

# Will We See a New Russian Security Policy After the Elections?

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Concerns about security among the Russian people have peaked at levels not seen since the disintegration of the USSR. Today it is obvious that security issues will become very popular among candidates during election campaigns for the State Duma and the presidency in 1999 and 2000, respectively. Why is this the case? For the first time in contemporary Russian history, ordinary people feel threatened. Politicians have already adopted rhetoric advocating "strong authority and stability;" Russia is prepared for the "iron fist." What are the roots of this phenomenon?

- unexpected terrorists attacks
- a new wave of separatist initiatives in some republics and regions
- the Russian Army is gaining public attention once again, but this time in a positive way
- demands for increasing military expenditures.

## **New Trends**

Terrorists attacks. These were truly an unexpected shock for the general public. The explosions in Buynaks, Moscow and Volgograd have had a twofold impact. First, ordinary people no longer feel safe in their own homes. Such feelings are very destructive: you can refuse to travel by plane or to go shopping, but you must live somewhere, and you need a place to feel secure. Unfortunately, many Russians today lack this. Second, many sociologists report growing social activism at the local level: the explosions have had the effect of making people decide where their loyalties and interests lie, what sociologists call the process of "delimitation," with the further effect of voter consolidation. We will now see more voters with definite political priorities--more voters psychologically prepared to make a hard choice about who they are going to support in the upcoming elections.

New wave of separatist initiatives in some republics. The real threat to Russian security comes not from Chechnya but from other republics, which remain not merely *de jure* but also *de facto* "subjects of the federation" (as Chechnya does not). For example, the government of Tatarstan refused to send army soldiers who are citizens of Tatarstan into Dagestan. Although there are not open conflicts between the center and the regions, we are witnessing a growing number of constitutional contradictions between federal law and local juridical initiatives.

The Russian army is gaining public attention once again. Many politicians (including Nemtsov, Yavlinsky, Nikolaev and others) have now actively initiated new debates on military reforms in Russia. Some experts see the rise of positive reports about the army and even the Ministry of Defense (which has always been criticized by politicians, journalists and the public) as preparation for a long-expected change in the military's role in Russian politics.

Demands for increasing military expenditures. The military-industrial complex is getting more attention on the federal and regional levels, and this seems to be a long-term trend. Even the liberal party Yabloko is demanding more funds for modern weapons procurement. Almost all politicians support an increased defense budget. Traditionally, the military-industrial complex has numerous institutional and informal channels through which to influence not only security but foreign policy as well. We should expect greater activity from these institutions.

### **Effects on Russian Society and Security Policy**

There are two developments that both reflect and help to explain these trends: the expanding agenda of foreign policy and the diminishing distinction between domestic and security policy. Traditional distinctions between so-called "high" and "low" politics appear far removed from the reality of Russian life. This has become more apparent after the bomb explosions in Russian cities. In Russia, these developments can have a profound impact on the public, with the result that Russians are knowledgeable about international relations and interested in world politics. Many of them have personal views on most international issues, enabling them to actively participate in the security policy debate. With the threat to personal security now so tangible they have an incentive to do so. This might have a destructive impact on Russian foreign and security policy.

With the linkage of international and personal security issues becoming a matter of public concern, Russia might lose the relative consensus on foreign policy that has existed since September 1998. This consensus has a key aspect, which is the view that in spite of the degradation of Russia's role in international affairs in recent years, this country still has a role to play in conflict resolution and management (at least on the regional level). Russia still has influence in the international system due to its geographic position, natural resources, and its possession of a nuclear arsenal. Furthermore, the prevalence of conflicts in Russia and its surroundings can serve as a basis for working out methods for the amelioration or management of conflicts. The Russian political and intellectual elite may be about to recognize that security problems can no longer be effectively managed through a unilateral approach to policy.

Another characteristic of Russian security policy is its lack of a coherent vision, and this will be aggravated by the connection between individual and national security. There is misunderstanding and confusion for many Russians concerning the use of such terms as "economic security," "informational security" and even "national security"--especially at

the local level. The modern conflicts have non-traditional causes, such as ecology, social tensions, illegal migration and narcotics--which were traditionally related to "low politics"--but are now found on the agenda in security studies and "high" politics. Many of these problems are issues that have remained within the competencies of provincial governments. Local authorities have assumed an increased role in the shaping and resolution of many international issues (particularly Tatarstan, Ingushetia, Vladivostok, Sakha, Yakutia, Petrozavodsk and some other regions). But this raises important questions. Are local authorities in Russia prepared for this activity? How effective might such activity be? The answers are discouraging: local authorities are unprepared, their foreign policy activities will not be effective, and their involvement will further fracture an already incoherent Russian security policy.

The lack of qualified specialists on international relations, the global economy and foreign trade at the regional level damages Russian prestige. Many governors and local presidents have decided to conduct independent foreign policies. As a consequence, we see unconstitutional international agreements and unprofessional policymaking in foreign economic relations, which could lead international financial institutions to make negative assessments of the country's economic condition as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Now, for the first time in the history of an independent Russia, there is consensus that the role of the army and the military-industrial complex must be strengthened and consolidated if the country and its citizens are to be secure. However, while the Russian public is ready to participate in this security debate, they are not ready to pay for the costs of national security. This represents yet another dilemma: Russia must find a compromise between what it wants and what it can afford.