

Russian National Security Policy in 2000

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Although signing a decree granting the new National Security Concept the status of law in January 2000 was one of acting president Vladimir V. Putin's first official decisions in the area of security policy, this development should not be misunderstood as tied solely to Putin's views or personal leadership. The new national security policy has been developing for at least a year, and is the result of debate and consensus across a substantial portion of the Russian national security elite. The policy is a very substantial change from the December 1997 National Security Concept, and is a significant shift from liberal elements in former President Yeltsin's political coalition. The reasons for the shift are partly internal, arising from Russia's own domestic political and economic developments after the August 1998 financial crisis, but they are also the result of NATO's war in Kosovo and other difficulties in Russia's relations with the US. In this memo, I explain the background to the new policy and the reason for the change in thinking, analyze the main elements of the new policy, and assess its implications for Russia's future security policies, defense priorities, and relations with the United States.

The Sources of Russia's National Security Concept Until 1997

Russia's National Security Concept is not a binding document: it can be (and has been) changed, amended, and even ignored. Yet the document is important for understanding Russian security policy, because it is a reflection of the priorities, assessments, compromises, and negotiations within the Russian political and security elite. It is a statement of the government's assessment of the international system, Russian national interests, sources of threats to those interests, and the means by which Russia can secure its interests.

Such an exercise, it must be understood, is fundamentally political. Different individuals and groups in Russian society will have different priorities and seek different kinds of internal and external political, economic, and social arrangements to pursue their own interests. The definition of Russia's priorities and opportunities means there will be winners and losers. Reflecting the turbulent and contentious nature of the post-communist transformation, Russia lacked an official national security policy until December 1997. Russian policy emphasizing partnership with the West and the need for Russia to become a member of the "civilized" Western international system reflected the view of a very narrow elite around Yeltsin. As competition in Russia's domestic political and economic arenas developed in the period 1993-97, multiple views of Russia's national security

policy based upon diverse sets of political, economic, and societal interests emerged. By 1997 a synthesis had emerged which still emphasized cooperation and integration, but with a strong measure of Eurasianism and great power thinking lending the policy a more traditional cast. This consensus view was the result of the domestic coalition that had successfully supported Yeltsin's presidential election in 1996, consisting of the liberals who had been the core of the government since 1991 along with the cooperation-oriented centrists who expanded Yeltsin's political base and opposed a return to the Soviet past.

The National Security Concept of December 1997

The compromise security policy was clear in Russia's December 1997 National Security Concept. It stated that the most important threats to Russian security lie not in the international system but in Russia's internal conditions. Since Russia's internal threats arise from economic decline, instability, and societal problems such as poor health and unemployment, they must be addressed through economic reform. Although economic reform is primarily an internal matter, it can be supported by a non-threatening international environment and by Russian integration into international economic institutions.

This liberalism was tempered, however, by insistence that Russia does not come to the international community as a subordinate member, but as one of the major players whose active participation is necessary for solving problems in political, economic, and military spheres. The 1997 Concept acknowledged difficulties for Russian participation and involvement--particularly the problem of NATO enlargement--but held that effective multilateral means for cooperation and coordination of international affairs ultimately could be achieved only with Russian involvement in organizations such as the OSCE. It based this confidence on Russia's status as the only truly Eurasian power. This centrist view--often referred to as "statist"--characterized the moderate middle of Russian national security debate in the 1990s.

It was truly astonishing that the national security policy of a such a large and important country considered internal threats to security more significant than external threats. Traditional international security threats were noted, but these were secondary to the internal threats. Similarly striking, the means for achieving Russian security at the international level was "partnership" with the West, and while Russian defense capabilities were mentioned, it was in the context of "reasonable expenditures," rather than the kind of dedicated investment required for any ambitious military reform and restructuring.

Kosovo, Chechnya, and Russia's New Environment

The 1998-99 period was a turning point for Russian assessment of its international environment, and for the composition of its governing coalition. The liberal-statist balance of political elite interests was upset in 1998 and 1999 by the August financial

crisis and, more importantly, by the Western war in Kosovo. The August crisis undermined liberal views by exposing Russia's vulnerability to the international economy and financial markets. The fundamental sources of the crisis were internal policy failures and economic weakness, but it was precipitated by the vulnerability of the ruble to speculative international financial markets. At the same time, because Russia's economy has done so well in the aftermath of the decision to devalue the ruble and implement limited debt defaults, the crisis reinforced statist arguments that a less Western-dependent, more state-directed policy of economic reform could be Russia's path to stability and eventual prosperity.

Even more significant for Russia's national security policy, however, were the implications of the American use of NATO to impose a military solution for Serbia's violation of Kosovar political and human rights. Russia's uneasy acceptance of NATO's membership enlargement was based in part on the assumption that Russia held a veto over NATO missions beyond collective self-defense of members' territories. The Russian leadership believed that the US and NATO had committed themselves to adopting non-collective defense missions only with a United Nations mandate. This would mean that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia would have influence over any such mission.

The US and NATO proved unwilling to live by this restriction in Kosovo. The issue of the expansion of NATO's membership was difficult enough for Russia: with Kosovo, it faced the expansion of NATO's mission, unrestrained by the UN. The expansion of NATO's mission to encompass unilateral intervention to settle an internal ethnic conflict and enforce Western human rights priorities creates the potential for something deemed even worse than membership enlargement. Given instability on and within Russia's borders in the Caucasus, Caspian, and Central Asia--areas in which the US has expressed both economic and geostrategic interests--the expansion of NATO's mission could threaten Russia's territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

The US might not agree, but it is important to understand that Russians consider Chechnya in light of Kosovo, Western policy and priorities, and NATO's mission expansion. Many factors played a role in the decision to "solve" the problem of Chechnya's separatism, instability, and threat to Russian territory, and it is unlikely that Kosovo was the most important. The war in Kosovo, however, undermined the liberal argument for "partnership" in order to gain Western support for Russia's international economic integration. The lesson appeared to be that the US would be constrained by its international commitments only when convenient, and that it would act unilaterally in important security matters when Russia did not agree with American policies. Kosovo signaled that American and Russian priorities were not in sync and that the US was more willing than the 1997 Concept had assumed to use military force closer to Russian borders for a wider variety of purposes. In short, Kosovo helped to undermine the liberals' security argument for partnership and reinforced those who had been arguing that the West's intentions toward Russia were not benign.

The Russian National Security Concept of 2000

The National Security Concept signed into law by Putin's decree in January 2000 has been in the works since the spring of 1999. A draft of the concept was approved by the Russian Security Council in October, and published in November 1999. At the same time, a draft military doctrine was being developed to supercede the doctrine of 1993: the draft was published in October 1999 and an official version is expected soon.

The development of these compromise political statements of Russian security assessments, interests, and policies was therefore a long-term process reflecting the concerns and conclusions of a substantial range of political figures. The process has been affected by events and problems such as NATO enlargement, Kosovo, Chechnya, and disagreements on offensive and defensive nuclear weapons, but its roots lie deep within Russia's political and security establishment. Were Russia to suffer another of its leadership shuffles, the basic outlines of the policy would remain.

The most important aspect of the new Concept is that it elevates the importance and expands the types of external threats to Russian security. The document still devotes a great deal of attention to internal threats to Russian security, arising primarily from the difficulties of its post-communist transition and its unsuccessful economic reforms. In contrast to the 1997 version, however, the new analysis emphasizes terrorism, societal discontent and disharmony, the uneven benefits of economic reform, the criminalization of Russian society, and the lack of a rule-based state to guarantee the safety and well-being of Russian citizens to a greater degree. Unlike the 1997 Concept, which appeared to call for staying the course of political-economic reform, the characterization of internal threats in the 2000 document justifies a reform policy with greater emphasis on the role of the Russian state in shaping the economy, safeguarding stability, and regulating social and political life.

Even more substantial changes have been made in Russia's assessment of its external environment and external threats to Russian security. The Concept no longer states that there are no external threats arising from deliberate actions or aggression. It provides a substantial list of external threats, including:

- the weakening of the OSCE and UN;
- weakening Russian political, economic, and military influence in the world;
- the consolidation of military-political blocs and alliances (particularly further eastward expansion of NATO), including the possibility of foreign military bases or deployment of forces on Russian borders;
- proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery;
- weakening of the CIS, and escalation of conflicts on CIS members' borders; and
- territorial claims against Russia.

In several places the Concept emphasizes that the natural tendency of international relations after Cold-War confrontation is toward the development of a multipolar world in which relations are based upon international law and a proper role for Russia. It argues that the United States and its allies, against this tendency, under the guise of multilateralism have sought to establish a unipolar world outside of international law. The document warns that NATO's policy transition to the use of military force outside its alliance territory without UN Security Council approval is a major threat to world stability, and that these trends create the potential for a new era of arms races among the world's great powers. The Concept links the internal threat of terrorism and separatism (clearly with Chechnya in mind) to external threats: it argues that international terrorism involves efforts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia, with the possibility of direct military aggression.

Given the greater significance accorded to external threats in the new assessment, it is not surprising that the new Concept calls for a greater emphasis on traditional security instruments. The main task of Russia's security policy in the external realm, it says, is to secure the country's territorial integrity, especially in preventing terrorism and threats to Russia's international borders. To deal with America's unilateralism, the Concept sets Russia the task of consolidating its position as one of the great powers and influential centers in the world. It is here that the Concept drops Russia's earlier use of the term "partnership" with the West and replaces it with the more limited "cooperation." Within that cooperation, the emphasis is on international measures to prevent proliferation and cope with the spread of international terrorism and crime.

In military defense terms, the policy focus is on preventing "scientific and technological dependence" and achieving a level of military capability sufficient to prevent aggression in local wars and prevail against groups of opposing forces in regional wars. Russia must keep its nuclear weapons as a guarantee against aggressors or coalitions of hostile states, and may resort to nuclear weapons to defend itself and its allies against nuclear-armed states or their allies.

Yet the good news is that the Concept preserves the fundamental argument that Russia's national interests and security will be achieved primarily through international law and "can only be achieved by the development of Russia's economy" in connection with its longer-term integration into the world economy. The economic reform this leadership has in mind appears to differ from previous policy: it places greater emphasis on support for the scientific, technological, and defense sectors of the economy. It appears to prescribe a stronger state role in facilitating equity and social stability and in regulating as well as creating market conditions. And it emphasizes that the goal of Russia's international economic integration is to open foreign markets to Russian products.

This seems to signal that the emphasis at home will be on greater state involvement and an economic policy closer to an industrial policy, focusing on the advanced defense sector and export promotion. This surely means a stronger state and greater state involvement in society. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that a strong priority

remains market reform and international integration, although of a type that will be less subject to Western blueprints and priorities.

Putin's statements since becoming president have reinforced this mix of views. He has emphasized that Russia's future lies in economic reform and international economic integration. He has called for progress on Russian membership in the World Trade Organization, has cut back on restrictions of important Russian raw materials exports, and taken steps against Russian energy firms that have not paid taxes or for government services. He has called for private ownership of land, an overhaul of the Russian tax system, and ratification of START II. At the same time, Putin leads a government that has prosecuted the brutal war in Chechnya and issued a revised, tougher security policy that identifies the United States as a potential threat to Russia.

As my analysis has suggested, however, there is no contradiction between economic reform and a tougher line on the Russian state and its national security policy. Putin is a Russian statist, and his leadership reflects a broad elite consensus that supports integration and cooperation with the West, but not at any price. He is willing to seek international integration and prosperity, but not at the price of territorial integrity and national sovereignty, nor at the price of the West's complete dominance in the nuclear and conventional military spheres. Russia's leadership has not abandoned internal reform and international integration, but it does not trust the West to protect Russia's interests.

Implications for the United States

The most important implication for the US of new Russian security policy is that the potential for cooperation on important security issues such as nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, and conflict management are at least as good as and probably better than in the 1990s. The current Russian leadership has a broader and more stable base of support, and will probably implement measures to increase the competence and capacity of the Russian state. That means Russia can be a reliable partner in controlling weapons of mass destruction, missile technology, and international crime. This is an improvement over the 1990s, when it was far from clear that Russia could control the actions of its citizens and agencies, even if the government wished to do so.

Second, it is extremely important to understand that the door remains open for Russian internal economic reform and international integration. This is not the time to be closing off access to the opportunities and benefits the international economic system holds for Russia's most important economic and political actors. Russia must be expected to play by the international economic rules of the game because those rules can have long-term effects in encouraging the kinds of transparency, competition, and prosperity which nudges Russia to a more liberal system. Cutting off access reinforces the position of those in Russian society who would profit from isolation, state control, and a Soviet-style defense economy.

Nevertheless, Russia is not going to be as easy to deal with as it was in the 1990s. Elements of an industrial policy and greater state regulation of the economy will make trade negotiations and financial transactions more complicated, and will cause problems in American domestic politics for certain sectors in which Russia can compete, such as steel. Russian defense spending will increase, partly in order to stem the crisis in Russia's conventional forces, partly in connection with the defense sector portion of the economic development policy. In order to prosecute the war in Chechnya, the Putin leadership found one billion dollars: unlimited funds are not available, but a shift in priorities can support increased levels of defense spending over those we saw in the 1990s. This increased defense spending is not a direct threat to US security in itself, but it has indirect implications for American security policy, including an increase in Russian efforts to sell arms on the international market, the shift in military balances that will concern Russia's neighbors, and the effects on Russian democracy and the state itself.

Most problematic will be negotiations in the area of nuclear arms control, particularly concerning American hopes for modification of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in order to deploy a form of national missile defense. Given the heightened threat assessment in the new security concept, and the increased emphasis on the importance of Russia's nuclear deterrent to cope with threats against itself or its allies, Russian defense officials have become very sensitive to any developments that might erode the strength of that deterrent capability. In addition, Russia's experience with US policy on NATO (that enlargement of membership and of mission violated assurances and agreements the Russian government believes the US made) makes Russian defense officials skeptical that the US would abide by any negotiated restrictions that proved inconvenient in the future. Russian analysts do not fear that American plans for NMD to cope with "rogue state" threats erode Russia's deterrent, but they do believe that such systems will provide the US with a "break-out" capability that may prove tempting in the future, given the trends toward American unilateralism in international affairs. No one knows (perhaps not even the Russian leaders themselves) whether there is an ABM-modification deal Russia can live with, and what the price might be in terms of a START III agreement. But it is certain that this will be a very difficult and bitter issue at a time when many Russian analysts believe that bilateral relations are approaching Cold War levels of mistrust. The most important implication for US policy is the need to understand that the Russian security leadership links national sovereignty and territorial integrity, terrorism and WMD, instability and conflict in the Caucasus/Caspian region, NATO's membership and mission enlargement, and US unilateralism. We may not agree that these elements are connected. However, we will not be able to devise a successful Russia policy unless we understand that the Russian political leadership will base its security policy on this assessment into the 21st century.