

The Soviet-sounding New Foreign Policy of Russia

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Key Points

- The New Russian Foreign Policy condemns the foreign policy of the West and claims that the West aims to dismantle Russia.
- For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, the Russian government has declared to turn toward Eurasia.
- The New Concept implies that Russia can use its armed forces to defend its citizens beyond its borders.
- According to the New Concept, Russia's global aspirations are achieved by ideological and military instruments.

Introduction

On March 31, President Putin announced an updated concept of Russian foreign policy.¹ The previous document has been in effect since November 30, 2016. The Russian government is adapting its foreign policy assumptions to the changed situation due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the confrontation with the West. The concept confirms Russia's global aspirations, which are to be realized by ideological and military instruments. As in the 2016 document, Russia takes a negative view of Western policies and emphasizes the increasing use of force in international relations. Russia accuses the West of hegemony and declares a steady turn towards Eurasia. New in the document is the possibility for Russia to use military means to defend its citizens beyond its borders.

Unless otherwise indicated in a footnote, the following Snapshot Paper is based on a bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs on Russia's new foreign policy concept.²

New yet old: Russia's image of the international order

The new document is based on the continuation of the pursuit of a multipolar world order. It is presumed that the non-Western world has a chance to prevail over American domination. At the same time, it is assumed to promote Russia as a culturally attractive country capable of spreading the ideology of the Russian World (*Rus. "Russkiy Mir"*).³ Unlike the 2016 document, and contrary to Russia's earlier diagnosis of the weakening West, Russia

¹ "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/, (accessed April 03, 2023).

² (Pol. Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych – PISM), Agnieszka Legucka, "W kierunku Eurazji – nowa koncepcja polityki zagranicznej Rosji", *PISM*, May 10, 2023, <https://pism.pl/publikacje/w-kierunku-eurazji-nowa-koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-rosji> (accessed May 10, 2023).

³ Benjamin R. Young, "Putin Has a Grimly Absolute Vision of the 'Russian World'", *Foreign Policy*, March 6, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/06/russia-putin-civilization/>, (accessed May 15, 2023).

now sees the West as a threat and a force to be fought. Previously, Russia has made offers of cooperation to Europe and the US, such as in the fight against terrorism. At the same time, Russia warned that a rejection by the West would raise the prospect of a Russian turn to Asia. In the new document, Russia now describes itself as a "Eurasian and Euro-Pacific" power.⁴

Russia's strengths include its membership in the UN, where it has the right of veto, its status as a nuclear power and its legacy as a USSR power. These strengths should allow Russia to improve its image as a victorious state of World War II, capable of promoting the fight against "Nazism" and anti-colonialism. This is supposed to differentiate Russia from European countries. In addition, Russia considers itself as one of the centers of international balance, exactly as it was understood in Soviet times.

The document points to revolutionary changes in the international environment. It mentions the crisis of globalization, as well as the increasing use of force in international relations, including the increase in armed conflicts. Russia devotes great attention to the importance of nuclear armaments and laments the disintegration of the arms control system and accuses Western countries of dismantling it. In addition, it introduces the possibility of defending Russian citizens beyond the country (a principle adapted from Russia's 2010 military doctrine).⁵

Revised objectives of Russia's foreign policy

Russia's main objectives remain its security, sovereignty in all aspects and territorial integrity. The secondary objective is to create favorable external conditions for strengthening Russia's position as an influential and independent center of the modern world. Russia also aims to counter Russophobia and to defend its own version of history. This Russian history is created through historical revisionism, which is also very characteristic for the Russian President himself and often accompanies his speeches.⁶ Vladimir Putin's ahistoricism helps the Russian regime to justify its decisions, including aggression against Ukraine. In addition, the presumption is to protect Russian-speaking citizens or people who identify with Russia around the world. Russia is notorious for using the narrative of protecting its own citizens to justify its actions (including military ones) as it is conveniently interpreted for the Russian cause (e.g., the narrative used during the invasion on Crimea in 2014).⁷ According to Russia, the ideological factor plays an important role in the clash of world civilizations. Russia wants to promote conservative values and thus oppose the dominance of the US and its allies. In terms of building economic sovereignty, Russia wants to become independent from the influence of Western countries in the world economy (including sanctions) and proposes a fairer decision-making process in the UN. Russia would like to become independent of revenues from the sale of energy resources as the basis of the federal budget.⁸

Russian definition of partners and rivals

Russia focuses its attention on Eurasia, highlighting two countries – China and India – which it describes as friendly, sovereign, global power centers. China is a priority country for Russia, especially in terms of mutual assistance and coordination in the international arena. Russia says it will seek for further strengthen its

⁴ Agnieszka Legucka, "W kierunku Eurazji - nowa koncepcja polityki zagranicznej Rosji", PISM, May 10, 2023, <https://pism.pl/publikacje/w-kierunku-eurazji-nowa-koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-rosji> (accessed May 10, 2023).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Yasmeen Serhan, "Who is Vladimir Putin's Revisionist History For?", *The Atlantic*, February 27, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/02/putin-russia-ukraine-revisionist-history/622936/>, (accessed May 31, 2023).

⁷ Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine", *RAND Corporation*, 2017, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1498.html, (accessed May 12, 2023).

⁸ Ibid 4.

comprehensive partnership with China. In the case of India, Russia wants to continue to build a strategic partnership to counter its unfriendly alliances. Russia wants to engage in the following organizations within the framework of international cooperation: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)⁹ and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).¹⁰ Also, Russia views the potential for building a coalition of partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America.¹¹

In the new concept, the notion of "near abroad" used in the 1990s returns. "Near abroad" for Russia are the CIS countries and other countries that are associated with Russia, Russian culture and centuries-old Russian tradition. This expanded the previous understanding of this group of countries. Until now, the term "near abroad" referred to the countries of the former USSR. Russia sees its "near abroad" as important for its security, stability, and socio-economic development. At the same time, Russia sees these countries not as partners, but as a zone of Russian influence. According to the concept, "near abroad" is important for strengthening Russia's position as one of the modern centers of the world. Of these countries, it singles out only Belarus, with which Russia wants to continue to interact strategically.¹²

Although Russia says it does not consider the West an enemy, it accuses Western countries of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and unleashing a new type of hybrid war. Russia makes it clear that it blames the United States and European countries for the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Russia also strongly criticizes Western countries for applying sanctions, while stressing that they will not be effective and that European countries must return to dialogue with Russia.¹³

Conclusions

Russia's new foreign policy concept is a manifestation of frustrations stemming from the ineffectiveness of Russian diplomacy toward the West. For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, the Russian government has declared a turn toward Eurasia. Russia is preparing for a permanent, systemic confrontation with the US and the European countries. What emerges from the concept is a picture of a world hostile to Russia, in which Russia must defend its interests in a determined and more assertive manner than before. According to the concept, Russia's deepening strategic partnership with China and India will force Europe to lift sanctions on Russia. Russian ambitions to play a global role seem unlikely, given the ongoing war with Ukraine. Russia's military, economic and social potential is weakening. Russia is also unlikely to succeed in building a Russia-China-India strategic triangle due to existing Sino-Indian disputes.¹⁴

The new concept is an expression of the militarization of Russian foreign policy. Russia attaches great importance to the use of force in international relations (conventional and nuclear). Despite many peaceful

⁹ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. Source – official website of CIS: Содружестве Независимых Государств, <https://cis.minsk.by/about-cis>, (accessed May 31, 2023).

¹⁰ William Alberque, Paul Fraioli, "Russia's new foreign-policy concept: the airing of grievances and a new vision of world order", *IJSS*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.ijss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/04/russia-new-foreign-policy-concept-the-airing-of-grievances-and-a-new-vision-of-world-order/>, (accessed May 10, 2023).

¹¹ Agnieszka Legucka, "W kierunku Eurazji - nowa koncepcja polityki zagranicznej Rosji", *PISM*, May 10, 2023, <https://pism.pl/publikacje/w-kierunku-eurazji-nowa-koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-rosji> (accessed May 10, 2023).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Scott Neuman, Alyson Hurt, "The ripple effects of Russia's war in Ukraine continue to change the world", *NPR*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/22/1157106172/ukraine-russia-war-refugees-food-prices>, (accessed May 20, 2023).

¹⁴ William Alberque, Paul Fraioli, "Russia's new foreign-policy concept: the airing of grievances and a new vision of world order", *IJSS*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.ijss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/04/russia-new-foreign-policy-concept-the-airing-of-grievances-and-a-new-vision-of-world-order/>, (accessed May 10, 2023).

declarations of intent, Russia will continue to be a threat and a destabilizing factor to its neighbors and to the international order. Moreover, Russia intends to continue to use the strategy of protecting Russian-speaking citizens to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.¹⁵

The updated concept sends a signal to the countries of the Global South, where Russia is looking for partners against the West. Russia has a chance to gain from such an anti-Western narrative and build its own coalition to represent its interests at the UN, for example. By contrast, Russia still lacks the potential to take a leading role in the Global South. Nevertheless, prioritization of strengthening alliances and partnerships with countries in CENTCOM AOR is paramount. In addition, Russia's strategic partnership with China and India requires strengthening regional security cooperation with key US partners in CENTCOM AOR and in the Indo-Pacific region. It is crucial to maintain a comprehensive understanding of Russia's activities, intentions, and capabilities through enhanced intelligence collection, analysis, and strategic assessments. Russia is constantly inventing new ways to circumvent sanctions, and many political and financial mechanisms favor Russia's survival. Just because Russia is tired of the war in Ukraine does not mean that its significance in CENTCOM AOR and the adjacent regions can be disregarded.

Recommendations for the US CENTCOM

- 1) Strengthening capabilities to combat hybrid warfare in response to Russia's activity in the AOR.
- 2) Actively promote the strengthening of regional security cooperation with key partners in the AOR and in Indo-Pacific region.
- 3) Work closely with relevant agencies and partner nations to counter Russian disinformation and influencing campaigns, promote media literacy, and foster alternative narratives to challenge false or misleading information propagated by Russia.
- 4) Maintain a comprehensive understanding of Russia's activities, intentions, and capabilities in AOR by enhanced intelligence collection, analysis, and strategic assessments to support its own decision-making processes, policy formulation, and resource allocation to effectively counter potential threats posed by Russia.

¹⁵ Ibid.