dahl are linked to their possible achievement through aid. It is noted that sanctions and aid have come to be employed in synergy. Nye's theory of soft power is presented, together with the link to international aid, which can be a tool of both hard power (when it allows to make someone do what he otherwise would not do) and soft power (when it bolsters affinity for the donor country). However, international aid does not automatically yield soft power.

Finally, section 1.2.3 is devoted to the framework of geopolitics. Geopolitics is defined as a comprehensive approach, at the intersection of history, geography and strategy. A wide range of factors that shape geopolitical rivalry are taken into account: historical, geographic, strategic, economic, technological, symbolic. Thus, not only material factors, but also ideas: the conflicting representations that inform rivalry are subordinated to subjective understandings of reality by states and their leaders. The media becomes a geopolitical factor, insofar as it influences the public opinion and spreads representations of geopolitical rivalry. Soft power can therefore find application within this framework. The geopolitical use of aid is further specified.

The second chapter analyses the Russian aid model, which is compared and contrasted with those of the US and China.

Section 2.1.1 opens with one more theoretical aspect, that is the dichotomy coordination-competition amongst donors and Steinwand's concept of lead donorship, i.e. the emergence of a main donor in a recipient country, so that a division of recipient countries amongst donors' spheres of influence occurs, as opposed to donor competition for that influence. Donor competition has increased in the past years, as established patterns of lead donorship amongst traditional donors have been defied by the re-emergence of countries such as the BRICS as aid donors, who operate outside of the Western aid architecture (OECD-DAC).

The concept of re-emerging donor is explored in section 2.1.2. According to Gray, emerging or new donors is a subjective category that reveals the point of view of traditional donors, rather than describing some objective feature. Re-emerging donors challenge what the West considers as the right way to go about international aid and development by introducing their own new cultural practices. Their aid philosophy views aid as not conditional on policy and institutional changes by the recipient and their aid discourse is centered on mutually beneficial cooperation and partnership rather than donorship.

Then, the focus is narrowed down to Russia as an aid donor (2.2). A brief overview of the evolution of Russian international aid, from its Soviet origins to the re-emergence as a donor in 2006 (2.2.1.), is followed by the analysis of the aid strategy, its stated goals and foreign policy relevance, the cultural reasons that prompted the re-emergence (with insights from the theory of the gift and ultimately related to the quest for recognition as part of the Global North), and the relationship with the Western aid architecture – Western institutions played a part in the early development of Russian aid capabilities (Russia can be seen as a “recruited” donor). The strategic documents that inform Russia’s aid strategy are the 2007 Concept and the 2014 Concept.

In the subsection *Geopolitical relevance: Official Development Assistance*, an analysis of aid recipients is undertaken: historical continuity with Soviet aid, geographical factors, and strategic factors are underlined. Temporal continuity across recipients of aid from the Russian Federation is also presented (relevant to the IAPP definition). For these purposes, a data set of bilateral ODA flows from Russia is analyzed (OECD data, available in spreadsheet format). The choice of looking at bilateral flows rather than at multilateral and bilateral flows together, is justified by the focus on bilateral flows expressed in the 2014 Concept: Russia deems bilateral flows to be more effective than multilateral flows in terms of foreign policy. Still, the analysis of international aid based on ODA is by definition limited and far from grasping the nature of IAPP. Other Official Flows (OOF) would need to be addressed too, in order to paint a more complete picture, but Russia does not submit OOF data to the OECD and there is currently a gap in academic research on the matter. Plus, these OECD indicators do not include aid to developed countries, which is a feature that emerged prominently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, some examples of military, diplomatic, energy and non-ODA financial aid are put forward in the following subsection, *Geopolitical relevance: Other Official Flows*. Then follows *Domestic actors in Russian aid*, an overview of the institutional set-up, which is fragmented among a number of state actors, and its history. In 2020, the coordination of the activities of these actors has been brought under the Kremlin’s oversight, signaling even more the relevance of aid for foreign policy interests.

In section 2.2.3, a comparative analysis provides insights on the dynamics of donor competition: Russia's international aid policy is compared and contrasted with those of the US and China, with regard to aid volumes, institutional set-up, underlying philosophy and donors' interests. The choice of the US and China as terms for comparison is motivated by the fact that the United States is the largest traditional donor, while China is the largest re-emerging donor.

According to data studied by AidData Research Lab, China's total official commitments (ODA+OOF) outranked those of the United States in 2009-2014. However, official statistics are not reported by China. The bulk of Chinese aid consists of OOF-like flows. Russian ODA (bilateral + multilateral) is dwarfed by its competitors: it is 1/34 of US ODA and 1/4 of estimated Chinese ODA. Notably, Russia lacks a central aid agency, in contrast with both the US and China.

Further, American aid policy largely differs from the Chinese one. The US is the main architect of the Western traditional donorship model, which entails the upholding of democracy, civil society empowerment, human rights and environment protection, market economy expansion, and public-private partnerships; the directionality of the aid is North-South. China's development cooperation is explicitly defined as a form of South-South cooperation in contrast with hierarchic North-South aid. Arguably, the Russian aid model possesses elements of both approaches: various characteristics overlap with one model or the other, but the most ambiguous elements may be its partial compliance with the OECD architecture (element of the US model) and the stress on equality between donor and recipient and on non-interference in the recipient country's domestic affairs (element of the Chinese model).

The third chapter delves into the topic of international health assistance.

The first section (3.1) is meant to give historical and policy context to Russia's international health aid, which informs its international response during the COVID-19 pandemic: mask diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy are not new phenomena, but should be seen in light of Soviet and Russian attempts at global health leadership.

Notably, US-USSR health diplomacy led to fundamental discoveries for the polio vaccine and to the eradication of smallpox (3.1.1).

In section 3.1.2, the Russian Federation's transition from recipient to donor is addressed again, focusing on the health sector. At the 2006 G8 Summit presided by Russia, health – specifically the fight against infectious diseases – was ranked as a priority of the summit, at Putin's prompting, for the first time in the history of the G8. It is considered one of the best examples of Russia's global health leadership. Health also became one of the three sector priorities of the 2007 Concept. Motivations for Russia's international health assistance and efforts to showcase leadership in global health are arguably linked to its national interests. Specifically, to prevent cross-border spread of infectious diseases into Russia's territory, ensure stability of its neighborhood, with geopolitical and

economic consequences for Russia, address pressing health threats within the country (e.g., HIV/AIDS) and attract attention to the achievements in the sector made in the post-Soviet period.

The Pharma-2020 strategy is presented (3.1.3) as it is relevant to current shortcomings in domestic vaccine production. It is a strategic investment program (and also an import substitution strategy) to boost the Russian pharmaceutical sector and become independent from foreign medicines. The goals set by 2020 were maybe too ambitious, but the effort was deemed successful. Pharma-2030 is being developed and it will focus on exports, non-communicable diseases and vaccine development.

Further, Russian assistance during the Ebola epidemic in 2014-2015 is recalled, as it shares many aspects of Russia's COVID-19 international response in 2020-2021: for instance, role of Rospotrebnadzor, deployment of a medical team in the recipient country, vaccine development by Gamaleya.

Despite these achievements, Russia is still considered under certain respects a global health security threat, notably because of its HIV/AIDS epidemic and accusations of health disinformation campaigns.

Russia's international response to the COVID-19 pandemic is then divided into two phases: a first one characterized by mask diplomacy, corresponding primarily to 2020 starting in February and particularly intense in the months of March and April, and a second phase characterized by vaccine diplomacy, starting in late 2020. Mask and vaccine diplomacy are here considered as part of a state's international aid policy even when medical equipment and vaccines are sold rather than donated: as scarce resources, their sale may be seen as an asymmetrical exchange (IAPP).

The second section (3.2) is dedicated to mask diplomacy.

The analysis of Russia's COVID-19 humanitarian aid (3.2.1) is based on a data set (available in spreadsheet format) compiled by the Moscow-based Center of Advanced Governance (CAG), which is comprised of Russian-language official reports on Russia's international humanitarian aid provided to tackle COVID-19, from February 2020 to February 2021. Information on aid sent by Russia in the following months of 2021, and on the aid sent by China and the US in the whole period are obtained from academic, official or media reports available online. A comprehensive account of aid deliveries has not been released by Russian nor Chinese authorities. The structure of Russia's humanitarian aid is analyzed with regard to the multiple Russian state actors providing the aid, geographic distribution of recipients and donor interests, and a focus on Russian aid to China and the US, whose motivation for prompt reciprocation is traced back to the theory of the gift.

Out of several Russian state actors involved, Rospotrebnadzor, the EMERCOM Ministry, and the Ministry of Defense emerged as the most active ones. Besides its role in logistics, the concentration of R&D capabilities in the Defense Ministry, particularly in the sectors of virology and

bacteriology, explains the presence of the military in aid deliveries – deployment even lasted several weeks in Italy, Serbia, and Republika Srpska. Their data collection may have been essential to vaccine development. In the past decade, all recipients of Russia’s COVID-19 humanitarian aid had already received Russian ODA, except for the rich beneficiaries: US and Italy.

Allocation is then analyzed by geopolitical areas of interest to Russia.

The course of action of competing donors, China and the US, is then compared to Russia’s (3.2.3), with a wider focus on China who has been the leading donor. Conversely, the US was facing a ravaging pandemic at home at the highest point of China’s and Russia’s mask diplomacy, and chose to keep masks and equipment for domestic needs, initially providing international financial aid to many countries, and only in later months delivering material aid. China has linked its aid to the BRI (specifically, to the Health Silk Road) and has competed with Russia’s donorship in many recipient countries: aid to Russia’s Near Abroad bears particular importance, but also aid to Africa, where Russia is vying for influence as part of its global foreign policy, and the Balkans.

A paragraph is devoted to the case of aid deliveries to Italy, which is set against the background of stalled EU-Russia relations and the special Italy-Russia relations (3.2.3).

China’s mask diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic definitely encroached upon areas of American and Russian geopolitical influence. Even when not in large amounts, highly-publicized Russian humanitarian aid (as well as the Chinese, though it was additionally in large quantities) had a great symbolic value, which can be a factor of geopolitical influence, especially compared to the US limit on PPE exports. From a foreign policy viewpoint, the pay-off of Russia’s material aid suffered from donor competition with China, who could afford to distribute a higher volume of aid to more countries due to structural factors – superior economic resources, large presence of mask producers in China – a clearer and long-term oriented aid strategy, whereby recipient countries’ indebtedness plays a major role, and the time variable, given that China got the pandemic under control sooner and was more free to direct its health assistance abroad (3.2.4).

The third section (3.3) provides a snapshot of vaccine diplomacy since the announcement of Sputnik V’s development on August 11, 2020 up until June 5, 2021, as this thesis is being submitted. The situation continues to evolve every day at a very fast pace. Lack of official comprehensive data from Russia and China constrains the analysis, but the section attempts to provide an account of this initial phase of vaccine diplomacy, setting it in the framework of International Aid Public Policies, and to analyze the trends that have emerged so far.

The first section (3.3.1) addresses the “race to develop”: different strategies for the development of vaccines, either led by the state in Russia and China or by private companies in the West, and the impact of these differences on vaccine diplomacy, are retraced. The development of Sputnik V, in terms of Russian state actors involved and international reception, is presented. Once

again the Ministry of Defense plays a leading role. Ownership of the whole process, from development to distribution, affords Russia and China an opportunity to reap the political returns not only in international relations, but also internally, in terms of domestic support for the government. On the contrary, in the Western world no state could take full credit for the vaccine. Even less could any Western state use it for geopolitical purposes: first, they had to secure supply from private pharmaceutical companies – as states were in a “race for procurement” – and only then they could think about exports or donations.

Section 3.3.2 examines Russia’s distribution of Sputnik V abroad – managed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund – and its geopolitical and soft power implications. Russia’s vaccine diplomacy is hindered by insufficient industrial production capacity. The Pharma-2020 strategy has not prompted enough modernization of old facilities or realization of new ones to compete with American, European, Chinese or Indian pharmaceutical industries. RDIF has invested \$100 million in new facilities, but the main mechanism whereby Russia hopes to be able to fulfill contractual obligations with states who purchased Sputnik V is the establishment of production in quite a few developing countries as well as in some advanced economies. This delocalization entails the transfer of the relevant technology, in a move that has great relevance for Russian foreign policy.

The comparative analysis is undertaken in the following section (3.3.3), which addresses the “race to distribute” with reference to China’s activism and the US absence in vaccine diplomacy until May-June 2021. In accordance with the challenge to the US-led international order and with the principles of cooperation among equals and respect for sovereignty that inform their aid philosophies, China and Russia have preferred bilateral vaccine deals, while the US is starting to channel vaccine exports mostly through the multilateral mechanism COVAX, which Russia does not participate to. The overlap of Chinese and Russian vaccine supplies in areas of geopolitical interest is examined.

A number of aspects emerge from the analysis of vaccine diplomacy.

By filling the void left by Western democracies in early global vaccine provision, and doing so in a highly-publicized manner, Russia may have not only improved its standing as a global health leader, but also exposed shortcomings in the Western international response and may be effectively competing with the West in the field of values. Still, the overall course of action of Russia, at both the domestic and international level, presents some alarming factors that undermine its soft power and do not resonate with the image of Russia as the bearer of those values that the West seemed to have forsaken during the early days of the pandemic. Expert opinions collected in virtual interviews with Professor Lucio Caracciolo and Professor Jill Dougherty are reported.

Russia’s production constraints limit the effectiveness of its vaccine diplomacy. Nevertheless, the delocalization of production in foreign countries, due to necessity, may turn into a strong diplomatic asset, that allows Russia to extend its geopolitical influence abroad and increase its soft

power through a type of aid that could be called “vaccine technology transfer”. Indeed, delocalization requires the transfer of valuable technology and knowledge, which is yet another aspect of International Aid Public Policies. Further, this form of aid could contribute to shape Russia’s aid approach. Indeed, Russia does not have as much economic power as China, the largest re-emerging donor, but its asset may be technological knowledge. Being based on the pursuit of a common interest (production of a vaccine to be used or exported by both countries) for which the donor needs the recipient and vice versa, the donor-recipient relationship would be rooted in equality, consistently with Russia’s disinterest in using international aid to export a model of economic development or impose conditions of policy reform, which is instead a characteristic of US and Western aid policies. Whilst the WHO mechanism for COVID-19 technology transfer (C-TAP) is struggling to gain momentum, China has struck production deals abroad too, and the US is moving in this direction through its International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). However, China and Russia enjoy more freedom of movement because the vaccine is an asset of the state, while in the US vaccines are controlled by the private sector companies that developed them.