

# Russia Profile Weekly Experts Panel: Russia's New National Security Strategy

Introduced by [Vladimir Frolov](#) Russia Profile 05/22/2009

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**Last week, the Kremlin released Russia's new National Security Strategy till 2020. It was long overdue. President Dmitry Medvedev declared that a new national security strategy was need back in September 2008, soon after the end of the war in South Ossetia. Drafted in 1997 and updated in 2000, the previous concept was clearly obsolete. So what does this document accomplish? What does it say about Medvedev's view of the world and of Russia's place in it? Will it lead to any substantive changes in Russia's foreign policy?**

One of the striking things about the new doctrine is that it is supposed to cover such a long period of time – up until 2020, while the United States reviews and updates its National Security Strategy annually. The Kremlin has apparently decided that things are so stable now that it can predict the nature and the line-up of threats until 2020, when Dmitry Medvedev will no longer be president.

The second striking aspect is the very broad definition of national security that the Russian planners have adopted. Similar American documents give a narrow interpretation of national security - foreign policy and defense. Russia's interpretation includes not only external security, but also internal security – Russia's development as a modern and prosperous state.

That is why the new doctrine lists, among Russia's top national interests, "developing democracy and civil society and increasing economic competitiveness." Among the key priorities to ensure Russia's national security the strategy lists "raising living standards for Russian citizens," "innovation-based economic growth," "environmental protection and resource conservation," and only at the end does it mention "strategic stability" and "Russia's active role in building a multi-polar world." The document says that the country should be among the world's five largest economies "in the medium term."

The new strategy mentions energy security and suggests that the attention of the international community be concentrated now on the reserves of the Middle East, the Barents Sea shelf, Central Asia and the Arctic. "With the ongoing competition for resources, attempts to use military force to solve emerging problems cannot be excluded, and this might destroy the balance of forces on Russia's and its allies' borders."

The strategy defines "energy security" as a "sustainable balance in supply and demand for standard quality energy resources," and calls for developing global energy markets based on WTO rules, international development, and transfers of energy saving or clean technologies. The paper also singles out NATO and the United States as likely security threats. "A global security architecture exclusively oriented toward the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was bound to fail," it says, adding that Russia "will not cease its vigilance with respect to plans to move NATO's military infrastructure closer to its borders and efforts to give the alliance a global character." The document asserts that Russia's military security is endangered "by efforts of a number of foreign countries to achieve military predominance, especially with nuclear forces" – an indication of Russia's pique at the United States.

The new strategy acknowledged the danger posed by an increase in the number of nuclear powers, but fails to mention Iran among such threats.

So what does this document accomplish, apart from making for very boring reading? What does it say about Medvedev's view of the world and of Russia's place in it? What kind of Russia do we see in it? Why is it so vacuous and declarative? Why does it cover such a long period of time when there is so much uncertainty in global affairs and in Russia's overall trajectory? What does it mean by lumping external and internal threats together? How is it being viewed in the West, particularly the passages about energy security? Will it lead to any substantive changes in Russia's foreign policy?

Eugene Kolesnikov, Private Consultant, the Netherlands:

The new strategy has formalized Russia's approach to national security that evolved during Vladimir Putin's reforms. It reflects the somber reality that Russia can only survive if it maintains its sovereignty (a requirement that persisted throughout Russia's millennial history) and modernizes its society (a recurrent endeavor, at least since Peter the Great).

This two-pronged approach to national security underpins the key concepts of the strategy: a multi-polar view of the world order, a clear recognition of the vital role of strategic military parity, the requirement of securing Russia's sphere of influence in the near abroad, overriding the importance of Russian energy resources and the need to modernize the economy and improve the wellbeing of the population.

In a way, the strategy attempts to put an end to the debates on Russia's position in the world and its development model, which started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The strategy presents a view that reflects a presumed consensus of the ruling elites on these issues.

In addition to these principal positions the strategy contains a wide array of secondary policy statements, or rather declarations of intent, in the areas of defense, security, economy, science and technology, healthcare, culture, ecology and so on, whose actual meaning entirely depends on the extent and format of implementation (which appears to be fine with the ruling class at the moment).

Formalization of the two-pronged approach to national security seems to be the main purpose of the new National Security Strategy. If there were no crisis, it would be an adequate strategy document. The problem, however, lies in the fact that the strategy completely fails to address tremendous risks related to the failures of capitalism, liberalism and globalization that we are currently facing. The cardinal, and perhaps rhetorical, question of whether the current somewhat statist, somewhat free-market, somewhat liberal, and clearly globalized Russian model of development espoused in the strategy will work in the new circumstances remains unaddressed. I hope that this cardinal question is not ignored by the ruling elites. A particularly curious passage from the document may indicate just that: "Consequences of world financial and economic crises may become comparable in their cumulative damage to a large-scale application of military force." This question, however, may have to wait a few more years until it becomes clear whether an adjusted globalized capitalism model survives another cycle or not, at which point a complete revision of the strategy may or may not become necessary.

Ethan S. Burger, Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, DC:

As a preliminary observation, one should not lose sight of the fact that the "Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation until 2020" (hereinafter SNS) can and is likely to be amended at some point in the future. I cannot decide if the inclusion of the word "strategy" in the SNS's title is a positive or negative development – perhaps it is merely neutral. Long-range planning is a useful mechanism to ensure that government officials take a common approach to particular issues. Unfortunately, the use of the term "strategy" is often associated with military affairs.

Perhaps, I should not be alarmed, since politicians have "campaign strategies" and it is likely that President Barak Obama has an evolving strategy to deal with the healthcare crisis in the United States.

The SNS may or may not be an important document. Its significance might be substantive or the process by which it was developed may be more important, and thus informative of the nature of power and politics in Russia. Of course, it might be one of those things that one leaves on one's bookshelf to gather dust or just saves onto one's hard drive.

The SNS covers a broad range of topics. It reflects an understanding that a state's power has both domestic and foreign components. Nonetheless, it is thin on detail – which is understandable, since governments act in the present -- usually on the basis of short-term considerations. This absence of detail and real analysis gives the SNS a flavor of being somewhat divorced from reality – but the same can be said about the Russian president's Annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly or the U.S. president's State of the Union Message. There has always been an element of "boosterism" in both speeches.

There is something for everyone within the SNS, and it avoids conflict between interest groups. This is not surprising, since the document offers little guidance with respect to prioritization of objectives. The Russian economy is not stable and there are significant differences of opinion about the political direction of the country. While President Medvedev has said that change takes time, one still has to wonder whether these changes will ever occur, and what will be the process that brings them about.

The SNS's discussion of national security issues does not break new ground. What does this indicate? Perhaps, it means that we can expect more of the same in Russian foreign policy. Does this mean that the individuals and interest groups active in this area will not only continue to exercise power, but choose their successors over the next 12 years as well? Twelve years is a long time in politics, but a short time in other contexts. People are mortal.

Who will be Russia's president in 2012, 2016 and 2020? To my knowledge, while some people may have ideas in this regard, whether they can bring them to fruition is uncertain. I am reminded of that famous scene in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, after T.E. Lawrence leads the Arab forces across the Saudi desert to surprise the Ottoman forces at Aqaba by attacking from their rear rather than from the sea, when he screams at an Arab colleague who was constantly interpreting events by referring to the Koran: "it's not written!"

Finally, the SNS assumes that competition for energy will inevitably be a key feature in international affairs for the foreseeable future, specifically in the Middle East, Barents Sea Shelf, Central Asia and the Arctic. Technological change, however, may alter the situation. Still, assuming that a scientific/engineering breakthrough does not occur, it would be most unfortunate if these situations were resolved primarily by the use of force.

It is troublesome that Russian planners still look at NATO as representing a threat of a global character. The SNS might have had a section on how Russia might win some real friends. Physics teaches us that molecules migrate from where they are highly concentrated to where they are less concentrated. That portion of Russia that lies east of the Urals seems very under-populated. I am certainly not the first to make this observation, nor will I be the last. If the Russian state is to have a bright future, it still seems to have a lot to learn.

Vladimir Beliaeff, President, Global Society Institute, San Francisco, CA:

Strategic formulations are longer-term by definition. In my opinion, it is not surprising that the Russian strategic time horizon is 2020 – actually, one could argue that this date is too close. A more distant time horizon does not really imply immutability of strategic formulations. But it is essential for a strategy to think longer-term. America is not known for a long-term culture, most probably because the country is so young, historically. The sense of time in a 1,500 year old society is very different than in a polity which is 250 years old. When Mongol invaders crushed the original Russian state, it was nearly twice as old as the United States is today. So an annual rewrite cycle for American strategic declarations is not per se a rule that must be followed by other countries. It certainly is not a sine qua non for national strategic thinking, rather – the opposite.


Of course, the world changes, and this change results in the transformation of the strategic landscape for every nation. One must assume that Russia will continue to evaluate and change its national security strategy – and shift the time horizon as well. But underlying global change there is a substratum of geopolitical realities, which define fundamental strategic axioms and parameters. A methodologically sound national strategy must address this geopolitical substratum, often invariant, at least in the context of the existence of that particular national polity. If a strategic formulation changes annually, one must question whether it is truly strategic, or perhaps operational or even tactical.

Published national security strategies are by nature boring and vacuous. One may wish for a frisson from reading statements like: "we have so-many one megaton warheads aimed at such-and-such cities of a particular strategic opponent" or "the leadership of such-and-such country is a bunch of senile, semi-literate crooks and we will exploit their weakness for our advantage," and an authentic national strategy might actually declare this, but what are the chances of such

statements ever seeing the light of day? Such declarations may exist, but a public version of a national strategy is not likely to include any words that may describe genuine military capabilities or make unvarnished assessments of an opponent's leadership. Perhaps some nations do not publish their own national strategies because they cannot be frank, and chose not to be boring or vacuous...

Regarding internal and external threats, experience of all times demonstrates the conflation of these in every circumstance. This was true in Athens and Rome, in Mesopotamia and early China. The separation of threats into external and internal is actually artificial. Russia's experience in the 20th century, starting with the Russo-Japanese war and the mutinies of 1905 proves the point – it is now documented that Russian revolutionaries were armed and financed by foreign military antagonists: a good example of the commonality of external and internal threats to national security.

Will the national security strategy influence Russia's foreign policy? Not only should a national strategy influence foreign policy, but it should also serve to explain it. For any state, if foreign policy actions contradict statements in its national strategy, then one can reasonably ask whether the formulations in the strategy are honest (they may be intentional disinformation) or whether the strategy version is obsolete.

Boring as it may be, Russia's national security strategy should help understand how Russia perceives itself and its universe. Rather than imagining Russia's strategic weltanschauung, or projecting their own opinions, scholars would benefit from carefully reviewing Russia's own perceptions of its security. 

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