

Russia's New National Security Strategy: Towards a 'Medvedev Doctrine'?

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Theme: A new Russian National Security Strategy was approved on 12 May, replacing the 2000 National Security Concept.

Summary: The 'National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020', approved by President Medvedev on 12 May, establishes a new framework for Russia's security policy. It is based on national strategic priorities in the areas of defence, security of the state and society, and sustainable development. The main changes from the 2000 National Security Concept are a greater emphasis on the need to improve the quality of life of Russia's citizens and a less hostile attitude towards the US and NATO. The National Security Strategy combines elements of continuity and change, assertiveness and pragmatism strongly influenced by the willingness to 'reset' a good relationship with the US in order to overcome the negative effects of last summer's war in South Ossetia.

This ARI describes the process of reviewing the previous documents on National Security, the new military and non-military threats and the goals and a check-list for assessing the National Security Strategy's results.

The extent to which sustainable development will be considered in practice a priority area remains to be seen, especially when the state is forced to choose between it and more traditional national security priorities, like military reform, in a context of limited public spending. Consequently, there is a risk that the increased focus on individuals and their living conditions that appears in the Strategy will be forgotten in favour of macroeconomic indicators, such as GDP growth, that do not reflect social inequalities. Furthermore, as with any official document, the Strategy is not only relevant for what it says, but also because of what it does *not* say. The most significant omission is, of course, the question of democracy and civil society, which are the document's first long-term national priorities, but which are subsequently barely mentioned.

Russia is now much more self-confident as a great power, thanks to its increased international role, economic development and military potential; that is why a stronger Russia should not perceive the West as a security challenge, but rather as a necessary partner in the fight against global threats, although rivalries will remain in other areas. The challenge for the Kremlin is to overcome the legacies of the past in order to face the real dangers to the country, which are still mostly its own internal weaknesses. However, the limited ability of Russia's citizens to influence governmental decisions means that any significant change will depend almost exclusively on the ruling elite and, especially, on Medvedev's authority over the rest of the executive power, including Putin and the *siloviki* (members of Russia's so-called 'power ministries' –*siloviye ministerstva*–: Defence, Internal Affairs and the security and intelligence services). As occurred in the past with many well-intentioned policies whose result was very different than expected, this might become one of the instances of what former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said about the post-Soviet economic reform: 'We wanted to make things better... but it turned out as always'.

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Analysis: The 'National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020',¹ approved by presidential decree on 12 May, establishes a new framework for Russia's security policy during Dmitry Medvedev's Presidency. It replaces the 2000 National Security Concept² –which was an update of 1997's–, adapting the official doctrine to the fundamental changes in the security environment and in Russia's international position that have taken place during the past eight years, that is, in Putin's two presidential terms.

The National Security Strategy has been the result of almost a year of preparation by an interagency commission at the Russian Security Council, an advisory body to the President in which the different federal bodies responsible for national security are represented. The commission was given the task by President Medvedev of preparing the new Strategy on 4 June 2008; at the same time, a new Foreign Policy Concept was being completed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be published in July of that year.³

The Strategy's preparation was coordinated by the Secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, who was the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) under Putin and one of his most trusted advisors. However, the document cannot be exclusively considered the work of the *siloviki*. The commission also received input from the Presidential Administration, the Government and the President's envoys to the seven Federal Districts, the Academy of Sciences and major corporations.⁴

Thus, the Strategy is the second step towards a full review of Russia's foreign and security policy. Drawing a parallel between Medvedev and his predecessor, Putin also started his first term with an updated National Security Concept –having coordinated its preparation himself, as Secretary of the Security Council– and Foreign Policy Concept, as well as a Military Doctrine. Consequently, it is not unlikely for the latter document to also be reviewed in the coming months.

The fact that the two previous National Security Concepts have been explicitly revoked by Medvedev's decree underscores the opening of a new stage, perhaps in an attempt to avoid it being perceived as merely a continuation of Putin's policies. The same can be said about the choice of the word 'strategy' –the same name as its equivalents in the US and the UK–⁵ instead of 'Concept'; this also suggests a more practical approach, with the definition of 'strategic national priorities' to safeguard national security.

The Strategy is complemented by an –unpublished– 'Framework for Strategic Planning' that will translate the national strategic priorities into lower-level planning documents, describing the tasks for the short (2009-12), medium (2009-15) and long terms (2009-20). As most of the Strategy's objectives are set for the medium and long terms, Medvedev will only be able to complete them if he is re-elected in 2012; even in that case, his successor would take office no later than 2018 (the Russian Constitution was recently reformed to

¹ *Strategia natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda*, 12/VI/2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru>.

² *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, 10/II/2000, <http://www.mid.ru>.

³ 'Response by Russian MFA Spokesman Andrei Nesterenko to Media Queries on Approval of National Security Strategy of Russian Federation to 2020', *Diplomaticheskiy Vestnik*, 22/VI/2009, <http://www.mid.ru>; and *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 12/VII/2008, <http://www.mid.ru>.

⁴ 'Beginning of Meeting with Security Council On National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 and Measures Necessary to Implement It', 24/III/2009, <http://www.kremlin.ru>.

⁵ However, Patrushev said in a recent interview that there has been no intention of copying foreign experiences. 'Dostoiniy uroven zhizni – luchshaya strategiya bezopasnosti Rossii' [A decent standard of living is Russia's best security strategy], *Izvestia*, 13/VI/2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru>.

extend the presidential term from four to six years, starting with the next election; the same President can only stay in power for two consecutive terms).

Russia's Recovery from Post-Soviet Decline

The first major difference between this Strategy and the previous Concept is the official perspective on Russia's position in the world. In early 2000 the main preoccupation was to halt the country's political, economic and military decline, having been unable to prevent NATO's military campaign against Yugoslavia. There was a widespread perception that, having ceased to be a superpower in 1991, after almost a decade of economic crises Russia was not even recognised as one of the world's great powers whose opinion should be taken into account. This 'Kosovo syndrome' explained much of Putin's genuine public support: a candidate who promised to put an end to the internal chaos of the Yeltsin era and to make Russia a respected country on the world stage.

Now, nine years later, despite the current global financial crisis, the Kremlin sees Russia as having successfully overcome the effects of its own internal, post-Soviet crisis: standards of living have improved, the state has been strengthened and challenges to territorial integrity –namely, separatism in Chechnya– are considered to have been defeated. As President Medvedev said to the Security Council at one of its meetings on the new Strategy, 'now, despite our current difficulties, we have an opportunity to look ahead, to look to the future and to participate in shaping that future'.

National Interests and Strategic Priorities

The definition of national interests in the Strategy is remarkably shorter than that of the 2000 National Security Concept, following a more practical, slightly less doctrinaire approach. According to it, Russia's long-term interests are: (1) to develop democracy, civil society and the national economy; (2) to protect the country's constitutional system, territorial integrity and sovereignty; (3) to become a world power, oriented towards maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a multipolar world.

These permanent interests are followed by Russia's 'national strategic priorities'⁶ for the next few years, which –significantly, in a document on Russian national security– include more than just protection from internal and external threats. Security is also achieved through several priorities for sustainable development:⁷ personal security and high standards of living for Russian citizens; economic growth; advancement of science, technology and education; rational use of environmental resources; and active participation in the formation of a multipolar system.

This idea of sustainable development –which only appeared briefly in the 2000 document– has been adopted as one of the main concepts throughout the Strategy. Even President Medvedev summarised the main idea behind the document as 'security through development', while Patrushev added that 'providing good living conditions in Russia is considered to be *as essential in ensuring national security as the traditional priorities, such as defence capabilities and security of the state*'.⁸

⁶ The idea is probably taken from the 'National Priority Projects' on Health, Education, Housing and Agro-Industrial Development, for which Medvedev was responsible when Putin was President.

⁷ 'O Strategii natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda' [About the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 13/V/2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru>.

⁸ 'Beginning of Meeting...', *op. cit.* Emphasis added.

Threat Perceptions and Responses

According to the Strategy, Russia will respond to perceived threats through national measures as well as in the framework of 'mutually beneficial' partnerships. The main multilateral forums mentioned in the document are –as could be expected– those in which Moscow's role is greatest: the United Nations Security Council, the G-8, the G-20, the RIC/BRIC (Russia, India, China + Brazil), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

However, the areas where threat perceptions have changed the most since 2000 are relations with NATO and with the US. With regard to the Atlantic Alliance, the prospect of a new enlargement closer to Russia's borders –Georgia and the Ukraine– is still considered unacceptable by Moscow, but it is *not* defined as a threat to military security, as was the case in the previous Concept with the possibility of enlargement to the Baltic States. Moreover, the Strategy also stresses that Russia is ready to develop relations with the organisation.

In comparison with the clear perception of NATO as a security threat that impregnated the 2000 National Security Concept, the fact that the Kremlin remains open to cooperation in areas of common interest with the Alliance –despite the heated arguments over the South Ossetia war– must not be overlooked. Such pragmatism is not completely new, but echoes Putin's support in May 2002 for the new NATO-Russia Council (NRC), despite the Alliance's planned enlargement to the three Baltic states, approved later that year at the Prague Summit.

At the same time, it is clearly stated that Moscow would prefer an Alliance exclusively oriented towards peacekeeping and crisis management operations under UN or OSCE mandates, renouncing its role as a collective defence organisation. From the Kremlin's point of view, NATO's 'limited membership' makes it inadequate for solving international security problems; this Russian frustration with its inability to influence NATO underlies its proposal of a new European Security Treaty, in which it could be a fully-fledged member instead of just an external partner.⁹

In the 2000 Concept the US was considered –as a result of the 'Kosovo syndrome'– nothing less than the leader of a coalition of Western powers aiming for world domination through unilateral military action. The tone of the new Strategy is much less hostile: now Moscow seeks an 'equal and meaningful strategic partnership' with Washington, especially on disarmament and arms control, confidence-building measures, non-proliferation, the fight against terrorism and the settlement of regional conflicts. This attitude might partly be an answer to President Obama's intention to 'press the reset button' in US-Russian relations: another signal to Washington included in the document is support for Obama's vision of 'a world free of nuclear weapons'.

However, American preponderance in terms of military potential and its projected development of a missile defence system are considered threats to Russia's military security; for the Strategy's authors there seems to be no contradiction with the perception of the US as a strategic partner. In any case, this is used to justify the need to improve the combat preparedness of the armed forces and to preserve nuclear deterrence up to a

⁹ See Manuel de la Cámara (2009), 'European Security and EU-Russian Relations', *ARI*, nr 76/2009, p. 2, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>.

level of parity with the US. These are not easy tasks, considering that military reform and modernisation of the mostly outdated nuclear arsenal will require huge investments that cannot be taken for granted in the current situation.¹⁰

Special attention is paid to the protection of Russia's long international border from the spread of local conflicts and illegal trafficking. Taking into account that South Ossetia and Abkhazia are now recognised by Moscow as independent states, this is also a reminder that Russia's Armed Forces will be in charge of protecting their 'borders' with Georgian territory. The presence of Russian military contingents in conflictive regions is also defended as a contribution to strategic stability.

With regard to non-military security, it is surprising to find that the activities of foreign intelligence services occupy the first place in the list of threats to the state and society, before even terrorism, national or religious radicalism and separatism, organised crime, illegal trafficking and corruption. Although the consideration of these services as a security threat is not new in Russia's security doctrine, their relevance in the new document might be a consequence of the recent 'spy scandal' with NATO.¹¹ Obviously, this is one of the paragraphs in which the influence of the *siloviki* has been greatest.

Another innovation in the Strategy is the focus on improving the citizens' quality of life, which in the 2000 Concept was only mentioned in a few sentences. Threats perceived in this area include: the world financial crisis, competition over scarce resources like raw materials, energy, water and food; crime and corruption; and health problems such as new large-scale epidemics and the extension of AIDS, tuberculosis, drug addiction and alcoholism. The main tasks to counter them include the protection of human rights through judicial and legislative means, developing the pharmaceutical industry and the healthcare system, guaranteeing food security by using biotechnology and preventing land depletion, and preventing the 'uncontrolled proliferation' of genetically-modified food products. In the long term, this is expected to improve the country's demographic situation, halting the current population decline.

There had already been references about these social problems in the previous document, although they were obscured by more traditional security issues such as NATO and international terrorism. The new Strategy, on the other hand, includes them as a priority within the concept of sustainable development. This is an acknowledgement of the link between Russia's international status and the welfare of its population, issues that put in an appearance in Putin's 2000 election campaign but which were pushed to the background as his presidency developed: 'our priority is to overcome our own poverty [...] A strong power cannot exist where weakness and poverty hold sway'.¹²

Related to this is the objective of economic growth: Russia wants to become 'one of the five leading countries in terms of GDP' in the medium term, that is, by 2015; in 2008 it was the seventh, after the US, China, Japan, India, Germany and the UK. Such a target may

¹⁰ See Alejandro MacKinlay (2009), 'El resurgimiento militar de Rusia', *ARI*, nr 64/2009, p. 5, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>; and 'Russian Economic Slide Worsening', *BBC News*, 26/V/2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

¹¹ Two members of NATO's Information Office in Moscow, with Canadian diplomatic status, were expelled in retaliation for the expulsion of two Russian diplomats from NATO, after being accused of espionage. 'Russia Expels Canadian Diplomats', *BBC News*, 6/V/2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

¹² Vladimir Putin (2000), 'Open Letter to Russian Voters', *Izvestia*, 25/II/2000, translated in J. L. Black (2001), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 2000*, vol. 1, Academic International Press, Gulf Breeze, p. 42 & 44.

seem unrealistic in the present situation, when it is clear that Russia is being deeply affected by the global crisis. However, the Strategy admits that the main threat in this area is Russia's current economic model, based on exporting energy resources and other commodities. The alternative is more investment in science, innovation and education, in order to develop the economy's high-technology sectors; this would also improve security in the military and international areas, as well as reduce Russia's dependence on other countries.

Among the economic priorities, energy security is understood as the existence of a stable demand, competitiveness of domestic producers and the prevention of a shortage of energy resources. Therefore, Russia needs to preserve its position as an energy supplier to international –mainly European– markets, developing its own reserves and having access to others. The long-term scenario is expected to be one of world competition for energy resources, especially in the Middle East, the Arctic, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia.

Culture is considered to contribute to national security by strengthening the country's 'spiritual unity' and its international image. The main perceived threats in this area are the dominance of 'mass culture', the promotion of violence or intolerance, and what are considered to be 'attempts to review Russian history', that is, criticism of the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War.¹³

Environmental security continues to be one of the least developed areas, with even less prominence than in the 2000 Concept; some issues of a more economic character –such as the risk of depletion of energy reserves– are also included here. But there is no significant mention of the need to develop alternative energy sources in order to combat climate change.

A Checklist for National Security

The Strategy ends with another innovation: the so-called 'main characteristics of the situation of national security', which are conceived as a checklist to assess the level of security at any given moment:

- Unemployment rate.
- Ratio of the richest part of the population to the poorest.
- Growth of consumer prices.
- External and domestic debt as a percentage of GDP.
- Resources for health, culture, education and science as a percentage of GDP.
- Annual renewal of military equipment and weapons.
- Availability of military and technical personnel.

While this is a positive idea, in the sense that it emphasises the Strategy's practical orientation, the indicators seem far from exhaustive and excessively biased towards the priority of economic development: The document itself considers that it will be necessary to refine them depending on results.

¹³ A 'Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests' has been recently created. See 'Russia Panel to "Protect History"', *BBC News*, 19/V/2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

Conclusion: The National Security Strategy combines elements of continuity and change, many of which were already present a few years ago, although they had not so far been included in the official security doctrine. However, the influence of the events of the past few months has been much greater than could be expected for a long-term planning document such as this. For example, it is clear that the election of Barack Obama and his decision to restore closer ties with Russia has contributed to the Kremlin's more constructive attitude towards cooperation with Washington. This factor, as well as the continuing pragmatism in Moscow's policies, has also limited the negative effects of last summer's war in South Ossetia on Russia's relations with the Atlantic Alliance: whatever the disagreements may be, the aggressive rhetoric of the 90s is no longer there.

The extent to which sustainable development will be considered a priority area remains to be seen, especially when the state is forced to choose between it and more traditional national security priorities like military reform in a context of limited public spending. Consequently, there is a risk that the increased focus on the citizen and his living standards that appears in the Strategy will be forgotten in favour of macroeconomic indicators such as GDP growth, that do not reflect social inequalities. Furthermore, as in any official document, the Strategy is not only relevant for what it says but also for what it does *not*. The most significant omission is, of course, the question of democracy and civil society, listed as the first long-term national priorities, but later barely mentioned throughout the document.

Russia is now much more self-confident as a great power, thanks to its increased international role, economic development and military potential; that is why a stronger Russia should not perceive the West as a security challenge, but rather as a necessary partner in the fight against global threats, although rivalries will remain in other areas. The challenge for the Kremlin is to overcome the legacies of the past in order to face the real dangers to the country, which are still mostly its own internal weaknesses. However, the limited ability of Russia's citizens to influence governmental decisions means that any significant change of course will depend almost exclusively on the ruling elite and, especially, on Medvedev's authority over the rest of the executive power, including Putin and the *siloviki*. As occurred in the past with many well-intentioned policies whose results were far different than expected, this might become one of the instances of what the former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said about the post-Soviet economic reform: 'We wanted to make things better... but it turned out as always'.

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