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Russia's
National Security Strategy
to 2020

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Introduction

The publication of Russia's latest National Security Strategy in May 2009 has given rise to a wide range of commentary and interpretation. But instead of dividing Russia-watchers both at home and abroad along the usual lines, it has provoked a much more varied response.

This may be because this is a far more broad-ranging and complex document than its predecessors, and in this respect it seems to have something for everybody. Certainly if you look at the headlines "Ready for a Fight: Russia's New Security Policy", "Moscow places energy at the heart of its National Security Strategy", and "Dignified Standard of Living is Russia's Best Security Strategy" you have to check that the commentaries are actually describing the same document.

Perhaps inevitably, the document bears distinctive symptoms of having been written by a committee, with areas which are less than clear and an occasional lack of coherence.² But the Strategy is less a universal statement in its own right than a foundation of a consistent overall system of ideas about national security. This review therefore looks first at the development of the current document, then places it in context with a range of other recent and planned papers outlining the Russian strategic view, before highlighting some key points of interest and major differences with previous versions.

Drafting and Development

The issue of the Strategy forms part of a systematic overhaul of Russia's doctrinal and strategic planning documents.³ Russia's situation and place in the world has changed beyond recognition since the last great outpouring of doctrinal writing following the anointment of Vladimir Putin as President in 2000, and there is no doubt that much of what was written then is no longer relevant to Russian circumstances.⁴

According to Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev, work on an updated version of the National Security Concept began as early as 2004, but stalled "for various reasons".⁵ Consultations began again following a presidential order in June 2008, despite speculation that the stimulus for renewed work might have been armed conflict in Georgia in August 2008.⁶

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² For example, the Security Council preamble to the document describes it as "retaining the primacy of already adopted national security political documents, in first place the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation" whereas in fact rather than retaining its primacy this document replaces the Concept altogether.

³ For a list of the documentation, see <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/sections/3/>

⁴ In presenting the Strategy, both Medvedev and Patrushev refer consistently to the previous version being issued in 1997, with the 2000 version treated as no more than an update - although at the time this looked like a comprehensive re-working into a much shorter and very different document. For a lucid explanation of the differences between the 1997 and 2000 versions, see Jakub M Godzimirski, "Russian National Security Concepts 1997 and 2000: A Comparative Analysis", *European Security*, Vol. 9 No. 4 (Winter 2000), pp. 73-91.

⁵ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

⁶ Presidential Instruction No. Pr-1150 of 4 June 2008.

The drawing up of the Strategy took place under direct Security Council supervision, carried out by “an interdepartmental working group attached to the staff of the Security Council, including representatives of a number of branches of the executive: the government staff, the presidential staff, the staffs of the presidential plenipotentiary representatives to the Federal Districts, the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as the expert community and major businesses” – seasoned Kremlin-watchers will note the significance of the order in which these are presented, especially the first two.⁷ Adoption of the new Strategy appeared to be expected at a Security Council meeting on 24 March 2009, when a draft was presented amidst lengthy public explanation of the new document’s aims and principles by both Nikolay Patrushev and Dmitriy Medvedev. But after some “diametrically opposite” proposals were voiced at the meeting, the document was returned to be worked on for another month, returning for eventual approval by a closed Security Council session on 24 April.⁸

Informed media speculation suggests that the changes introduced at the last minute were intended to reflect the altered state of relations with the USA under Barack Obama, and the introduction of new passages on human rights.⁹ But as stated by Academician Aleksandr Nekipelov, one of the document’s drafters, “not all foreign policy issues should be linked with President Obama, since [other] positive trends have emerged with his arrival”.¹⁰

At various points of its evolution the Security Council of the Russian Federation has risked being seen as tangential or of limited relevance or power. With the legislative and political force imbued in the new Strategy, doubts are dispelled: the Security Council is placed firmly at the helm of all areas of Russian activity which can be construed as having a bearing on national security – including, from now on, economic development and human rights.

Secretary of the Security Council Nikolay Patrushev, formerly Director of the Federal Security Service and a key member of the Petersburg-Karelia KGB circle, will play a key role. Patrushev is to oversee the Security Council’s “coordinating role”, covering all elements of the national security system and beyond – “organs of state government, state organizations, and social organizations”¹¹ - as well as enjoying a provision that all documents on domestic or foreign policy should be referred to the Security Council for review. Furthermore the Security Council is to be the body measuring progress by all concerned parties on implementing the Strategy, reporting annually to the President.¹²

The intention to use the Strategy as an instrument of control was also signalled by Medvedev. who said that “strategic planning is the most important factor in the development of the country and the provision of national security for it. We have repeatedly said that we must introduce such planning into everyday life. Here, as you know, department priorities have been dominating for a long time, priorities that do not always facilitate the effective achievement of unified, strategic goals.”¹³

There may not have been recent many high-profile instances of wilful setting of priorities by individual departments: the Ministry of Defence is pursuing an aggressive reform programme under a Medvedev associate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not a main source of foreign policy initiatives, and the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development has been disinclined to engage in

⁷ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

⁸ *Kommersant*, 14 May 2009; *Izvestiya* 13 May 2009.

⁹ *Kommersant*, 14 May 2009.

¹⁰ *RIA-Novosti*, 13 May 2009.

¹¹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25 March 2009.

¹² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No 537 of 12 May 2009, accessible at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/436.html>

¹³ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25 March 2009.

independent thinking for some time. But the 2009 National Security Strategy is a step towards ensuring that through Nikolay Patrushev, the “unified strategic goals” of the Putin circle are not interfered with in future.

“A System-Forming Document”

According to President Medvedev, the National Security Strategy is a “fundamental, system-forming document, which is aimed at the enhancement of the quality of state control.”¹⁴

In a similar way to the 2000 Concept, the Strategy serves as an umbrella document for other policies prescribing Russian state approaches to strategic and security issues. It describes itself as the “officially recognised system of strategic priorities, goals and measures” – in other words it is also an aspirational document, as opposed to the 1997 and 2000 versions which were predominantly descriptive of current risks and threats.¹⁵

The Strategy itself is not limited to the single publicly-released document, but made up of a complex of different inter-related papers. It sets criteria for measuring the condition of state security, but is incomplete without its classified addenda specifying actual numerical values for these criteria (the Bases for Strategic Planning and the List of Criteria and Indicators of National Security) - designed for developing forecasts and serving as additional foundation documents for ensuring implementation of strategic aims through legislation.¹⁶ A good indication that the published version of the Strategy is incomplete as a stand-alone document is that although it refers repeatedly to prospects for the short, medium and long term, it was left to Nikolay Patrushev to explain in a protocol newspaper interview introducing the Strategy precisely what periods this meant in a document with a relatively short planned lifespan. According to Patrushev, references to the short term mean the period to 2012, the medium term 2013-2015, and the long term out to 2020.¹⁷

The Strategy’s task is the “formation and maintenance by the national security forces of domestic and foreign conditions that are favourable for the implementation of the strategic national priorities” – the Strategy sets the conditions, while the priorities can be honed in other documents. This relationship with other strategic concepts is made explicit in some cases, and inferred in others: the document is closely tied in with the Long-Term Socio-Economic Development Concept of the Russian Federation to 2020, while in Patrushev’s introduction he made pointed reference to Medvedev’s 5 November 2008 speech outlining foreign and domestic policy priorities.¹⁸

When Russia’s new Foreign Policy Concept was signed by Medvedev and published on 12 July 2008, it appeared to be out of sequence as it had appeared independently of the updated Security Strategy which should, according to theory, provide the basis for it. But its consistency with the foreign policy section of the Strategy (the Foreign Policy Concept by and large expands on themes from the Strategy) and the timing of its release (shortly after the order was given to re-start work on the Strategy) point reassuringly to its being part of the same broadly coherent master plan.

¹⁴ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25 March 2009.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all citations are from “Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation to 2020, Confirmed by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No 537 of 12 May 2009” as published in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, weekly edition 20-26 May 2009.

¹⁶ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

¹⁷ *Izvestiya*, 13 May 2009.

¹⁸ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

This year has already seen the release of the Bases of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic to 2020 and Beyond, and the Security Council is also supervising the drafting of a new military doctrine, scheduled at present to be completed by September 2009,¹⁹ which after a number of false starts has been handed to a working group led by former Chief of General Staff Yuriy Baluyevskiy.²⁰ Also planned for 2009 are the Russian Federation Food Security Doctrine to 2020 and the Concept for State and Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation to 2020.²¹

In this way a number of documents defining strategic direction for Russia have been lined up for release in quick succession, updating a whole range of doctrine statements which have been in force since they were issued almost a decade ago in a Russia which looked radically different. This is part of ongoing work to fashion a coherent system with 2020 as a common target date.²²

So it would follow that the Strategy is no more intended to provide all the answers than its predecessor documents. Some critical Russian media comment suggested that the Strategy was long on aspirations but short on practical suggestions as to how to achieve them,²³ leading to a slightly defensive tone by some defending the form of the document – Aleksey Arbatov, director of the Centre for International Security at the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations specifying that this is “not an encyclopædia”, and Sergey Rogov, head of the USA and Canada Institute and one of the academic advisers to the Security Council, explaining that it is “not a weather forecast” either.²⁴

Radical Departures

The new Strategy is an optimistic, confident and assertive document, stating challenges clearly but avoiding the sense of doom and hostile encirclement that permeated previous versions (following the issue of the 2000 Concept, one commentator noted that “to sum up the emotional tenor of the document, in practically all vitally important areas the situation is catastrophic”).²⁵

Some of this is directly attributable to Russia’s changed circumstances over the past decade. One of the first paragraphs in the preamble describing the current situation reads “Russia has overcome the aftermath of the systemic political and socioeconomic crisis at the end of the 20th century – it has halted the decline in the standard of living and quality of life of Russian citizens”.²⁶

Russia’s internal situation was so very different at that time that it can require a real mental effort to think back to 1999-2000 and recall how very fragile and weak Russia appeared –

- economically (the 1998 default still appeared disastrous, and its long-term consequences were still far from clear);

¹⁹ Col-Gen Anatoliy Nogovitsyn, quoted by *Agentstvo voyennykh novostey* (AVN), 25 December 2008

²⁰ *Agentstvo voyennykh novostey* (AVN), 27 April 2009.

²¹ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

²² Possibly the first in this series was the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation to 2020, which has been in force since 2001. At the same time some less prominent documents in the system of strategic primers are either not being worked on, or work is taking place much less noisily than on the Security Strategy or military doctrine; for instance the Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, which also dates back to the flurry of doctrine-writing following Putin’s anointment as President in 2000, but which also describes a fast-developing environment.

²³ See for example *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* on 14 May on “general, even though beautiful words”, which will be “signed and quickly forgotten”.

²⁴ Each in separate interviews on Vesti TV, 13 May 2009.

²⁵ Vladimir Yermolin in *Izvestiya*, 11 January 2000.

²⁶ “Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation to 2020”, *Krasnaya Zvezda* 20-26 May 2009.

- in internal security (the main phase of fighting in the Second Chechen war was still ongoing, with all the consequences this entailed for security, including major terrorist threats in Moscow and across the rest of Russia);
- politically and socially, with both political and social cohesion in shreds following the Yeltsin years, and the process of rolling back areas of regional self-governance yet to begin;
- militarily – if President Putin is to be believed, effectively all Russia’s available combat capable land-based armed forces were engaged in Chechnya at this time, leaving no spare capacity for military activity whatsoever.²⁷

Though serious problems remain, all of these circumstances have seen radical improvement over the course of the decade. So it may be entirely reasonable that while in the 2000 document, descriptions of direct threats and means of ensuring security against them took up almost the entire document, the 2009 version still deals with “protecting the national interests of the state” but does so with much more self-confidence, a much broader brush, and much less emphasis on hard security threats.

Russian official commentary is keen to present the new Strategy’s primary focus on economic issues instead of hard security as a fundamentally new idea. As Medvedev put it, “security is not only our foreign policy surroundings, or issues of maintaining defence capability, it is also economic security... economic security is also a component part of the National Security Strategy.”²⁸ Rogov says that the new version “places emphasis not simply on the protection of vitally important interests but on security through development”²⁹, while contributor to the Strategy Ruslan Grinberg, Head of the Institute for International Economic and Political Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, goes further in saying that economic security had “surpassed traditional security problems as the top priority of the document.”³⁰

In fact, emphasis on the role of development of the economy is not entirely new to this form of document. At the time of drafting of the 2000 version, Russia was still reeling from economic collapse following the 1998 default. That version stated emphatically that “Russia’s national interests may be ensured only on the basis of sustainable economic development. Therefore, Russia’s national interests in economics are of key importance.”

What is new is an advance from the supposition that economic development is a means to an end, namely ensuring that hard security threats can be countered, to a much broader horizon. As the editor-in-chief of Russia in Global Affairs magazine Fedor Lukyanov points out, a key difference with the 1997 or 2000 versions is “departure from a classic narrow interpretation of the idea of national security as predominantly a military or a geopolitical notion in favour of the integrated approach... [previously] it was usual that the interests and needs of for example the military-industrial complex were incomparably more important than the needs of the citizens”.³¹

This dilution of emphasis on hard security threats may also formalise a shifting perception within Russia, following in particular suggestions of a change of approach from the USA. Until 2009, it is arguable that Russian doctrine was reflective of recent outside events which Russia had been unable to influence. The 2000 Security Concept and military doctrine were issued following NATO attacks

²⁷ Annual address to Federal Assembly, 10 May 2006.

²⁸ Transcript of beginning of 24 March 2009 Security Council meeting at http://kremlin.ru/appears/2009/03/24/1541_type63378type82634_214272.shtml

²⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 April 2009.

³⁰ *Xinhua*, 14 May 2009.

³¹ *Gazeta.ru*, 14 May 2009.

on Serbia and “unilateral occupation” of Kosovo; the 2003 “Current Tasks of the Russian Armed Forces” white paper appeared following the invasion of Iraq and with the disturbing prospect of Russia’s neighbours on the Baltic actually joining a “hostile” alliance; the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept swiftly followed uncertainty over a possible Membership Action Plan for Ukraine and Georgia, an even more alarming possibility. By contrast, the new Strategy was drafted in the afterglow of Russia taking firm action in August 2008 to resolve simultaneously a number of doctrinally-recognised risk situations (unresolved conflict on borders, presence of hostile armed forces, threat to Russian citizens abroad and more). It may therefore be not surprising that for the time being at least, threat of imminent hostile action can take a back seat to domestic development and civil affairs.

The need formally to include mention of civil society in definitions of and responses to risk situations does lead to occasional odd or clumsy formulations. The phrase “national security forces in coordination with the institutions of civil society” recurs often, sometimes in unlikely arenas for their cooperation – such as for instance medical licensing and standardisation, which is not a traditional area of interest for the security forces.

Another striking new element is the official attitude to nuclear weapons. Russia’s stated position on the circumstances under which it would consider first use of nuclear weapons caused much interest in the previous versions of the National Security Concept.³² In 2009, by contrast, although nuclear deterrence and (affordable) parity with the USA are given their due, there is instead a hope for “consistent advance toward a world free of nuclear weapons”, with bilateral arms reduction work a priority. If there is to be any further official statement on Russia’s approach to first nuclear strike, it appears it is to be saved for the military doctrine.

Key Provisions

Russia’s Place

The Strategy marks another shift in Russia’s officially-stated view of its place in the world, reflecting a continually evolving internal debate. An earlier assumption that Russia deserves by right to be a great power at the top table seems to have been replaced by an aspiration.

In 2000, the National Security Concept declared unequivocally that “Russia is one of the world’s major countries... despite the complex international situation and its own temporary difficulties, Russia continues to play an important role in global processes by virtue of its great... potential and unique strategic location”. Nine years later, this bold statement has been replaced by an aim, that of “transformation of the Russian Federation into one of the leading powers in terms of... influence on world processes”.

This is consistent with the Foreign Policy concept statement that “the Russian Federation possesses real capacity to play a well-deserved role globally.”³³ The 2009 Strategy makes it clear that this capacity is largely based on energy reserves and political use of them: “Russia’s resource potential and a pragmatic policy of using it have broadened the Russian Federation’s capabilities for strengthening its influence on the world stage.”

International Organisations

The Strategy nods to current Russian initiatives on European security, referring to the threat posed by the “inadequacy of the existing global and regional architecture, oriented only on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation”. It also continues the trend of promoting the CSTO as a credible

³² See for example Dr Steven Main, *Russia’s New National Security Concept (January 2000): The Threat Defined*, Conflict Studies Research Centre Occasional Paper, Camberley: CSRC, 2000.

³³ <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

international organisation: “the Collective Security Treaty Organisation is regarded as the main inter-state instrument called upon to resist regional threats of a military-political and military-strategic nature”. According to State Duma Foreign Affairs chairman Konstantin Kosachev, commenting on the international organisations section of the Strategy, “only by developing organisations of this sort can we guarantee security on the territories adjacent to the Russian Federation and prevent the scenario played out last August in the South Caucasus”.³⁴ CSTO Secretary-General Nikolay Bordyuzha was understandably positive about his organisation’s role described in the Strategy, saying that “acknowledgement of the CSTO role is of paramount importance”³⁵ and noting that the “legislative basis was almost complete” for setting up the CSTO’s own rapid reaction forces.³⁶

In relations with NATO, “the determining factor... remains the unacceptability for Russia of plans to move the Alliance’s military infrastructure forward to her borders and attempts to give it global functions running counter to the norms of international law”. In the language of Russian indicators and warnings, this is a much softer wording than in the 2000 version, which saw “the possible emergence of foreign military bases and major military presences in the immediate proximity of Russian borders” as a “fundamental threat in the international sphere”. Furthermore, relations are dependent on NATO’s willingness “to respect the norms of international law and to transform them in the longer term”. This is consistent with Aleksey Arbatov’s assessment of the Strategy as listing foreign threats but saying that “on all of these issues Russia is willing to negotiate and do a deal”.³⁷

Human Space

In Russian security definitions, national security traditionally consists in protecting the interests of the triad of individual, society and state – in itself an interesting formulation. The 2000 Concept mentioned the importance of protection of constitutional rights of the individual, but in the new Strategy protection of human rights is promoted to rank alongside societal and state interests.

Yet despite an unnamed drafter being quoted as saying the Strategy follows President Medvedev’s instruction on human rights and is therefore “quite democratic, even liberal”,³⁸ the list of individual rights which the NSS is intended to protect for Russian citizens is limited to “life, security, labour, housing, health and a healthy lifestyle, accessible education and cultural development”. Readers of a liberal persuasion will note that a number of human rights which would be taken for granted in the West are conspicuous by their absence – as is any mention of democracy.

In the economy, too, on a human scale there are limits to the “democratic, even liberal” approach. Free markets or private property rights also fail to get a mention.

Culture plays a prominent role in the document. The recently-declared struggle with the “falsifiers of history”, the programme to roll back views of history to the Soviet cult of victory, is referred to with “attempts to re-examine views on Russia’s history” noted as a threat. Social cohesion can be improved by fostering the “spiritual unity of the Russian Federation’s multiethnic people”, by such means as resisting orientation to “the spiritual needs of marginal strata”, which is a “primary threat to national security in the cultural sphere”. Culture is to be directed abroad, too, with “use of Russia’s cultural potential in support of multilateral international cooperation” – which the producers of Moscow’s Eurovision extravaganza will have found particularly topical.³⁹

³⁴ *RIA-Novosti*, 15 May 2009.

³⁵ *Interfax*, 14 May 2009.

³⁶ *ITAR-TASS*, 14 May 2009.

³⁷ *Vesti TV*, 13 May 2009.

³⁸ *Kommersant*, 14 May 2009.

³⁹ Russian media were naturally quick to note the happy circumstance of one Russian-speaking Eurovision Song Contest winner handing the trophy to another.

The issue of Russia seeking to protect its citizens (or at least passport-holders) overseas has lately been invested with great significance, and was particularly prominent during the war in Georgia in August 2008. It is occasionally assumed that this is a new strand in Russian policy, tailored to expediency and with an eye to leverage on neighbours. But in fact it is a long-standing theme in security policy documents. The 2000 Concept stated unambiguously the foreign policy aim to “protect the lawful rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad, through the use of political, economic and other measures”. The 2009 Strategy calls for “efforts to increase the effectiveness of the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens abroad”, which could be read as a direct reference back to the previous document and a suggestion that this protection has so far been found wanting.

Energy

Foreign interest in energy reserves to which Russia feels it has a moral, if not necessarily a legal, right, is treated as a potential threat. “Attention in international politics will in the long term be concentrated on the possession of energy resources”, with many of these resources in Russia’s neighbourhood. Furthermore, “under conditions of resource competition the resolution of emerging problems by means of employment of military force is not ruled out”. At the same time a key requirement for energy security is “multilateral cooperation in the interests of forming an energy market which meets the principles of the World Trade Organisation” – without specifying whether Russia considers these principles should also apply to its own domestic energy market.

The USA

“Values and models have become the object of global competition”, the Strategy notes. It further sets out an aim to “strive to establish a full strategic partnership with the USA based on coinciding interests”, then draws up a list of priority interests which are entirely in the field of hard security - arms control, non-proliferation and counter-terrorism, and regional conflict settlement. What is notable is the absence of coinciding interests in other fields, or an intention for partnership based on shared values.

At the same time the discussion of relations with the USA provides another example of toning down the language of threat. In contrast with regular Russian commentary noting the role of unilateral use of force by the USA as a major destabilising factor in international affairs (and, during a period of public debate on the form of the new military doctrine in 2007-2008, as a direct and immediate threat to Russia), the USA is not specifically identified by name in the Security Strategy as a security problem. Instead, in a phrase which smacks of a last-minute amendment, the Strategy refers coyly to “a range of leading foreign countries” which aim to achieve military supremacy.

Defence

Section IV.1, National Defence, accounts for only nine of the Strategy’s 112 articles, much reduced from similar sections in previous iterations. Specific provisions for how defence is to be developed are left vague and anodyne, calling for “development of the military infrastructure and also... improving the system of control of the state’s military organisation”. The primary task in strengthening national defence in the medium term is stated as “transition to a qualitatively new appearance for the Russian Federation Armed Forces”, but there is little detail on how this is to be achieved other than “by improving the organisational and staff structure and the system of territorial basing of forces [and] organising cooperation between arms of service”. Almost the only unequivocal statement in controversial areas is a commitment to completing the move to a unified procurement and logistics systems.

This lack of detail almost suggests a hedging of bets over the outcome of the current efforts to overhaul the military and move away from mass mobilisation as a key feature of Russia's defence – the only reference to manning of the armed forces calls for “refining” (*utochneniye*) of the recruitment system, which leaves a wide range of options open.⁴⁰ It appears it will be left to the military doctrine, being drafted by a team led by a former Chief of General Staff who supposedly was moved aside because of his opposition to reform, to provide the legislative cover for the reforms being pushed through by Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdukov – and to address the other controversy of precisely what kind of threat NATO and the USA pose to Russia.⁴¹

Border issues remain prominent in Russian indicators and warnings, pointing to continued efforts towards border demarcation and settlements, since “incompleteness of the international legal registration of the state border [is a] primary threat to the interests and security of the Russian Federation”. Border protection facilities are to be improved still further in a number of areas, “particularly in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, the Far East and in the Caspian”. Notably, the presence of Russian forces abroad “can promote the maintenance of strategic stability and equal strategic partnership” – as they are doing, for instance, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Reality Check

There are areas of international relations where in the Western interpretation the provisions of the Strategy would be distinctly at odds with current practice.

In the Russian narrative, complaints in the Strategy about “retreat from international agreements in the sphere of arms control and reduction” are not incompatible with Russia's own “moratorium” on observance of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) – although this is far less justifiable in the light of the unequivocal commitment to “observe active treaties and agreements in the area of arms limitation and reduction” or to “participation in conventional armed forces reduction and limitation processes and... confidence-building measures”.

Similarly, the call for “comprehensive strengthening of relationship mechanisms with the European Union, including the consistent formation of common spaces” is consistent with Russian opposition to the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative as a “partnership against Russia” – as long as the “common spaces” are viewed in Russian terms and include recognition that the EU has no business making friends with countries in “Russia's traditional sphere of influence”.

Key Omissions

The Economy

In 2000, an essential task was “taking measures to overcome the consequences of the economic crisis”. Despite preoccupations in the rest of the world, mention of economic crises in the 2009 document is limited to hypothetical scenarios. Interestingly, when asked about this point in a newspaper interview, Nikolay Patrushev painted a different picture by quoting the Strategy's note that “the consequences of the global financial-economic crises could become comparable in terms of total damage caused with the large-scale use of military force”. But this is just a single sub-paragraph in the general preamble describing the world situation, and no mention of current crisis recurs when describing threats to Russia. According to Medvedev, “the crisis cannot and must not

⁴⁰ There is a nod to old-fashioned mobilisation potential in the mention of the state programme for strategic reserves of mineral and raw material resources, although this appears out of context in another part of the document.

⁴¹ At the time of writing, some Russian media are again predicting the imminent demise of Serdyukov after defeat by the opponents of reform. But the continued replacement of senior figures by Serdyukov supporters, such as Vladimir Shamanov's appointment to commander of Airborne Troops, and Aleksandr Sukhorukov's installation at the head of Rosobronzakaz, suggest that Serdyukov is continuing to consolidate his grip.

be a reason for us to narrow our horizons for planning and turn away from the fulfilment of the priority tasks that we have set.”⁴²

What appears instead is an ambition for Russia’s “entry into the top five countries by GDP in the medium term”, set as a strategic goal. Given that almost exactly a year earlier Vladimir Putin was suggesting Russia could overtake the UK in sixth place, this would seem a statement of confidence that Russia is surviving the current economic crises better than most.⁴³

Threats which may thwart this aim include “continued maintenance of the raw materials export model of development of the national economy”. Others include disparate levels of development between regions, which the Strategy seeks to counter by means of infrastructure development in the Arctic and Far East, and evening out development by forming “advanced territorial industrial areas” in a number of Federal Districts.

But alongside recognition of these domestic problems, the threat from foreign involvement in the Russian economy is emphasised repeatedly (“seizure of the national grain market by foreign companies”, “overcoming raw materials dependence on foreign suppliers for the development of the pharmaceutical industry”). Foreign competition is almost as dangerous: “adoption of discriminatory measures and intensification of dishonest competition with regard to Russia” and “unauthorised transfer abroad of competitive domestic technologies” are listed as direct threats to national economic security.

The document concludes with a list of seven “basic descriptors of the condition of national security” – it is in keeping with the overall thrust of this new Strategy that five of these seven criteria are measures of economic performance.

China

With the exception of mentions of improving border facilities in the Far East, when reading this document you could be forgiven for forgetting that China exists at all. In this way the Strategy reinforces the supposition that when discussing security threats, Russia feels it can expound at length about more or less hypothetical threats emanating from a fractured and emollient Alliance in the West, but dare not breathe a word about potential risks from the East for fear of immediate political, diplomatic or economic pain.

Demography

Despite a state of public health in Russia which by common consensus remains dire, this too commands little attention in the document, taking just 8 articles in Section IV.3. There is mention of “massive spread of HIV infection” and “outbreak of large-scale epidemics and pandemics” – but these are described as purely hypothetical threats, leading on to a call for emphasis on preventive healthcare.

Demographic trends are one of the most significant long-term threats to Russia; opinions differ only on how rapid demographic collapse will be, and the likely range of severity of consequences. Yet despite the fact that the Strategy only covers the period to 2020, it is startling that apart from a passing exhortation for “radical improvement of the demographic situation in the long term” in Section IV.3.45, there is no discussion at all of demographic issues - unless we count the intriguing suggestion that among all their other duties, the national security forces should “create conditions for... stimulating fertility” (Section IV.3.52).

⁴² *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25 March 2009.

⁴³ *ITAR-TASS* 8 May 2008; but as an acerbic commentary in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 14 May 2009 noted, in terms of per capita GDP Russia ranks 74th in the world.

Terrorism

In 2000, it seemed entirely uncontroversial for the National Security Concept to state that “international terrorism is waging an open campaign to destabilise Russia”. Possibly with half an eye to giving countenance to the declared end of the “counter-terrorist operation” in Chechnya, the 2009 version gives much less prominence to terrorism as a threat.

Conclusion

The year 2020 is the common target date for the Russian system of strategic papers now being laid out. This date is now fast approaching – Nikolay Patrushev’s “medium term” is only four years away. If the choice of 2020 has any significance at all beyond a pithy rhetorical flourish, it may indicate the planning horizon of the current leadership, given that it sets the target date beyond another full presidential term after Medvedev’s current tenure. But in the majority of cases, the doctrine papers issued to date which are aimed at 2020 have not described a desired end state, but rather means of ensuring Russia’s survival that long.⁴⁴

The new Strategy breaks the trend. With its upbeat tone and air of aspiration, and its step away from the narrative of victimhood, it is a product of a Russian leadership that feels stronger and more confident of its ability to influence the world. And by laying down the ground rules for ensuring coherent and unified approaches to Russian strategic aims, and placing oversight firmly with the Security Council led by a close Putin associate, the Strategy marks a step towards a changed landscape of Russian strategic decision-making.

⁴⁴ In some ways the Arctic Strategy, confirmed in September 2008 and made public in March 2009 is similar in approach and outlook to the National Security Strategy. See “Osnovui gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2020 goda i dalneishshuyu perspektivu”, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/98.html>.

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- "Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020", by Keir Giles, June 2009