

RUSSIA' S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY UNTIL 2020

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Russia's National Security Strategy until 2020 defines Russia as 'one of the key subjects within the reconfigured system of multipolar international relations'. At the end of the 20th century, it says, Russia has managed to hold its own against nationalism, separatism, and international terrorism while defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity. On 17 pages, the document lists the dangers that are threatening Russia's security. It also describes the country's security interests as well as the priorities, objectives, and tools of its security policy. The document clearly reveals that in times of financial crisis, threats are perceived as being mostly of domestic origin.

In the military field, Russia feels threatened mainly by 'the policy of some leading states which aim at achieving superiority especially in strategic nuclear weapons'. Further hazards identified by Russia's military include the development of high-tech weapons, the use of information technology in warfare, and non-nuclear strategic weapons. In their view, the militarization of space and the unilateral installation of global rocket defence systems will lead to a renewal of the arms race and boost the proliferation and production of weapons of mass destruction and their launchers. Thus, the Strategy clearly identifies the USA as guilty of causing all the world's future security problems. Conversely, Russia intends to champion 'strategic stability and a strategic partnership based on equality'. The question is, with whom? Even in a case as clear as this, the Strategy avoids mentioning the USA by name.

Although the Strategy lays great stress on military threats, the Kremlin is actually alarmed by non-military hazards. Even president Vladimir Putin is no longer able to gloss over the impact of the global economic and financial crisis on the country's social peace.

All this notwithstanding, the Strategy tends to confuse fact and fancy when it addresses the economic situation: within the foreseeable future, Russia's national economy is supposed to become one of the five largest in the world. Another fact that emerges clearly is that the authors of the Strategy fear that the federation might break apart. No wonder, then, that the document deals with all the numerous hazards that threaten the unity of the Russian Federation, such as nationalism, separatism, xenophobia, extremism, and religious radicalism. Moreover, Russia expects disputes to arise over the control of energy resources not only in the Middle East but also in the Barent's Sea, the Arctic, the Caspian region, and Central Asia. The Kremlin assumes that the resolution of these conflicts may necessitate the 'deployment of military forces'.

Other 'strategic national security objectives' named in the Strategy include improving the quality of life of the population as well as the demographic situation. Next to this, the Strategy deals with corruption, organized crime, alcoholism, aids, and drug addiction. These are hazards to which Russians are exposed every day. The political tandem is similarly committed to combating alcohol abuse in the country, with the two top politicians personally promoting a healthy lifestyle. During the ten years for which the alcoholic president Boris Jelzin ruled, this problem was not an issue.

As a further perusal of the Strategy shows, globalization is said to promote quarrels between states over different levels of development and/or the increasingly widening prosperity gap. The situation is being further exacerbated by 'different values and development models'. Furthermore, 'non-regional forces' are interfering more and more often in the solution of regional crises. In that context, the Kremlin launched a frontal attack against the USA and NATO: because no new international security architecture had emerged as yet, the North Atlantic Alliance was brashly assuming that it was entitled to 'intervene everywhere in the world'.

'Medvedyev's dilemma' – this is the term used by Professor Alexei Bogaturov of the Moscow Institute for International Security to describe Russia's position vis-à-vis the West: on the one hand, Russia would prefer not to return to a policy of confrontation; on the other hand, the Kremlin cannot just stand by and watch the USA and NATO pursue their policy of military superiority, although there is actually nothing that Moscow can do about it. Finally, there are purely financial reasons why the Russian leaders should not want another arms race. Mentioned explicitly in the Strategy, this argument is supposed to emphasize 'the pragmatic and rational approach' of Russia's security policy.

Ultimately, the quality of the relations between Russia and the NATO is to be decided by the latter's military expansion to the borders of Russia. Only if NATO accepts Russia's national interests will Moscow be willing to 'pursue and deepen its contacts' with it. At the same time, the Strategy attacks the USA because of its alleged plans to rule the world alone. Rejecting the USA's controversial plans for a rocket defence system, the Strategy says that if it were actually deployed it would be 'very difficult' to maintain 'global and regional stability'.

Apart from the UN, Russia plans to assert its interests in other international organizations. The 'key intergovernmental instrument' of Russia's regional security policy named by the Strategy is the 'organization of the convention on collective security'.

As outlined in the Strategy, Russia further assumes that both strategic stability and the equality of the strategic partnership will be preserved by the presence of Russian armed forces in regions of conflict. Only insiders probably know what the authors meant by this nebulous statement: is it about supporting the USA in Afghanistan or about intervening in other unspecified regions of conflict? Does it allude to Ukraine or the Krim? Or to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh?

According to the Strategy, Russia succeeded not only in dealing with the aftermath of the political, social, and economic crisis that followed the system change but also in strengthening 'purely Russian ideals', such as respect for the country's historic achievements. In this context, the Strategy addresses the negative influence exerted on the cultural aspect of national security by incessant attempts to demean Russia's role and significance in the history of the world.

In Russia itself, opinions about the National Security Strategy vary. 'There is no detailed threat analysis. All the document does is describe banal facts', says major general Professor Pavel Zolotarev, deputy director of the renowned Institute for US and Canadian Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Moscow press was even more outspoken in its criticism. Vadim Solovyov, the deputy editor-in-chief of the Muscovite paper "Nezavisimaya gazeta", noted that 'carried away by socio-economic fantasies, the Strategy's authors hardly took note of the crisis at all', adding 'the Strategy is new, but its views are outdated'. Alexander Khramchikhin, a military expert with the Institute of Political and Military Analysis, had this to criticize: 'There was no public debate about the country's strategy'. He went on to say that the Strategy was 'declamatory and propagandist in character' and constituted a 'mix of psychological complexes, lies, and self-deceptions'.

The Strategy was put to its first political test when US president Barack Obama visited Russia in July 2009.

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