

Analysis

Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020

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Abstract

The Russian leadership presented a new national security strategy in May 2009. This document is intended to define an officially recognized system of strategic priorities and measures in the area of domestic and foreign policy that will ensure long-term national security and guarantee the sustainable development of the state. The role of Russia as a major power is defined confidently in the new strategy paper. As a “key subject in the evolving multipolar system of international relations”, Russia aims to play a dominant role together with the US, China, and other great powers. On the other hand, the authors of the “Strategy 2020” have failed to formulate a convincing threat picture. Classic Soviet-era threat perceptions are loosely juxtaposed with notions relating to the risks associated with globalization. From this, certain inferences may be drawn as to the assertiveness of President Dmitry Medvedev’s administration. The president and his team have not managed to maintain control of the discussion on the security policy concept and to integrate the positions of the agencies involved into a coherent line of argumentation. Nevertheless, the “Strategy 2020” assigns a high priority to economic development – evidence that Medvedev and Vladimir Putin are realistic in their assessment of the status quo in Russia. Only an increase in economic output will give Russia the means to substantiate its claim to great power status. Medvedev succinctly summarized this approach in his presentation of the “Strategy 2020” by summing it up with the formula “Security Through Development”.

The Dilemma of Russian Foreign Policy

The Russian Federation is certainly not in an enviable situation when it comes to foreign or security policy. Devoid of significant alliances, with an economic output comparable to that of France, and a standard of living that is far below that in Europe at large, it must find the means to secure a huge territory and overextended borders, end the violent conflicts in the Northern Caucasus, and maintain the strategic nuclear balance with the US. At the same time, the Russian leadership is laying claim to act as a hegemon in the post-Soviet space and as a great power on the international stage. The question is whether Russia has the economic, military, and political potential to resolve security issues successfully and to back up its international ambitions. The fundamental problem to be resolved by the country’s foreign and security policy is the disparity between aspirations and resources. That dilemma is further aggravated by the international financial crisis and plummeting energy prices, which have hit the Russian economy hard.

The “Strategy for Russia’s National Security to 2020”, which Russian President Medvedev signed on 12 May 2009, must deal with this state of affairs; it must single out the domestic and foreign threats and indicate ways of extracting the country from this difficult situation. At the same time, the document also sheds light on the extent to which the president and his administration are able to coordinate the various agencies and

disparate forces within the political leadership, with their highly divergent conceptions of security, and ensure their commitment to a common policy.

The Run-Up to “Strategy 2020”

As understood in Russian politics, a national security strategy should define the officially recognized system of strategic priorities and measures in the fields of domestic and foreign policies that guarantees the long-term national security and sustainable development of the state. Similar documents have been published in the past. The May 2009 “Strategy 2020” replaced a national security conception that had been passed on 17 December 1997. A revised version of that document was confirmed by then president Putin in May 2000. Since then, however, the international state of affairs has changed considerably. The attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001 and the weakening of the US in the wake of its attack on Iraq, the Eastern expansion of the EU and NATO in 2004, the rising energy prices, the “color revolutions” in the CIS of 2003–4, the South Ossetian conflict in 2008, the international financial crisis, and the plummeting oil price in 2008 – all of these factors affected the international standing of Russia both positively and negatively.

The national security strategy had to be adapted to the changing international situation. Preparations began in 2004 on Putin’s instructions. But the work was

slow to get off the ground, for reasons that remain unclear. The Security Council may have lost influence during the tenure of former foreign minister Igor Ivanov, who acted as secretary of the Security Council from April 2004 to July 2007, and may therefore have been unable to assert itself against the “power structures” – the Defense Ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, and the intelligence services. After Ivanov’s resignation in July 2007, the position was not immediately filled – another sign of the Council’s declining relevance during Putin’s second term in office. Ivanov’s ongoing obligations were taken on by his deputy, Valentin Sobolev. It was not until May 2008, after Medvedev’s election as president, that the latter appointed a new secretary of the Security Council, namely Nikolai Patrushev, who had served as head of the domestic intelligence service, Federal Security Service (FSB), until the government reshuffle.

Medvedev’s New Start

In June 2008, President Medvedev ordered that work on the security strategy be resumed. The task was handed to an interministerial working group at the Security Council that included representatives of the government, the presidential staff, the president’s plenipotentiary representatives to the federal districts, the Academy of Sciences, and major corporations as well as individual experts. The work wore on until 2009. Meanwhile, the government, which was separately elaborating a “concept for long-term socio-economic development to the year 2020”, was quicker to reach a result. Its paper, which deals with issues of economic and social development, was completed in autumn 2008 and enacted by Prime Minister Putin’s decree on 17 November.

Meanwhile, the draft security strategy passed through several levels of scrutiny. The scientific advisory board of the Security Council discussed the paper’s approach and methods, which were then approved by the president. The draft was subsequently discussed in all federal districts. The governors and the speakers of the regional parliaments participated in these regional debates. Furthermore, the presidium of the Academy of Sciences discussed the paper and its content was coordinated with all of the members of the Security Council, i.e., the prime minister, the head of the presidential administration, the ministers of defense, interior, and foreign affairs, the representatives of both chambers of parliament, and the heads of the domestic and foreign intelligence services.

In early February 2009, the Russian media announced that the concept was “nearly done”. The Security

Council was presented with a draft on 24 March; however, it was agreed that the final decision would be delayed by a month. The official reason given was that of a “purely technical” revision. However, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Security Council, declared that a number of new and partially contradictory suggestions for changes had been made. Some in the Defense Ministry, for example, reportedly wanted the immigration of Chinese people to the Far Eastern part of Russia to be framed as a threat – a demand that was not taken up by the reviewers. Colonel General Georgii Shpak, a former commander of the airborne forces and now assistant to the head of the presidential administration, explained that the delay was needed to reassess whether any additional risks for Russia might arise from the international financial crisis. Russian media outlets touted another reason, according to which President Medvedev was deliberately holding back the strategy until after his meeting with US President Barack Obama in mid-April in order to gain a clearer picture as to the future course of relations with the US. These contradictory announcements reflect the many voices involved in the editorial process and their lack of coordination. Apparently, as of March 2009, the divergent departmental interests had not been resolved and the parties involved had not been brought to agreement on a concept.

The “Strategy 2020” and the New System of Strategic Planning

On 24 April, after the revision of the draft had been completed, it was adopted and passed on to the president. He enacted the “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020” by decree on 12 May. The document is intended to constitute a framework of sorts for a series of further concepts, three more of which are to be presented in the course of 2009: a new military doctrine, which is being elaborated by a working group headed by former chief of the general staff Yuri Baluevsky; a doctrine for food security to 2020; and a conceptual document for state and national policy. The “Strategy” itself dovetails with the concept for long-term socio-economic development to 2020 that the government already adopted in November 2008.

Together with the “Strategy 2020” document, decisions were adopted on the “Foundations of Strategic Planning in Russia” together with a list of criteria and indicators for national security. Taken together, these documents are to create the basis for a system of strategic planning encompassing all state authorities. Each department must now present individual strategic plans for its portfolio. According to a list put together by the

Security Council, 135 strategies, concepts, and white-papers are to be elaborated to cover all areas from banking to agricultural policy. As part of the new strategic planning system, these concepts are to be reviewed annually by the Security Council. If this system of strategic planning is put into practice, it will significantly boost the power of the Security Council. Its apparatus will then be authorized to intervene in the work of all portfolios.

A Profusion of Threat Perceptions

The “Strategy 2020” document itself is visibly more voluminous than its predecessor document. In 7,300 words (compared to the earlier paper’s 5,000 words) and 112 paragraphs, it deals with such diverse topics as national defense, economic growth, health policy, ecology, and culture as well as their significance for Russia’s national security. The document begins with the confident assertion that “Russia has overcome the results of the political and socio-economic systemic crisis at the end of the 20th century...” and defines Russia’s new role in the world from this starting point. It claims that the country has overcome nationalism, separatism, and terrorism, secured its territorial integrity, and restored the basis for enhancing its competitiveness and defending the interests of the nation as a “key subject in the emerging multipolar system of international relations”. Thus, the “Strategy 2020” depicts a Russia that has overcome its domestic crisis, has resurged economically, and demands to be accorded equal status with the other great powers.

The document identifies a qualitatively new geopolitical situation that has come about through the emergence of new centers of economic growth and political influence. Russia counts itself among these, regarding itself as a leading economy that is internationally competitive and features a strong arms sector, a huge store of natural resources, and pragmatic politics. The implication of this self-perception for Europe is that the regional security architecture, based on NATO as its cornerstone, is outdated. Indeed, it is regarded in the “Strategy 2020” as a “threat to the provision of international security” that must be amended accordingly.

In the sections that follow, a broad range of perceived threats is developed. The authors of the chapter on “The Contemporary World and Russia: Current State and Developmental Tendencies” mainly take their cue from global risks. Threats to Russia’s national interests are seen as emanating from the unilateral use of force in international relations – an obvious reference to the US and NATO; the proliferation of mass casual-

ty weapons, including the risk that such weapons might be acquired by violent political groups; illegal activities in the fields of cybernetics, life sciences, and high technology; global information warfare; and the destabilization of economic development and democratic institutions. Further threats identified include nationalism, xenophobia, separatism, demographic problems, the drug trade and human trafficking, organized crime, the spread of pandemics, and lack of water. These risk factors can also be found in threat analyses used by other European states. Notably, this list does not refer to any immediate military threat to Russia.

The chapter on “National Defense”, however, takes a different approach. It makes critical reference to the “policy of a number of leading foreign countries that are aiming to achieve a dominant military superiority, especially in the field of strategic nuclear forces...” This phrase is obviously directed against the US, which is also reproached for its intention to build up a global missile defense system and militarize outer space. In the chapter on “Security of State and Society” – a new term first introduced in this strategy paper – espionage by foreign services and individual persons is identified as the main threat, together with the activities of violent political groups. It is noticeable that foreign espionage is ranked as a higher threat than terrorism, even though attacks on security forces are on the rise in the Northern Caucasus and several republics are on the brink of civil war.

The chapter on “Raising Russian Citizens’ Standard of Living” defines a completely different kind of threat. It refers primarily to the international financial crisis, but also to the struggle for energy, water, and food as well as Russia’s lack of technological development. Raising the standard of living is regarded as an important instrument for combating corruption and organized crime. Ensuring a stable supply of food and affordable medicine is considered an important goal of a national security strategy.

In the chapter on the economy, the authors mainly concentrate on the further development of industry, which they hope will reduce Russia’s dependence on exports of raw materials. A failure of this effort is regarded as a potential threat, as is the loss of control over the nation’s resources and the deteriorating state of its resource base. The stated goal is for Russia to ascend to become one of the world’s five most productive economies in the middle term. This is, however, an extremely ambitious target. According to the latest World Bank figures, which refer to the year 2007, Russia was ranked in eighth place – with economic power being rat-

ed in terms of purchasing power parity – or in eleventh place based on the World Bank’s Gross National Income framework (Atlas Method). Since the country owed this rank mainly to high income derived from energy exports, the decline of energy prices will make it difficult to catch up with the US, Japan, China, India, Germany, France, and the UK. Finally, the “Strategy 2020” also identifies risks in other areas: Discrepancies in the level of development between the various Russian regions, the backwardness of science and technology, and the shortcomings of the public health system. Additional threats identified include the falsification of Russian history and the danger of climate change.

Metrics for Threats

Overall, one gets the impression that the “Strategy 2020” paper was written by several authors whose threat perceptions diverge radically. Classic enemy perceptions of the Soviet age are loosely juxtaposed with notions linked to the risks of globalization. The lead editors have failed to homogenize these perceptions in the final version of the paper and to compile them into a single, concise threat perception. The “Strategy 2020” apparently constitutes a compromise paper that includes the competing views of several institutions without attempting to unify them. The editors themselves seem to have been aware of this inadequacy. Thus, in a brief conclusion, they listed a hierarchy of criteria for measuring the gravity of threats. This list of criteria identifies seven metrics against which the future state of national security should be measured:

1. The level of unemployment.
2. The level of social inequality (measured as the ratio of the top ten percent income bracket compared to the bottom ten percent income bracket).
3. The inflation rate.
4. National debt (internal and external) in relation to GDP.
5. Expenditures for health coverage, culture, education, and science in relation to GDP.
6. The annual modernization standard of weapons systems and military gear.
7. The availability of qualified staff in the military and engineering/technical fields.

This list is remarkable for listing priorities whose consistency with the rest of the text is limited. Some aspects, such as economic growth and investment, are not mentioned at all, while others, such as armament and the size of military capabilities, are only referred to in passing. Social security is clearly accorded priority over military security. National security is measured in terms of

social stability, not in terms of economic power or military potential. There is no question that in this chapter, the experts in domestic and social policy have prevailed over the foreign policy, military, and intelligence communities. Whether this applies to security policy in general is a question that must remain unanswered.

“Security Through Development”

Overall, the “Strategy for Russia’s National Security to 2020” is an incomplete document that does not attempt to present a comprehensive risk analysis, but merely lists political threats. Thus, conservative expert Konstantin Sivkov, the first vice president of the Academy of Geopolitical Issues, regarded the document as “flippant”, since it does not even attempt to identify the causes of the global crisis, which he believes are to be found in the behavior of the US. Viktor Ilyukhin, a Communist who for many years presided over the Duma’s Security Committee, described the “Strategy 2020” as being “completely inadequate to the state of affairs”, since it made no reference to the shortcomings of Russian industry – underperformance in the areas of engineering, information technology, and machine tool manufacturing. Even a liberal publication such as *Yezhednevny Zhurnal* (“Daily Journal”) criticized the paper for being too vague: “The list of threats is a lobbyists’ list.” It claimed that each department had asserted its influence in order to ensure that its own interests were entrenched in the strategy document.

Indeed, it appears that each chapter of the document was written by a different agency. The “Strategy 2020” does not even attempt to formulate a coherent, structured risk analysis. It simply assembles threat perceptions. It offers no clues as to which of the competing views out of this jumble of risk perceptions will determine the future course of politics – the FSB’s fear of foreign espionage, the military’s fear of NATO, the liberal economists’ concern for economic development, or the establishment’s fear of social unrest. This allows us to draw certain inferences as to the Medvedev administration’s ability to assert itself. The president and his team have not been able to control the discussion over the security policy concept and to integrate the positions of the government bodies involved into a coherent line of argumentation. Apparently, one year into his term of office, Medvedev has not yet managed to assert his authority across the entire administrative apparatus. It should not come as a surprise that the intelligence services and the military leadership have a worldview of their own, but the president must be capable of subordinating their activities to his own political goals.

This is not sufficiently apparent in the “Strategy 2020” document. It is possible that this is due to the personal involvement of the secretary of the Security Council. Nikolai Patrushev served for many years as the director of the FSB. His affinity to the work of the intelligence services and his desire to expand the security apparatus into an efficient instrument of control are reflected in the national strategy. It remains to be seen to what extent he can assert himself vis-à-vis the presidential administration and other agencies.

On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the “Strategy” identifies targets for foreign policy that already constitute policy guidelines today. One of these is Russia’s claim to be acknowledged as a great power, its determination to maintain control over the nation’s natural resources, and its intention of maintaining social stability in the country. It follows that Russia will oppose a liberalization of the energy market, “democracy promotion”, and the fostering of civil-society organizations by external actors with equal determi-

nation. An “orange scenario” – a development resembling that in Ukraine in 2004/5 – is just as unacceptable to the Medvedev administration as it was to Putin at the time.

The high priority accorded to economic development in the relevant chapters of the “Strategy 2020” shows that Medvedev and Putin alike are realistic in their assessment of the status quo in Russia. By banking on economic growth, they are pursuing the only possible course that can resolve the dilemma of Russian foreign policy. Only increasing economic output can ensure that Russia has the means to back up its claim to great power status. It can only gain international prestige and security by the further growth of its national economy, accelerated innovation, and fostering science and technology. This is succinctly summarized in the formula used by Medvedev while presenting the “Strategy 2020”: “Security Through Development”.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

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Reading Tip

For opinion polls on Russians’ view of Russia’s role in the world, for a documentation of ceilings on arms and equipment as stipulated by the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty and for an overview of international organizations in Europe please see Russian Analytical Digest 55/09, “The Role of Russia in Europe’s Security Architecture”, 18 February 2009, <http://se2.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=RESSpecNet&fileid=A50453B9-9939-C477-F4B8-15D53BC0C0E9&lng=en> or via the website of the Russian Analytical Digest <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=96690>