

What is new in Russia's 2009 national security strategy?

The new strategy provides little substance and is rather hollow in terms of policy content. One can nevertheless observe the continuing tendency of confrontation between Russia and the West. In many respects the "zero-sum" thinking continues to prevail.

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Work on Russia's new national security strategy, adopted on 12 May 2009, was started following its brief war with Georgia in August last year. The developments in the South Caucasus encouraged the Russian government to reconsider some of its security and strategic priorities. The ensuing financial/economic crisis, however, has strongly confused the context of national security for a number of countries, not least for Russia. Taking into consideration that the full ramifications of the crisis are yet hard to foresee, this does not seem as the most plausible moment to publish a national security strategy setting out national security priorities for the period up to 2020.

The document, which was largely drafted by the Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, seems to have been prepared in haste and provides only shallow strategic guidance. It is not fundamentally different from the one released in 1997 and later updated in 2000. In terms of external security policy it is also not much different from the Foreign Policy Concept adopted in July 2008 which was rather diplomatic and only superficially sketched out the main priorities and principles to guide Russia's foreign policy. On the other hand, a closer look at the strategy reveals some of the main concerns of the Russian leadership. It also contains a few relatively new aspects.

Main aspects of the new strategy

The strategy is innovative in one important respect, i.e. it places a strong emphasis on the **internal dimension of security**, namely on the principle of "security through development"¹. The strategy states that "the strategic national security objectives in the medium term are to improve the quality of life of Russian citizens, to reduce the social and economic inequality and to fundamentally improve the demographic situation in the long term"². It also mentions that Russia's long term national interests lie "in the development of democracy and civil society". The departure from a narrow interpretation of national security as a military or geopolitical concept can be seen as one of its most positive aspects. Russia has traditionally relied on a "hard power" vocabulary when constructing its doctrines and

¹ About the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020, 13 May 2009 - <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/437.html>

² The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020; adopted on 12 May 2009 - <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>

strategies, and therefore much more emphasis was always placed on the needs of the military-industrial complex than that of civil society³.

On the other hand, the strategy contains a number of indications about the external security threats and challenges. Several major aspects can be distinguished.

First, despite the fact that the adoption of the strategy was postponed due to the planned meeting between Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev at the beginning of April, the final version contains strong anti-American statements. In terms of external threats, the document makes the strongest reference to the Western countries (primarily the US). Russia is mostly concerned about the **dangers posed by unipolarity and US unilateralism**. The strategy states that “the recurrence of unilateral force in international relations will have a negative impact with regard to implementation of Russia’s national interests”. It also expresses a clear determination to seek for a multipolar international system and states that the fundamental long term interest is to make Russia a “world power, which seeks to maintain strategic stability and mutually beneficial cooperation in a multipolar world”.

The strategy conveys Russia’s unease about the growing gap between its military potential and that of the US. It clearly states that in terms of military security the main threat is “the policy of some leading countries aimed at military supremacy, especially in terms of strategic nuclear forces”. Especially worrying is the “development of high-precision, high-tech military infrastructure”, as well as “the formation of a unilateral global missile defence system and the militarization of space, which could lead to a new arms race”. The strategy explicitly states that the “ability to maintain global and regional stability is being significantly aggravated by the elements of the global missile defence system of the US”. It states, however, that Russia will “pursue a rational and pragmatic foreign policy” and will put efforts to avoid an “expensive confrontation, including a new arms race”.

The Kremlin clearly identifies **NATO’s viability and its potential enlargement as a threat to its national security**. The strategy makes it clear that Russia finds “unacceptable the encroachment of the Alliance’s military infrastructure to its borders”, as well as NATO’s attempts to “assume global responsibilities which are inconsistent with international law”. It goes on to draw attention to the “unsustainability of the existing global and regional security architecture oriented towards NATO”.

Second, the strategy clearly states that “**the priority of Russia’s foreign policy is the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS** [Commonwealth of Independent States] states”. It indicates that Moscow will foster regional and sub-regional integration in the area primarily through organizations like the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). It is interesting that the strategy singles out the importance of the CSTO as a “major interstate instrument to confront regional threats and challenges of a political-military and military-strategic nature”.

Emphasis on the CSTO might be indicative of the changing perception among the Russian elite about how integration in the post-Soviet space should be managed. So far integration processes

³ Fyodor Lukyanov, A Positive but Confusing Security Strategy, Russia in Global Affairs, 20 May 2009 - <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/engsmi/1271.html>

through the CIS have been almost non-existent as the organization has had little to offer to its members, other than Russia. Lack of economic attractiveness of the Russian market has also complicated integration efforts through the EurAsEC. It is therefore likely that the Kremlin is stepping up efforts to foster integration in the region through the hard security dimension instead.

The security strategy also expresses concern about the growing influence of outside forces in the CIS area. It puts emphasis on the increasing competition over energy resources and expresses concern that because of this competition “the existing balance of forces near the border of the Russian Federation and its allies may be violated”. The document says Russia will modernize its border troops to be prepared for possible military conflicts and to prevent crimes like trafficking of drugs, weapons and human beings, smuggling and poaching. Borders with Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan as well as regions of the Arctic, the Caspian Sea and the Far East require special attention⁴.

Third, Russia seeks to underline the **importance of a multi-vector foreign and security policy**. The new strategy states that “the transition from bloc confrontation to the principle of multi-vector diplomacy, Russia’s resource potential, and the pragmatic use [of this potential] have increased the possibility for the Russian Federation to strengthen its influence on the world stage”. Russia will put efforts to “strengthen the political capacity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)” and take steps to “strengthen mutual trust and partnership in the Central Asian region”.

It is worth noting that emphasis on the multi-vector strategy and the SCO is not surprising. Strategic cooperation with China is central to Russia’s multi-vector policy. That is why Russia’s national security strategy underlines the importance of strengthening cooperation within the SCO and encourages the organization to assume more political-security functions. On the other hand, such a flirt with China might be seen as yet another diplomatic move directed towards the West. Partnership between Russia and China is not unproblematic and the securitization of China in Russian political circles is widespread. Growing power discrepancies between the two states, competition over Central Asian energy resources and China’s growing influence in Russia’s Far East are likely to increase political tension in the medium to long term. A strategic alliance between the two is also unlikely, especially taking into account the huge economic interdependence existing between China and the West.

Fourth, the strategy makes a reference to the **increasing importance of energy in international affairs**. It mentions that competition for energy resources will increase the likelihood of conflict and states that “the attention of international politics in the long term perspective will focus on the possession of energy resources”. Russia’s focus will be on energy-rich regions like the Middle East, the Arctic, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia.

Fifth, the mentioning of the **Arctic region in relation to the possible competition over natural resources** is a particularly important aspect. It is the first time Russia makes an explicit reference to its Arctic ambitions in one of its official security doctrines. The importance

⁴ Russia's new security strategy: sleeker and stronger, RussiaToday, 13 May 2009 - [http://www.russiatoday.com/Politics/2009-05-13/Russia s new security strategy sleeker and stronger.html/print](http://www.russiatoday.com/Politics/2009-05-13/Russia_s_new_security_strategy_sleeker_and_stronger.html/print)

of the Arctic region and the need to defend Russia's interests in the region is mentioned several times in the strategy.

Russia has been putting efforts to strengthen its position in the area for some years now. In March 2009 the Russian Security Council posted on its website a document entitled "The Fundamentals of Russian State Policy in the Arctic up to 2020 and beyond". The document outlines the country's strategy in the region and claims that the development of its energy reserves by 2020 is a vital national objective⁵. It also envisages the deployment of military, border and coastal guard units in the Arctic "to guarantee Russia's military security in diverse military and political circumstances"⁶. Moscow is planning to set up a special militarized security structure – the Arctic Group of Forces – to defend its interests in the region⁷. According to the Security Council, "it does not mean that we are planning to militarize the Arctic. We are focusing on the creation of an effective system of coastal security, the development of arctic border infrastructure, and the presence of military units of an adequate strength". It has been reported that the new structure would come under the jurisdiction of the Federal Security Service – the FSB⁸.

So far Russia has undertaken two Arctic expeditions - to the Mendeleev underwater chain in 2005 and to the Lomonosov ridge in the summer of 2007 - to support its territorial claims. Russia argues that the Lomonosov ridge is an extension of its territory, which justifies its ownership of 1.2 million sq km of the Arctic⁹. Moscow has pledged to submit documentary evidence to the UN on the external boundaries of Russia's territorial shelf by 2010. However, other Arctic countries such as Canada and Denmark are contesting such Russian claims and are collecting evidence to support their own claim over the Lomonosov ridge. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UN bodies have to evaluate such claims and make any final decisions. Russia, however, seems to be preparing to strengthen its hard power positions in the region to be prepared to settle the disputes using force. This might have serious negative consequences and provoke an arms race in the region.

Estimated Arctic energy resources¹⁰:

- **Oil – 90 billion barrels of undiscovered, technically recoverable oil (around 13% of world's undiscovered oil)**
- **Gas – 47 trillion cu m of technically recoverable natural gas (around 30% of undiscovered natural gas)**

⁵ Russia warns of war within a decade over Arctic oil and gas riches, TimesOnline.co.uk, 14 May 2009 - <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article6283130.ece>

⁶ Russia against increasing military presence in Arctic, RIA Novosti, 29 April 2009 - <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090429/121374139.html>

⁷ Russia determined to boost its power in a dangerous world, UPI.com, 5 June 2009 - http://www.upi.com/Security_Industry/2009/06/05/Russia-determined-to-boost-its-power-in-a-dangerous-world/UPI-30381244215662/2/

⁸ Russia determined to boost its power in a dangerous world

⁹ Russia warns of war within a decade over Arctic oil and gas riches

¹⁰ US Geological Survey (USGS) report - <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980>

Sixth, the strategy reflects the **changing understanding of the role of the military** in Russia's national security mindset. According to the strategy, Russia will aim to "transform the structure of the Armed Forces, to retain the capacity of the strategic nuclear forces, to improve the organizational structure of the ground forces, as well as increase the number of troops at permanent readiness". This is in fact a continuation of the plans to reform the military underway since the middle of 2008. Following the war with Georgia, Russian defence officials announced that they would seek to undertake Russia's most ambitious, systemic military modernization programme since the collapse of the Soviet Union, scheduled to deliver a more efficient and combat-ready military by 2020¹¹.

These developments actually lay ground for the new military doctrine of the Russian Federation, to be prepared this autumn. The new doctrine is expected to aim at keeping Russia's nuclear forces at a high degree of readiness, while continuing with its military reform. The reform envisages the reduction of Russian troop numbers and making its Armed Forces leaner and more effective, as well as focused on solving smaller scale regional conflicts¹².

In sum, Russia's new security strategy is a relatively hollow document in the sense that it provides few deeper insights into the strategic and security thinking of the Russian political-military leadership. The tone of the strategy is rather diplomatic and less confrontational compared to some of Russia's rhetoric over the last years. The strategy places a significant emphasis on internal aspects of security and avoids some of the most controversial aspects of Russia's recent foreign and security policy. For example, there is no explicit mentioning of the "privileged interests" in the post-Soviet space.

On the other hand, the strategy explicitly conveys the existing confrontation between Russia and the West and defines the CIS area as Russia's primary zone of interests making clear that Moscow might use force to defend its interests in the region. It is also explicit about the need to create a multipolar world and to dethrone the US as the sole "superpower". The latter goal can be best served by engaging into a multi-vector foreign and security policy and strengthening partnership with powers in the Far East, most notably China. It also declares that Russia is ready to participate in the fight for the Arctic. This is especially troubling as this might mark the beginning of a ferocious campaign to fight over the control of the Arctic mineral resources or the opening of the Northwest Passage. The EU and other international players concerned should devise coherent policies with regard to the region and the potential confrontation over its control. Ultimately, only a legally grounded solution can determine the future status of the Arctic region and prevent the use of force in the scramble for the region's energy resources. ▪

¹¹ Roger McDermott, Medvedev's Ambitious Military Reform Plans, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 5, Issue: 21, 4 November 2009, The Jamestown Foundation - [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34079&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=166&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34079&tx_ttnews[backPid]=166&no_cache=1)

¹² Fyodor Lukyanov