Russian Foreign and Security Policy—A Strategic Overhaul?

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Since Dmitri Medvedev became president, Russia has conducted a major overhaul of its foreign and security policy documentation for the first time in a decade. In summer 2008, Moscow published a new foreign policy concept. Subsequently, a new National Security Strategy was published in May 2009 and then a new Military Doctrine in February 2010.[1] Simultaneously, Moscow has launched a series of initiatives proposing the reform of the international security, energy, and financial architectures.

These moves underscore the duality of Russia's reappraisal both of its own position in international affairs and the wider international context as a whole. Moscow argues that Russia has emerged as a regional power with global horizons—and as a result is in a position to assert its own national interests as a responsibility to contribute to international affairs. These points take on added import given the second argument— that international affairs are essentially increasingly competitive and unstable and that the current institutional frameworks are simply unable to address today's challenges but exacerbate them.

This article examines Russian foreign and security policy, first by examining its broader conceptual basis. It then turns to assess the Russian proposals for international reform before finally considering some of the shortcomings of the current overhaul.

[1] For more detailed examination of the new documents, see Monaghan, A., *Russia Will Propose a New Foreign Policy Concept to NATO* (Rome: NDC, June 2008), available at http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/series.php?icode=3; and the NATO Defense College Review Series, particularly Giles, K., *Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020* (Rome: NDC, June 2009); Idem, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010* (Rome: NDC, February 2010). Both are available at http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/series.php?icode=9

Russia's Strategic Horizons

Russia's strategic horizons have evolved significantly and rapidly reflecting a sharp recovery from the weakness and national political focus of the 1990s. As Vladimir Putin's presidency progressed, and particularly during his second term, Russia emerged as a state with a regional horizon, increasingly seeking to assert its influence in Eurasia. As Dmitri Medvedev began his presidency, Russia's position was one of a regional power with global horizons and ambitions. Thus Putin declared that Russia "has returned to the world stage as a strong state, a country that others heed and that can stand up for itself." Indeed, he did not think anyone was "tempted to make ultimatums to Russia today". Medvedev too espouses such views. Prior to his election, he stated that Russia has changed, becoming stronger and more successful, a transformation accompanied by a return to a fitting place in world affairs and a change in the way others treated it. He emphasised this view again during one of his first major foreign policy speeches as president, in Berlin in June 2008 and then again in August 2008 after the war between Russia and Georgia. Such views were then encapsulated in the yearly survey by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which noted that Russia has "finished a stage of 'concentration' and returned to the international arena in the role of one of the world's leading states".

Moscow thus considers Russia to have a right to sit among other leading powers and have its interests and views considered, even when they differ from those of the West. As one Russian commentator suggested in 2006, Russia had previously seen itself as "Pluto in the Western solar system, very far from the centre, but still fundamentally part of it. Now it has left that orbit completely."[2] Indeed, at that time, Moscow began to consider Russia to be an indispensable global actor and partner for leading states, based on its roles as a key producer and transit state in global energy security and as an ally in the war against terrorism. Officials in Moscow thus state firmly that Russia is now a "subject" in international relations, not simply an "object", and as such a "subject" power, Russia has "responsibilities" to make proposals to

[2] Dmitri Trenin, "Russia leaves the West", *Foreign Affairs*, 85:4, Jul-Aug 2006.

address and to seek to resolve international problems.

This new position highlights two further inter-linked features of Russian foreign policy thinking—first, that Russia has no permanent friends (though potential partners will be revealed by their response to Moscow's proposals and initiatives); second, Russia's rise to this status, along with the rise of other regional powers—such as China, India and Brazil—illustrates that a real multi-polar world is materialising, within which there is an emerging competitive market for (equally valid) ideas on the future world order. This is all the more important since Moscow argues that the influence of the West is receding. In this context, all states should be free from twentieth-century "bloc discipline" to choose their own path of development.

According to Moscow, therefore, a world is emerging in which there is not confrontation but competition between value systems and models—and Moscow argues that Russia is a legitimate political model along the lines of a Sovereign or Conservative Democracy. Russia sees an opportunity to present itself as a valid "value centre", and posits the legitimacy of Russia's own values. In part to counter ongoing Western influence, in part to benefit from its recession, Russia must become attractive politically, economically and culturally.[3] Moscow believes that such a model is particularly relevant in Eurasia and Asia. Commentator Sergei Karaganov has argued that Russia, by showing the post-Soviet and developing societies, has proven that they can fruitfully organise their economies in ways other than the EU (which entails significant and expensive reform), and is "restoring albeit very slowly, its ability to attract medium-developed states". He believes that "many neighbouring states…are eager to emulate the sovereign system of Russia which is showing growth and is better governed."[4]

Thus, one of the aims of this conceptual basis is that Moscow sees Russia becoming a Eurasian regional financial, energy, and security hub, and political model. Moscow seeks to establish a ruble area, energy interrelationships in Central Asia and the Far East (as envisaged in the new Energy Strategy to 2030), and

[3] Interview with Sergei Lavrov, *Izvestiya*, 31 Mar. 2008.

[4] Karaganov, S., "A new epoch of confrontation", *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, December 2007.

security cooperation in the shape of organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) which is promoted, for instance, in the National Security Strategy as the main inter-state instrument for resisting regional threats of a military political and military strategic nature. The Military Doctrine also emphasises the importance of the CSTO and states that Russia will contribute forces to the CSTO's rapid reaction group and explicitly emphasises the CSTO's collective defence provision.

Indeed, in some respects, the financial crisis has therefore been good for Russian foreign policy. Not only does Moscow argue that it has highlighted the ineffectiveness of Western-dominated institutions, and the concomitant decline of Western influence, but it has also created the opportunity for Moscow to extend assistance to states worse affected than itself. The crisis curtailed Moscow's ambitions to establish the ruble as a reserve currency, but because of its huge financial reserves built up as a result of high hydrocarbon prices, Russia has been in a position to extend financial support to neighbours in an attempt to gather together the remaining "loyal" members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This was best exemplified by the decision to form a $10bn Eurasian Economic Community anti-crisis fund and through loans to states and the formation of a customs union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Moscow's Initiatives for International Reform

Nevertheless, the competitive multi-polar world is rendered unstable by the inadequacy of existing organisations and institution—not least because Moscow argues both that it is left out of strategic decision making and that the existing architectures are insufficiently representative of the rising powers which exacerbates international tension. Indeed, this sense of exclusion lies behind the significant deterioration in Russia's relationships with the West and Euro-Atlantic community writ-large, symbolised so clearly by the Western reaction to the war between Russia and Georgia. It is in this atmosphere—fractious already for several years—that Moscow has made a range of proposals, which have emerged since President Medvedev called for a pan-European security conference at a speech in Berlin in June 2008. Subsequently, in early spring 2009, Moscow published its proposals

for reform of the international financial architecture prior to the G20 summit in London. Finally, during a visit to Helsinki in April, Medvedev launched his energy proposals, which were in large part triggered by the dispute between Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukraini.

In fact, the three sets of proposals build on long-standing Russian arguments. The ancestry of the security proposals can be traced from Russian negotiations leading to the Istanbul summit of 1999, through Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security conference in 2007. Moscow seeks to tie its energy proposals back to its G8 presidency focus on energy security, but the ideas can be found in the longer-term arguments behind its rejection of the ECT. The financial proposals are couched in the longer-term objective to establish Russia as a financial hub and the ruble as a reserve currency. All three sets of proposals seek to broaden international representation in decision making to be more reflective of this emergent multi-polarity—to enhance the role of the G20 in financial matters, and bring the USA, China and Norway into a broader Energy Charter framework, for instance.

The security proposals have taken particular prominence, forming the key thrust of Russian foreign and security policy. Arms control, conflict management, and confidence building lie at the heart of Moscow's proposals. Officially launched by President Medvedev in June 2008, they have evolved from a rough, short draft circulated in the autumn of 2008 through a more developed series of ideas outlined by Foreign Minister Lavrov at the OSCE Annual Security Conference in June 2009 to the publication of a draft treaty text at the end of November 2009. They emphasise the role of the 1999 Charter for European Security's Platform for Cooperative Security as a mechanism for the coordination of activities of existing organisations.

Lavrov's June 2009 speech emphasised the four main "blocks" of the proposals:

- The affirmation into a legally binding format of basic principles of relations between states and their uniform interpretation, particularly regarding the inadmissibility of the use of force or its threat against territorial integrity or political independence of any party to the treaty.

- Establishing the basic principles for arms control regimes, confidence building measures and definition of what is meant by "substantial combat forces".

- Establishing clear rules for conflict resolution, enshrining negotiation and uniform approaches to the prevention and peaceful resolution of such crises.

- Addressing arrangements for cooperation between states and organisations to counter new threats and challenges.

An overall aim—which should be seen closely together with Moscow's energy proposals—appears to be a "peace treaty", drawing a line under the Cold War, ending Moscow's isolation and thus binding Russia and Europe together in a fashion similar to the European Coal and Steel Community. Moscow argues that the development of a "Greater Europe" or "Bigger Europe" is essential to European—and Russian—success in competing in the new, multi-polar international environment.

A Political Idea Lacking a Strategy?

In each of the sets of proposals there are a number of problems. Not the least of these is that the strategic view about the role Russia does and could play that has resulted from Moscow's overhaul of doctrine and planning, and on which the proposals are based, might be called "aspirational", even fanciful.

The strategic documentation published, while broadly reflective of a whole, on occasion clash and on occasion omit important developments. The National Security Strategy, for instance, published in May 2009, hardly discussed terrorism, and the Military Doctrine barely discussed the important reforms being undertaken in the Russian armed forces. Indeed, the two documents themselves at times seem ill coordinated—the Security Strategy appears to look forward in a more positive light, avoiding emphasis of international hostility and conflict. Published less than one year later, however, the Military Doctrine again emphasises the possibility of military security threats, particularly in the shape of NATO, which is labelled a "danger".

Furthermore, the three sets of reform proposals are light on substance, being apparently simply documents to launch discussions. What substance there is, is often inconsistent and contradictory even regarding Russia's own policy—for instance the assertion of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which contradicts Russia's own recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It also remains unclear how these

proposals sit alongside the existing arrangements such as CFE and the ECT—is Russia leaving them? Are the proposals intended to complement existing formats or replace them? While Russian officials argue that hard security is the main focus of the security proposals, it remains unclear where the other baskets of the wider security agenda fit. Grushko has suggested that issues such as the rule of law, human rights, and energy should be addressed separately in appropriate fora. This does not exclude the new treaties to cover issues exceeding those of the political-military sphere but it raises the question of how many separate treaties does Moscow envisage?

Finally, whether Moscow has sufficient capital, in terms of bureaucratic capacity, resources, and international political capital, to advocate and sustain all these proposals at once is open to question. Essentially, therefore, the question is whether Moscow can formulate the proposals clearly and then persuade a sceptical Euro-Atlantic audience that may not be either willing or able to renegotiate agreements which it has reached and ratified but of which Moscow disapproves at a time of many other (more) pressing priorities. The impact of the financial crisis on Russia and the range of serious domestic problems Moscow faces, including ongoing instability in the north Caucasus, decrepit infrastructure across the Russian Federation, and serious problems of corruption, dilute Moscow's own focus on its foreign and security policy aims. The Russian energy sector, on which so much depends, continues to suffer from underinvestment and inefficient management. Russia also faces important health and demographic problems, with a populations beset by low birth rates and life expectancy, and rising rates of HIV/AIDS and TB. The health situation is considered so grave as to be a security issue, and it has major implications for the future of Russia's workforce and thus economy.

Indeed, much of the conceptual thinking that forms the basis of both the strategic aims and the proposals for reform have a strong flavour of *status quo ante*: many of the plans were conceived for a booming economy, one for which the conditions of spring 2008 were ideal. They were not prepared for times of economic strain and have not been suitably reconsidered after the financial crisis.

On the other hand, beyond the Presidential Administration and specific governmental departments, the process of formulating more detailed sets of proposals appears to remain somewhat

underdeveloped and ill-defined. The financial crisis has only highlighted the lack of joined-up thinking and decision making in Russian political and government circles: in emphasising the lack of mechanisms for articulating policies and particularly for responding to problems, the crisis also underscored the difficulties Moscow faces in implementing the coordination not just of wider interests but even inter-departmental interests. While Moscow might have a political idea of what it seeks to achieve in the long term, it does not have a clear strategy of how to get there. It remains largely reactive to both domestic and international problems and has significant difficulty in shaping the international agenda.

Conclusions

The publication of new strategies and the launching of initiatives for international reform suggest a degree of general consensus amongst the Russian foreign and security policy elite. The somewhat haphazard nature of their formulation and the lack of substance "in letter" should not overshadow the importance of the "spirit" in which they are proposed.

Yet, it remains unclear either whether Moscow has a developed and coherent idea of its eventual goals beyond headline statements and drafts, or, importantly, whether Russia has the domestic resources and international political capital available to implement what is a very ambitious agenda of security, energy, and financial reform, both domestic and international. Indeed, there appear to be important contradictions both within proposals—such as the proposed need for respect for state sovereignty and the inadmissibility of the use of force in international relations, arguments which appear difficult to sustain after the war with Georgia and the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia—and between strategic documents, such as the National Security Strategy and the Military Doctrine. However, the centrality of the strategies and proposals to Russian foreign policy suggests that they will not simply be dropped by Moscow: it would be a major policy and strategic reversal/U-turn, with no clear subsequent direction or domestic support.

A blurred, dual picture is thus emerging in which Moscow increasingly calls for debate and proffers drafts and increasingly counts on positive responses—and yet rejects criticism and

underscores proposals through suspension of current mechanisms. If the idea of a treaty fails, Lavrov has stated, the pan-European space is faced with the prospect of a full-scale re-nationalisation or privatisation of security.

By the same token, there appears to be a rather ambiguous picture of what Moscow seeks to achieve in its foreign policy—on one hand seeking to attract neighbours to its model, on the other asserting its national interests in such a robust way as to drive potential allies and partners in the region away.

Finally, an equally important calculation in Moscow will be how Russia emerges from the crisis compared to other states—China, one of the most important states for Russia, despite Moscow's overall apparent focus on the West and the threat coming from it, appears to be emerging strengthened. This will pose important questions for Russian policy of how to react to an international situation dominated by the US and China. To be sure, Russia's economic, security and political relationships with China are significantly improved, but it is striking that China is so often absent from publicly visible strategic discussion. Moreover, the Russian economy is the worst performing of the emergent states, and failing to emerge amongst the first few states is likely to undermine Russian global ambitions in the short term.

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