Non-Alignment Spirit as a Small State's Grand Strategy: The Case of Belarus

Yauheni Preiherman*

This paper argues that, when structural conditions in international relations are increasingly shaped by great power confrontation and, thus, produce heightened risks and uncertainties for the small states that sit in-between competing great powers, such small states naturally turn to non-alignment ideas, even when existing institutional affiliations (i.e., membership of collective security organizations) prevent them from pursuing fully-fledged non-alignment policies. In that case, their overall foreign and security policy behaviour tends to be driven by the non-alignment spirit – that is, the concept of the 'non-use of collective defence pacts to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers.' The non-alignment spirit thus effectively becomes the foundation of their grand strategy, even as small states might remain formally aligned. The paper analyses Belarus's foreign and security policies in the context of two post-Cold War structural shifts as a case study.

Keywords: grand strategy; small state; non-alignment; Belarus's foreign policy

* **Yauheni Preiherman** is Founder and Director at the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations (Belarus).

Introduction

The concept and praxis of non-alignment appeared to have lost their attractiveness after the end of the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) certainly preserved its historical stature, but its mission no longer seemed equally relevant as the world was living through the 'unipolar moment'. However, the past decade has seen structural developments in the international system that are undermining unipolarity and reviving great power rivalry.[1] Under these conditions, it is only logical to expect the ideas that used to drive the NAM to resurface in the foreign policy portfolios of certain categories of states.

One such category, in which this expectation already appears to be gaining traction, is represented by small states that find themselves between geopolitical centres of gravity and thus experience their competing pressures. In other words, these small states geographically sit between great powers and their security and well-being depend to a significant extent on the ability to sustain co-operative relations with both of them. Hence, as geopolitical tensions rise, the positions of such small in-between states become particularly precarious.

Most interestingly, this logic works not only for formally non-aligned states, but also for those that happen to be part of defence alliances. As a result, we can often observe institutionally aligned states demonstrating patterns of international behaviour typical of non-aligned states. Belarus serves as an example. Minsk is officially aligned with Russia through bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, but it appears to pursue a foreign policy increasingly rooted in the non-alignment spirit. The latter is reflected in Article 6a of the Bandung Principles, which were agreed at the Afro–Asian Conference held in Bandung in 1955. They prescribe the 'non-use of collective defence pacts to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers.'[2] More broadly, the non-alignment spirit can be defined as 'a counter-hegemonic critique of contemporary world order or a rhetorical justification

1 See, for example: Kroenig, M., *The Return of Great Power Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Russell Mead, W., "The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, 2014.

2 Namazerbaijan.org (2019) *Bandung Principles*, available at: https://www.namazerbaijan.org/founding-principles (accessed July 15, 2020).

for the maximization of national interest.'[3]

This paper addresses the following research question: what accounts for the recurrent patterns of non-alignment behaviour in the foreign policies of small aligned states? It argues that the non-alignment spirit can form the contours of a grand strategy of a small in-between state, even when the state is formally aligned. In that case, a small state does not give up its alliance commitments, but its day-to-day foreign and security policy behaviour is driven, to a large extent, by the non-alignment logic. The ultimate goal of such behaviour is to make sure that, as geopolitical tensions rise, alliance partners do not limit the small state's room for international manoeuvre to the detriment of its national interest and do not entangle the small state in conflicts not of its own choosing. The paper applies a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy to explore the non-alignment elements in Belarus's foreign and security policies.

In what follows, the first section discusses grand strategy as a concept and whether it is analytically helpful for dealing with small states' foreign policy behaviour. The second section looks at how Belarus's structural conditions changed after the end of the Cold War – that, is after the country gained independence. The final section interprets Belarus's responses to the structural shifts and identifies the contours of its grand strategy rooted in the non-alignment spirit.

A grand strategy for a small state?

The very idea of a small state's grand strategy may sound artificial. There has long been a tacit understanding that only great powers are capable of grand-strategizing, due to the multiple and diverse resources they possess and can operationalize.[4] Moreover, it is widely believed that the structural pressures of the international system actually require that a great power should develop its own grand strategy in order to be more effective and efficient

3 Abraham, I. "From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2008, p. 195.

4 Murray, W. "Thoughts on Grand Strategy," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*, eds Murray, W., Sinnreich, R. H. and Lacey, J. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 1.

Moreover, it is widely believed that the structural pressures of the international system actually require that a great power should develop its own grand strategy in order to be more effective and efficient in its foreign policy. Small states, in contrast, lack resources and capabilities and thus, it can be argued, have no reason to think about a grand strategy.

in its foreign policy. Small states, in contrast, lack resources and capabilities and thus, it can be argued, have no reason to think about a grand strategy. Their systemic 'destiny', according to this line of thinking, is to permanently adapt to changing realities in international relations that are shaped by great powers. As small states have no effective control over important developments in world politics, they simply cannot plan and strategize, the argument goes.[5]

Furthermore, in today's world, where data are multiplying at a bewildering pace and information flows are unparalleled, there is a growing belief that grand strategies, as such, are becoming relics of the past.[6] As Barack Obama famously put it in 2014, 'I don't really even need George Kennan right now.'[7] However, from a realist standpoint, globalization and modern advances in technology do not really change the fundamental essence of inter-state dealings. States remain the centrepieces of international affairs and face the same challenge of providing for their own survival, security and well-being, even though the manifestations of this challenge look increasingly complex and multifaceted. Hence, in the words of Allison, 'coherent strategy does not guarantee success, but its absence is a reliable route to failure.'[8]

This argument is germane to small states to no lesser extent than to great powers. The former's place in the international system is characterized by multiple vulnerabilities and uncertainties stemming from sources beyond their immediate control. In order to navigate such an environment, they need to maximize the efficiency of their scarce resources, which is a function of

5 *Ibid*.

6 Sinnreich, R. H. (2012) "Patterns of Grand Strategy," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*, eds Murray, W., Sinnreich, R. H. and Lacey, J. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 261.

7 Remnick, D. (2014) "Going the Distance. On and Off the Road with Barack Obama," *New Yorker*, 27 January, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/going-the-distance-david-remnick (accessed July 13, 2020).

8 Allison, G. (2017) "The Thucydides's Trap," *Foreign Policy*, 9 June, available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/the-thucydides-trap/ (accessed July 9, 2020).

strategy. As Gaddis phrased it, 'danger is a school for strategy.'[9]

In part, the problem of applying the concept of 'grand strategy' to the analysis of small states seems to do with the variety of meanings that the term is used to imply in the literature. It is one of those widely employed buzzwords that is supposed to carry a universally accepted definition, but, in reality, international relations scholars do not share a single understanding of it.[10] British military scholar Liddell Hart is known to have coined the term back in the mid-1900s. He used it as a way to refer to an overarching objective that should direct the thinking of statesmen – 'grand strategy should control strategy.'[11] He observed that even a victory in a war often leaves a country more vulnerable and weaker than it was before the war. Liddell Hart maintained, therefore, that, during a war, statesmen must be concerned about the kind of peace their country is likely to get and be smart in ensuring the best conditions of peace, even if this might go against the logic of fighting on the battlefield. And it is the task of grand strategy to serve this end: to be a 'state's overall plan for providing national security by keeping national resources and external commitments in balance.'[12]

a victory in a war often leaves a country more vulnerable and weaker than it was before the war.

Thus, several ideas are central to the concept of grand strategy. First, it is meant to take account of multiple processes and factors affecting the state and assess them through the lenses of the national interest.[13] Second, states and their leadership need to have a set of principles and priorities, which should help to structure and guide their policy making. This set should address the fundamental concerns about the state's security and well-being in a more comprehensive way than is usually needed to react to daily events.[14] Here, a clear understanding of the

9 Gaddis, J. L. (2009) *What Is Grand Strategy?*, Keynote address for a conference on 'American Grand Strategy after War' at Duke University, 26 February, available at: http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/grandstrategypaper.pdf (accessed July 13, 2020).

10 Kitchen, N. "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, 2010, p. 119.

11 Liddell Hart, B. H., *Strategy* (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 353.

12 Dueck, C. *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 9-10.

13 Kitchen, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

14 Murray, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

In this respect, grand strategy is also about balancing and mitigating existing and potential risks and making sure that no critical mistakes are made under unexpected circumstances because policy makers might miscalculate the balance.

principles and priorities, and informed flexibility in applying them, might be more important than setting specific goals.[15] Third, grand strategy has to address an inherent tension between ends and means. In other words, it is 'more often than not about the ability to adjust to the reality that resources, will, and interests inevitably find themselves out of balance in some areas.'[16] In this respect, grand strategy is also about balancing and mitigating existing and potential risks and making sure that no critical mistakes are made under unexpected circumstances because policy makers might miscalculate the balance.

Finally, as Lobell et al. point out, in addition to the correlation between strategic aims and the resources available to pursue them, a grand strategy has to factor in 'the anticipation of likely reactions of one or more potential opponents.'[17] The interests and potential calculations of all relevant actors (allies as well as opponents) need to be kept on the strategic radar. Otherwise, a grand strategy can fail where least expected. Thus, in essence, grand strategy is 'the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's relations with the outside world.'[18]

All these definitions, while outlining important elements of the concept, still remain quite broad. This reflects the very function of grand strategy – to be an overarching strategy for a state's other strategies – but this also leaves a feeling of an unsatisfactory delineation of the concept and makes it difficult to operationalize. Hence, an analytical model is needed that will serve as a mechanism to identify a grand strategy. For this, this paper utilizes Kitchen's neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation (see Figure 1).[19]

---

15 Jones, M., "Strategy as Character: Bismarck and the Prusso-German Question, 1862-1878," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*, eds Murray, W., Sinnreich, R. H. and Lacey, J. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 108.

16 Murray, *op. cit*, 2.

17 Lobell, S. E., Taliaferro, J. W. and Ripsman, N. M. "Introduction: Grand Strategy Between the World Wars," in *The Challenge of Grand Strategy*, eds Taliaferro, J. W., Ripsman, N. M. and Lobell, S. E. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14-15.

18 Ibid., 15.

19 Kitchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-136.

Kitchen singles out three major tasks that a grand strategy has to perform. The first one is *strategic assessment aimed at defining national security threats*. The scholar stresses that 'different assessments may follow from particular historical, ideological, political or ideational biases.'[20] He maintains that facts on the ground usually make it well-known to a state the exact structural conditions in which it finds itself, but the ideas of policy makers still can interfere in the process when they assess the actual strategic situation and take foreign policy decisions as a result. The second major task of grand strategy, according to Kitchen, is to identify appropriate and optimal *means of strategy*. Importantly, from a neoclassical realist perspective, this 'involves consideration of both what means are available, which will work most effectively, and whether their use can be justified.'[21]

Finally, Kitchen talks about *auxiliary goals* as another task of grand strategy. He contends that whether a state entertains any tertiary goals (and if yes, the scope of such goals) normally depends on the availability of resources to concentrate on something other than the primary goals of security and survival.[22] Some states may not have such auxiliary goals at all, and this paper assumes that Belarus does not hold any such auxiliary goals, as all its relatively limited resources are directed entirely at pursuing the primary goals.

Figure 1. Kitchen's neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation.

20 Ibid., 134.

21 Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

22 Ibid., 136.

The following sections will use the two components of Kitchen's model – strategic assessment and means of strategy – to evaluate the place of non-alignment ideas in Belarus's foreign and security policy.

Strategic assessment: Facts on the ground and what Minsk makes of them

The structural conditions (or facts on the ground) under which Belarus has had to operate have changed twice since the country gained independence in 1991.

After the end of the Cold War and with the USSR's collapse, the 'unipolar moment' ensued and the centre of world power shifted to the 'unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies.'[23] At that time, the development of international politics seemed to point to a qualitatively new era in history – that of an unprecedented, peaceful order based on co-operative security and globalizing economies. Many believed that growing economic interdependencies would cement unprecedentedly strong incentives for state and non-state actors to cooperate rather than conflict. That appeared particularly true for Eastern Europe, where the post-Cold War international environment quickly decreased overall tensions and facilitated a new quality of a co-operative atmosphere beyond the formerly existing dividing lines. The new Russian leadership appeared, at least initially, enthusiastic about developing close partner relations with former opponents in Washington and the European capitals. It was symbolic of the new opening in Russian–Western relations that Russian President Boris Yeltsin received 13 standing ovations from the joint meeting of the US Congress in June 1992.

Yet, even in that relatively benign situation, one problem – NATO's eastward expansion – started to loom large in Russian–Western relations. As Waltz argued, it produced a structural impulse: it gave Moscow reasons to fear that NATO would not stop at absorbing former Warsaw Treaty Organization members, but would continue its expansion closer to Russia's borders by welcoming former Soviet republics.[24] This naturally made

23 Krauthammer, C. "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990, p. 23.

24 Waltz, K. "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, p. 21.

Moscow think about possible countermeasures, even as Russia was struggling with multiple domestic problems and the overall relationship with the West looked rather promising.

Those facts on the ground established a generally favourable situation for Belarus. As an in-between small state, it was not exposed to heightened competing pressures from the two centres of geopolitical gravity, Russia and the West.

Those facts on the ground established a generally favourable situation for Belarus. As an in-between small state, it was not exposed to heightened competing pressures from the two centres of geopolitical gravity, Russia and the West. In fact, there was now only one such centre, and its relations with Moscow were largely non-confrontational in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Thanks to that, Minsk felt quite 'relaxed' as to the geopolitical environment in which it operated. Even NATO expansion did not appear to pose a significant security problem. Belarus could even capitalize on it to an extent by positioning itself as a vehement opponent of NATO and using that rhetoric to extract more benefits from its alliance with Russia (see the next section for more details).[25] That was a safe policy line, given that Russia's relations with the West in general and NATO in particular were much better and more co-operative than Belarus's own relations with Western capitals (the latter suffered owing to disagreements over the domestic political situation in Belarus).

However, the geopolitical environment started to change. On 27 June 2006, in an address at the meeting of Russian ambassadors, President Putin stated that Russia's political influence in world affairs should be brought into accordance with its growing economic power and stressed Moscow's resolve to secure the status of an indispensable nation in a multipolar international system.[26] That speech marked the beginning of a turning point in Russian foreign policy and in great power relations. Putin's famous address at the 2007 Munich Security Conference confirmed the trend, as the Russian leader argued that 'the unipolar world that had been

25 Pravo.levonevsky.org (2001) *Kontseptsiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti Respubliki Belarus [National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus]*, available at: (accessed July 15, 2020).

26 Kremlin.ru (2006) *Vystuplenie na soveschanii s poslami i postoyannymi predstavitelyami Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Address at the Meeting with Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation]*, available at: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23669 (accessed 15 July 2020).

proposed after the Cold War did not take place.'[27]

Before too long, the rhetorical confrontation started to spill over into the military realm, which resulted in the 2008 Russo–Georgian war. The five-day war carried serious structural implications for Belarus. Qualitatively new facts on the ground were emerging and, as an immediate result, Minsk could no longer take geopolitics easy. In other words, Belarus started to realize the drawbacks of its position between the two centres of geopolitical gravity, which suddenly meant growing security risks and shrinking room for manoeuvre. The short-lived rapprochement ('reset') in Russian–Western relations that took place after Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev assumed office in their respective countries did ease tensions a little and, thus, relaxed the geopolitical environment for Belarus for a while. However, the 2013–14 events in and around Ukraine reignited the confrontation and Russian–Western relations dropped to the lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

To make matters worse, rising tensions between Russia and the West came across as being further aggravated by the Trump administration's policies towards China, which triggered the gradual demise of the post-Cold War arms control and strategic stability arrangements.

To make matters worse, rising tensions between Russia and the West came across as being further aggravated by the Trump administration's policies towards China, which triggered the gradual demise of the post-Cold War arms control and strategic stability arrangements. The latter were of particular importance to Belarus's security, given where the country sits geographically. The assessment of the developments by the Belarusian government revealed that it quickly realized the multiple risks and threats that the situation implied and that the new facts on the ground required that Minsk adapt its foreign and security policies. According to the Belarusian Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei:

> Unfortunately, today we are placed between two major geopolitical players — Russia on one side and the European Union on the other side. In other words, we are now between two large fires, which are, so to speak, in a state of enmity.[28]

27 Kremlin.ru (2007) *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, available at: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034 (accessed 13 July 2020).

28 Belta.by (2018) *Foreign minister about situation around Belarus: We happened to be between two large fires*, available at: https://eng.belta.by/politics/view/

President Lukashenko put it even more emphatically: 'if we take at least one incautious step, we will collapse under the rubble of disagreements, conflicts and empires.'[29]

Thus, Belarus has experienced two major structural shifts since it became a sovereign state. The first one was about the 'unipolar moment' and the waning of geopolitical tensions, whereas the second carried the opposite implications – growing geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West. In other words, the second shift re-emphasized Belarus's in-between position and confronted it with the utmost challenge of finding the most effective policy to provide for its national security and, if possible, maximize its international opportunities. In what follows, the paper offers an account of Belarus's responses to the structural shifts and shows how the non-alignment spirit became the cornerstone of the country's grand strategy amid growing geopolitical tensions.

Means of strategy: from an alignment to a non-alignment spirit

In response to the first structural shift – the 'unipolar moment' – Minsk concluded a strategic deal with Russia whereby the two countries essentially pooled their exclusive resources: Belarus provided its geopolitical resources in exchange for Russia's economic resources. In other words, the strategic bargain meant that Belarus, given its crucial geostrategic significance for Russian security, committed to being Moscow's loyal military and political ally, whereas Russia offered highly beneficial economic conditions to Minsk (in particular, low oil and gas prices, and privileged access to the Russian market for Belarusian producers, as well as to loans and other financial instruments). Guided by that logic, Minsk joined two collective security arrangements with Moscow. On the bilateral track, an advanced level of defence cooperation was established within the framework of the Union State of Belarus and Russia. And multilaterally, Belarus joined the Collective Security Treaty, which later became the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

---

foreign-minister-about-situation-around-belarus-we-happened-to-be-between-two-large-fires-110733-2018 (accessed 12 July 2020).

29 Belta.by (2020) *Lukashenko: One wrong move can get Belarus buried under rubble of international conflicts*, available at: https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-one-wrong-move-can-get-belarus-buried-under-rubble-of-international-conflicts-131353-2020/ (accessed 12 July 2020).

It would still be wrong to say that, within that bargain, Belarus started to bandwagon with Russia on all international issues and yielded effective control of its security and foreign policies to Moscow, as the shelter theory would expect.[30] Several constitutional amendments that were enacted in the 1990s and early 2000s did not alter Article 18 of the Constitution, which pledges to make Belarus a neutral and nuclear-free state.[31] Somewhat ironically, in the 2001 edition of the National Security Concept, only two lines separated the following, seemingly opposing, aims: 'creating conditions for […] achieving the long-term goal – obtaining of the neutral status' and strengthening 'military and political cooperation in the frameworks of the Union State Treaty and the Collective Security Treaty.'[32] On top of that, in 1997, Belarus became an observer and then in 1998 joined the NAM, whereas the 2002 military doctrine seemed to have departed from neutrality and put an overwhelming emphasis on the alliance with Russia.[33]

While the Belarusian leadership realized the urgent need to adapt its foreign and security policies, it was equally obvious that a militarily allied nation has no easy and linear options for that.

After the 2008 Russo–Georgian war and the 2014 crises in and around Ukraine, the structural pressures changed dramatically – and so did Minsk's policy responses. While the Belarusian leadership realized the urgent need to adapt its foreign and security policies, it was equally obvious that a militarily allied nation has no easy and linear options for that. One option – leaving the bilateral and multilateral security arrangements with Russia – was off the table, as it would immediately destroy Belarus's relations with Russia and, thus, have highly detrimental effects for the country's security and economic well-being. Another seemingly effortless option, bandwagoning with Russia with a view to ensuring a

30 Bailes, A. J. K., Thayer, B. A. and Thorhallsson, B. "Alliance Theory and Alliance 'Shelter': The Complexities of Small State Alliance Behaviour," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 9-26.

31 Law.by (2004) *Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994*, available at: http://law.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=V19402875e (accessed 12 July 2020).

32 Pravo.levonevsky.org (2001) *Kontseptsiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti Respubliki Belarus [National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus]*, available at: http://pravo.levonevsky.org/bazaby11/republic42/text232.htm (accessed July 15, 2020).

33 Main, S. J. (2002) "The Military Doctrine of the Republic of Belarus", *Conflict Studies Research Centre*, available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155595/Belarus%202002.pdf (accessed 5 July 2020).

security shelter from Moscow, was equally unacceptable. Under the circumstances of escalating Russian–Western military and political tensions, it would amount to placing Belarus at the geographical forefront of that confrontation without having a say, let alone control, over what Moscow does vis-à-vis the West, even when the ally's actions implied direct consequences for Belarus's security.[34] As a result, it would inevitably lead to the erosion of Belarusian sovereignty.

Drawing on that assessment, Minsk was looking for non-linear ways of adapting its foreign and security policies. As Makei put it, 'Belarus would like to find a wise positive balance in relations with Russia and the European Union as well as other Western nations.'[35] This very wording originated from a clearly non-aligned analysis of the core causes of Belarus's geopolitical problems. Exactly as was the case within the NAM in the 1960s,[36] Minsk identified those causes in the struggle of great powers for dominance.[37] And, also similar to the NAM's positions during the Cold War, Belarus offered a vision of a 'wise positive balance' that rested on its de-facto non-aligned stance on the Russian–Ukrainian conflict and a large number of initiatives in the spirit of non-alignment.

It took Minsk a while, and some trial-and-error learning, to work out a holistic stance on the Russian–Ukrainian conflict and the geopolitical confrontation it triggered. Over time, Belarus's adaptation efforts evolved into a policy that can be defined as 'situational neutrality.'[38] Beyond the conflict in Ukraine,

34 Preiherman, Y. (2020) "Pandemic Heightens Need to Reset Belarus-Russia Ties", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/27/pandemic-heightens-need-to-reset-belarus-russia-ties-pub-81909 (accessed 13 July 2020).

35 Belta.by (2018) *Foreign minister about situation around Belarus: We happened to be between two large fires*, available at: https://eng.belta.by/politics/view/foreign-minister-about-situation-around-belarus-we-happened-to-be-between-two-large-fires-110733-2018 (accessed 12 July 2020).

36 Abraham, *op.cit*, p. 211; Harshe, R. "India's Non-Alignment: An Attempt at Conceptual Reconstruction," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 7/8, 1990, p. 399.

37 Belta.by (2020) *Lukashenko: One wrong move can get Belarus buried under rubble of international conflicts*, available at: https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-one-wrong-move-can-get-belarus-buried-under-rubble-of-international-conflicts-131353-2020/ (accessed 12 July 2020).

38 Melyantsou, D. (2019) *Situational Neutrality: A Conceptualisation*

the policy was supplemented by multiple peace-making and bridging initiatives. In particular, Belarus used bilateral and multilateral platforms to actively promote neutrally leaning ideas and a bridging agenda and tried to turn them into the trademark features of its international image.

A typical example is the article by President Lukashenko in Russia's *Izvestiya*, in which, while discussing the future of the Eurasian economic integration, he laid out the 'integration of integrations' concept, which would later become a 'red thread' in Belarus's international talking points.[39] At its heart is the idea that the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU should develop a close economic partnership with a view to creating a Greater Eurasia from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which would ensure security and prosperity on the continent. Belarus promoted a similar grand vision for the Eastern Partnership: 'the EaP should help build a prosperous and secure Europe without dividing lines and spheres of influence' where Belarus could serve as a 'bridge linking the Customs Union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan and the EU.'[40] Minsk fostered the same ideas during its 2017 chairmanship in the Central European Initiative under the overarching slogan *Promoting Connectivity in a Wider Europe*.[41] Belarus promoted the same types of ideas in the military security realm. There, it went as far as to decline Russia's requests to establish a military airbase on Belarusian territory, citing, inter alia, concerns that a base would undermine stability and security in the region.[42]

Attempt, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations, available at: http://minskdialogue.by/en/research/opinions/situational-neutrality-a-conceptualization-attempt (accessed 15 July 2020).

39 Lukashenka, A. (2011) "O sud'bakh nashei integratsii" [About the Fate of Our Integration], *Izvestiya*, available at: https://iz.ru/news/504081 (accessed 14 July 2020).

40 Korosteleva, E. "Belarusian Foreign Policy in a Time of Crisis," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 3-4, 2011: 575.

41 Mfa.gov.by (2017) *Presidency Agenda*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, available at: http://mfa.gov.by/upload/17.02.24_Presidency_priority_eng.pdf (accessed 18 July 2020).

42 Naviny.by (2019) *Makei o rossiiskoi aviabaze: nokakogo smysla v nei net [Makei on the Russian airbase: It is pointless]*, available at: https://naviny.by/new/20191001/1569905103-makey-o-rossiyskoy-aviabaze-nikakogo-smysla-v-ney-net (accessed 15 July 2020).

Conclusions

The application of Kitchen's model of grand strategy formation to analysing Belarus's foreign policy highlights a clear switch of gears by Minsk in response to the structural shift that undermined the 'unipolar moment' and brought back great power confrontation. Importantly, as a neoclassical realist model, it demonstrates that the change was not just automatically imposed by the new facts on the ground, but rather became reality after a strategic assessment by Belarusian policy makers.

In light of this dilemma, Minsk had no other option but to pursue a policy with multiple non-linear elements rooted in the non-alignment spirit, which in the end turned into a grand strategy streamlining all foreign and security policy thinking.

The post-2008 structural shift exposed Belarus's multiple geopolitical vulnerabilities as a small in-between state and thus necessitated a cautious policy aimed at minimizing security risks and maximizing international opportunities. Ideally, this implied the need to create room for an independent foreign policy, but Belarus's alliance with Russia naturally imposed certain limits on this aspiration, whereas leaving the alliance would be highly impractical and even dangerous. In light of this dilemma, Minsk had no other option but to pursue a policy with multiple non-linear elements rooted in the non-alignment spirit, which in the end turned into a grand strategy streamlining all foreign and security policy thinking.

In this regard, Belarus's engagement with non-alignment ideas went through a noteworthy evolution, similar to the experience of the NAM's founding members in the 1960s. When Belarus joined the NAM in 1998, its rationale was about a newly sovereign state strengthening its voice in the international system.[43] But, after 2008, the rationale, to use Abraham's wording, transformed into a 'conceptual frame that took as its first priority the need to overcome the bipolar division of the world.'[44]

43 Antanovich, I. (2017) "Shagi k suverenitetu: kak Belarus 25 let nazad obrela nezavisimost" [How Belarus gained independence 25 years ago], *SB. Belarus Segodnya*, available at: https://www.sb.by/articles/uverenno-idti-svoim-kursom.html (accessed 15 July 2020).

44 Abraham, *op.cit*, p. 198.