

## Analysis

### Medvedev's Security Policy: A Provisional Assessment

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#### Abstract

President Dmitry Medvedev has been in office for more than a year, making this a suitable moment to offer a provisional assessment of his external security policy by analyzing his major security documents and statements. In July 2008, several months after his inauguration as president, Medvedev launched his first major security document, the Foreign Policy Concept. Shortly after the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008, Medvedev introduced a second security policy initiative, this time in the form of a statement on major policy principles. The next month, in September 2008, Putin's successor approved a specific strategy for the Arctic region. And in May 2009 President Medvedev ratified Russia's first National Security Strategy. Russia's military doctrine, the third pillar of the "troika" of the country's security policy hierarchy after the strategy and the foreign policy concept is expected to appear in a new edition during the course of 2009.

#### Foreign Policy Concept (July 2008)

On 12 July 2008, Medvedev signed a new edition of the Foreign Policy Concept (FPC), promulgating his first security document as president. The most salient entries in the document dealt with Russia's international status, Euro-Atlantic security structures and (security) cooperation with Eastern actors. As to its position in the international arena, the FPC described Russia as a great power with a full-fledged role in global affairs and as one of the influential centers in the modern world. Because of its status as a resurgent "great" or "super" power, Russia claimed to exert a substantial influence on international developments. In line with its strong international position, the FPC made it clear that Russia would protect the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad.

With regard to Euro-Atlantic security, the FPC described Moscow's desire to create a different regional collective security and cooperation system than the one currently employed by the West, thereby ensuring the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region. Furthermore, the FPC rejected further expansion of NATO, especially concerning Ukraine and Georgia. The document also reiterated Moscow's opposition to the planned US missile defence shield in Europe.

The Concept heavily emphasized the East, asserting deepened engagement in the format of the Russia-India-China Troika, with China and India bilaterally and in the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership. In addition to this, the FPC explicitly mentioned the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – a Russian-led military alliance of seven states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – as a key instrument for maintaining stability and ensuring security in the CIS. The foreign policy paper also referred to the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO) – a political, economic and security grouping of Russia, China and four Central Asian CIS states – for its role in creating a network of partners in the Asia-Pacific Region.

The FPC clearly reflected Moscow's policy priorities of the time. The document stressed that Russia had restored its international standing and was pursuing its own national interests instead of being influenced by the desires of other actors. This stance repeated policy statements from Putin's 2007 and 2008 security documents. The August 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict might also be considered as a policy action reflecting these views. The rejection of Western security actions – such as the existing Euro-Atlantic security architecture, NATO expansion and the US missile shield – had been incorporated into Russia's security policy during the latter part of Putin's second term, whereas Medvedev launched the proposal for a new Euro-Atlantic security architecture in June 2008. The emphasis on partners – states and organizations – in the East coincided with Moscow's closer ties to China and the upgrading of CSTO and SCO from, respectively, a treaty and a grouping into full-fledged organizations in recent years.

The FPC devoted considerable attention to energy, both in terms of security issues and resources. This approach was also in line with Putin's 2007 and 2008 statements. Energy became a consistent part of Moscow's security thinking due to its ability to produce high revenues and its use as an instrument of power, particularly during the gas conflicts with Ukraine.

Another structural aspect of the Kremlin's security mindset included in the FPC was the importance of being a nuclear power. The document repeatedly mentioned the importance of the strategic nuclear deterrent,

but also noted the option of negotiations aimed at reducing the number of nuclear weapons.

Overall, the emphasis in this document on strengthening ties with India and China and with CSTO and SCO, in combination with its opposition towards the current (Western-orientated) European security structure, gave the impression that Russia's interest in seeking security arrangements was moving from West to East.

### **Foreign and Security Policy Principles (August 2008)**

Soon after the Russo-Georgian conflict, in a 31 August television interview, President Medvedev further elaborated his views on foreign and security policy by announcing five principles that would presumably guide Russian action:

1. International law must have primacy;
2. Multi-polarity should replace the US-dominated unipolar system;
3. Russia has no intention of isolating itself, seeking friendly relations even with the West;
4. Russia considers it a priority to protect Russians wherever they may be. Russia responds to any aggressive act against its citizens or Russia;
5. Russia has privileged interests in certain regions.

Russia's military actions in Georgia colored the Western reaction to Medvedev's principles. Because Russia had just invaded not only the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but also Georgia proper, critics questioned Russia's commitment to the primacy of international law. Russia's unhappiness with the unipolar system and US policies, along with its declarations protecting Russians abroad represented traditional statements of Russian security thinking. However, in the light of Russia's conflict with Georgia, this reference to the protection of Russian minorities received a different connotation. Russia justified its use of military force in Georgia's separatist regions as necessary to protect the Russian minority in South Ossetia. Estonia and Latvia accordingly viewed Medvedev's statements as threats, considering the presence of Russian minorities on their territory. Particularly controversial was Russia's assertion of its "privileged interests," especially regarding Georgia and Ukraine; this declaration emphasized the Russian view that the former Soviet space was its sphere of influence from which the West should stay out.

### **National Security Strategy until 2020 (May 2009)**

On 12 May 2009 Medvedev signed a decree approving the "National Security Strategy of the Russian

Federation until 2020 (NSS)." The NSS replaced the National Security Concepts of 1997 (Yeltsin) and 2000 (Putin). The document took a wide view of security and included chapters on developments in international security, national interests, priorities and threats, ensuring national security in the field of military security and defence, social security, the welfare of citizens, the economy, science-technology-education, health care, culture, and the environment.

Concerning national interests and priorities, the document listed defence and state and societal security as the first priorities for Russia's national security, followed by social-economic concerns, such as increasing the quality of life and economic growth. According to the NSS, Russia's ability to defend its national security depended above all on the country's economic potential.

In the military sphere, the paper stressed that parity with the USA in strategic nuclear weapons should be gained or maintained. Furthermore, the strategy asserted that Russia should develop into a global power, since it was already one of the leading powers influencing world processes. Another interest was the protection of Russian citizens in the so-called "near abroad".

The NSS emphasized the interdependence between civil stability and national security, stating that social-economic development was as important as military security. A highly ambitious economic objective in the NSS is to become the world's fifth largest economy in terms of GDP (Russia ranked eighth in 2008 according to the International Monetary Fund and the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook).

Traditionally, a crucial element of Russian strategic policy papers has been threat perception. As to threats, Medvedev's strategy pointed out the policy of a number of leading countries, which seek military supremacy by building up nuclear, as well as conventional, strategic arms, unilaterally developing anti-ballistic missile defences and militarizing space, which may trigger a new arms race. Another threat is NATO's expansion near Russia's borders and attempts to grant the military alliance a global role. Non-compliance with international arms control agreements represents another threat. Energy security was now also brought in as a threat, backed by the claim that competition for energy resources might create tension, which could escalate into the use of military force near Russian borders and those of its allies. In addition to external threats, the document also listed domestic perils, such as demographic problems, poverty, insufficient health care, terrorism, separatism, radicalism, extremism, organized

crime, corruption, and the danger of worldwide pandemics.

Overall the NSS demonstrated a balanced approach to the full scope of security dimensions. The foreign and military security dimension comprised seven out of the 16 pages of the NSS. The remaining pages dealt with other, especially domestic, security concerns. Thus, the NSS was more than simply a military-oriented document. However, when it came to external security threats, an overload of (military) threats from the West demonstrated the traditional approach of Russian security thinking, reflecting Russian fears that the country is encircled by enemies, creating a need to seek allies and create buffer zones against such dangers.

The NSS mentioned a large number of objectives to be reached in all security dimensions, but it remains to be seen whether these can be achieved. However, for the first time in a strategic security document, the NSS concluded with a number of indicators, such as economic growth, the unemployment rate and the level of military modernization. If these indicators are monitored and policy is adjusted accordingly, then the chances of successfully reaching the targets will be better than if no benchmarks had been provided.

Just as Putin's National Security Concept of 2000 reflected concerns raised by the Kosovo conflict of 1999, the NSS also exhibited present-day policy priorities. Most important was the desire that Russia should develop into a global power. This aspiration was a clear continuation of the thinking in the latter years of Putin's presidency. Then Russian leaders claimed that other countries could no longer ignore Russian interests since Russia had restored much of its lost status. Other current and continuing Russian policy positions in the strategy were rejections of further NATO enlargement and the US missile defence shield in Europe, efforts to promote a new European security architecture, and an emphasis on the need to modernize Russia's armed forces. Another vital and recurring policy point was the protection of Russian citizens in the "near abroad", since this issue was used by Moscow to legitimize its invasion of Georgia in August 2008. The reference in the NSS to the role of Russian military contingents in conflict areas promoting international stability was probably also related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Energy has been gaining weight in Russian security thinking since Putin's second presidential term. Indicative of the crucial importance given to energy (resources and security) was that the NSS mentioned this item more than five times, respectively in the chapters dealing with "Russia in the world commu-

nity", "National defence", "Raising the quality of life" and "Economic growth". The strategy described energy as a power instrument, strengthening Moscow's influence in the international arena and providing a resource to use as strategic deterrence. The latter was possibly a hint to the policy of cutting-off energy supplies for economic, but also for political, purposes, respectively to Belarus and Ukraine, as was again demonstrated in January 2009. In addition to describing energy as a tool of power, the NSS defined it as a strategic security asset, asserting that increasingly scarce energy resources can create a threat if energy-poor states attempted to gain control of assets held by energy rich-states, such as Russia, which could cause armed conflicts. In addition to Central Asia and the Caspian Sea, the Arctic region was mentioned as a prime source of energy resources. This approach corresponded with the Kremlin's 2020 and beyond strategy on the Arctic, endorsed by Medvedev in September 2008.

According to the NSS, the main military threats came from the West, i.e. the USA and NATO. The reference to non-compliance with international arms control agreements probably referred to the USA's unilateral annulment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, as well as to the refusal of the NATO member states to ratify the Adapted Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty of 1999, which caused Russia to suspend this treaty in December 2007.

The statements on nuclear arms in the NSS were ambiguous. On the one hand, Russia stressed modernization of its strategic nuclear deterrent, probably to counterbalance its weak conventional forces and to underline its position as a superpower. Hence, the strategy focused on maintaining nuclear parity with the USA in reply to its European missile shield and an assumed US nuclear strike doctrine. On the other hand, the NSS also proposed nuclear disarmament. Since a large part of Russia's nuclear deterrent was out of date, the talks with the USA on nuclear reductions, started in May 2009, were most likely aimed at destroying the obsolete weapons and maintaining Moscow's modern nuclear arms.

## Conclusion

In the course of his first year in office President Dmitry Medvedev has presented three major security statements, namely the FPC, a statement on key policy principles, and the NSS. In comparing these three initiatives, a first conclusion is that they all were similar. First, they all emphasized a multipolar world, guided by international law, without unilateral domination, such as by the

USA. Second, the three statements mentioned Russia's desire to cooperate and maintain friendly relations with all countries, including the West. Third, every security scheme underlined the protection of Russians abroad as a policy priority. And fourth, all plans – whether openly or concealed in other entries – asserted that Russia had privileged interests in certain regions, such as the former Soviet space.

Whereas Medvedev's statement of August 2008 was limited to enumerating policy principles, the FPC and the NSS explained policy platforms in detail. Additional policy priorities shared by the FPC and the NSS were: Russia's return to a great power status capable of influencing international developments; interests as the starting point for foreign and security policy; rejection of the West's security programs, such as the existing Euro-Atlantic security architecture, NATO expansion and the US missile shield; emphasis on partners in the

East (China, India, CSTO and SCO); energy as a power tool and strategic asset; and nuclear arms as confirmation of Russia's great power status.

A further conclusion is that the main features of Medvedev's security initiatives reflect to a large extent Putin's security policy documents of 2007 and 2008. Hence, Medvedev's foreign security policy so far does not introduce a new course in Russian security thinking, but merely extends that of his predecessor Putin.

What should the West do in response to Moscow's policies? In order to effectively "press the reset button" between the West and Russia, the USA and Europe need to enhance their talks with the Kremlin and discuss with Russian officials in public the alleged Western threats to Russia. Convincing the Kremlin to drop its zero-sum security policy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to enter the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the main challenge that lies ahead for Western policy makers.

**Table: Chronology of major security documents and statements (2008–2009)**

Date	Policy document
12 July 2008	Foreign Policy Concept approved by RF President
31 August 2008	Statement by Medvedev on principles of foreign/security policy
12 May 2009	National Security Strategy until 2020 ratified by presidential decree
Expected 2009	Revised Military Doctrine

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