

The Russian National Security Concept: A Liberal-Statist Synthesis

Celeste A. Wallander
July 1998
PONARS Policy Memo 30
Harvard University

In the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Soviet ideas and interests had been thoroughly discredited, and Russia's domestic political, economic, and social system had only begun its fundamental and painful transformation. As a result, the Westernizing policy of a narrow group of liberal elites was quickly and early challenged by national patriots and *derzhavniki* (a term derived from *derzhava*, which literally translates as "power" but evokes "great power") who advocated an assertive policy toward Russia's "near abroad" (the newly independent states of the Soviet Union) and did not shy from confrontation with the West. While attention focused on these colorful and extreme articulations of a Russian great power perspective, a more moderate version developed among the political elites who actually make Russian policy. By 1997, a liberal-statist synthesis emerged based upon several clear premises: Russia as a re-conceived great power, a geostrategic understanding of the international system, and an economically self-interested, integrationist, and instrumental understanding of how Russia can profit from a particular international order. This synthesis, rather than the extremist views easily found in the Russian press, should be understood as the basis for Russian national security policy.

Russian Elite Views on Security

Since 1991, Russia's political elite have coalesced into four distinct groups--liberals, statist, "derzhavniki" and national patriots--which can be demarcated by their views of the international system and Russian security interests. Liberals adopted the Westernizing view of former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, but recently have brought a more economic and self-interested tone to their views on international affairs. This new tone reflects the growing interest in foreign affairs on the part of Russia's financial elite and the increased involvement of leading government representatives and reformists in foreign relations. Statists espouse a generally civic and inclusive definition of Russia identity, and advocate cooperation with but not subordination to the west in international affairs. Though regretting the loss of the Union, statist regard the breakup as a reality that can not and should not be undone by force. They see Russia as a real, if diminished, great power whose national interests are determined by its history and location as the world's only Eurasian power.

Similar in their focus on Russia's great power status and Eurasian identity, Russia's *derzhavniki* are distinct from statist in more clearly advocating a reconstituted Union by vigorous and unapologetic use of all Russia's means--including military. They hold a more strongly ethnic definition of Russian identity and nationalism and more determined approach toward Russia's

claims on Russian territories of Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan. Russian national patriots are exclusivist and xenophobic, and hold the most ethnically based conceptions of Russian citizenship and nationality. They demand a role in protecting the rights and privileges of ethnic Russians throughout the former Soviet Union. Their view of international relations is zero-sum and conspiratorial, and claims that the West--allied with the Yeltsin government--brought down the Soviet Union and is now seeking to finish off Russia.

Synthesis of Elite Views: the National Security Concept

On 17 December 1997, Yeltsin signed a presidential decree establishing the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation. In defining the state of the international system, Russian national interests, threats to Russia, and the means for securing Russian interests and coping with threats, the National Security Concept serves not only as an official guide to foreign policy, but establishes the basis for Russian military doctrine and practical matters such as the shape of its military and the parameters of military reform. The appearance of the official Concept allows for an evaluation of how elite views on security have affected the formulation of official government policy, which will dictate the form of Russian involvement in global and regional security issues for some time.

The document clearly articulates the government's view of the international system in which Russia operates: "in the present time the situation in the international arena is characterized first of all by the fundamental tendency toward the formation of a multipolar world," reflecting the consensus elite view. From there, however, the Concept takes a distinctly liberal turn: the operative threats to Russia lie not in the international system, but in Russia's internal conditions. Since these internal threats arise from economic decline, instability, and societal problems such as poor health, unemployment, and social tensions, the best way to solve them is through economic reform. Though economic reform is primarily an internal matter, it can be supported by a non-threatening international environment and by integration into international economic institutions.

This Kozyrev-like liberalism is tempered, however, by clearly statist insistence that Russia does not come to the international community as a subordinate member, with hat in hand, but rather as a key player whose active participation is necessary for solving problems in political, economic, and military spheres. The Concept recognizes that there have been difficulties in creating this comprehensive cooperative basis for accepting Russian participation and involvement--specifically, with NATO enlargement. Nevertheless, it asserts that effective multilateral means for cooperation and coordination of international affairs will be achieved only with Russian involvement in organizations such as the UN and OSCE. It bases this confidence on Russia's status as the only truly Eurasian power, having interests and influence in Europe, the Near East, Central and South Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region.

None of this comes as surprise, given the gradual emergence of the statist view and its influence in the Russian government under Foreign Minister Primakov. What is surprising is how directly and forcefully the Concept places the internal threat to Russian security ahead of international threats, and its focus on the centrality of societal and state interests in reform, stability, and

development. The document thus clearly shows a marrying of liberal and statist views, with liberal influence in defining national security in terms of domestic well-being and reform, and statist influence in articulating the kind of assertive and pro-active Russian foreign involvement which will shape and best use opportunities in the international system to support Russia's primarily internal security tasks.

This is by no means to say that more traditional national security interests are absent from the Concept.: participation as a Great Power and as one center in a multipolar world, in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism, in developing good relations with the CIS states, in defense of the territory of the state, and in maintaining security from military aggression on the part of other states. However, these are listed after the internal threats and tasks, and with a caution that the proper balance of military and defense forces to cope with external security must themselves be balanced with the appropriate economic means to deal with all the threats and challenges Russia faces. That is, recognition of real foreign, defense, and military problems will not overwhelm the priority on the economic prerequisites for national security and economic reform.

The threats to Russian interests enumerated by the Concept also reveal the liberal-statist synthesis. The threat of deliberate aggression is deemed not "realistic," but escalation from local or regional conflicts is deemed possible, as are threats arising from proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Primary attention is devoted to discussion of Russia's internal threats, including socio-economic collapse and separatist movements. The main threat identified in the international sphere is "through the attempt of other states to oppose the strengthening of Russia as one of the centers forming a multipolar world." The section on threats concludes that 1) the most important threats are not military in nature; 2) they are primarily internal and political, economic, and social in character; and 3) therefore the most important means for achieving Russian security is the solution of its internal problems.

Given this analysis, it is not surprising the Concept concludes that the means for achieving Russian interests and security are through partnership with other countries given recognition of Russia as a great power, and as the only truly Eurasian power. The Concept allows that assuring Russia's security requires military capability for threats that might appear in the 21st century, but that this must be based upon "rational expenditures for national defense." The Concept explicitly states that Russia does not need parity for military defense, although Russia does need nuclear weapons for deterrence against aggression, and flexible forces to protect the country against regional and local conflicts which might threaten Russian borders and possibly escalate to larger war. It states that Russia reserves the right to use military force, including nuclear weapons, but also that the use of military force becomes the means for national security only after non-military measures fail or are not effective.

Conclusion

Whether the National Security Concept will prove an accurate guide to actual Russian policy remains to be seen, of course. The Russian government (and the president himself) has on many occasions ignored presidential decrees. However, the Concept does establish the basic line of

Russian foreign and security policy as a mix of statist and liberal ideas and interests. For all the attention to more nationalist, reactionary, and threatening rhetoric on the Russian political scene since 1992, the *derzhavnik* and national patriotic views of international security and Russian interests do not appear in this official document. These views--and the political figures who have advanced them in Russian political debate--probably enhanced the influence of statist in a moderate compromise; therefore one cannot dismiss their role in Russian policy. However, to understand Russian security concepts as they actually affect policy, these two approaches are less important than those of the liberals and statist.

Given the replacement of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin with liberal Sergei Kiriyenko, the liberal-statist synthesis on Russian national security is becoming more firmly established and likely to persist into the next century. Whether the synthesis itself is stable depends primarily on domestic Russian economics and politics. In particular, it depends on reform elements in the Russian government, and the political influence of financial and business interests that have a stake in international integration. It also depends on the direction of those economic interests themselves: will they remain primarily internationalist and reformist, or develop a stronger state capitalist and isolationist strain? If integration-oriented economic interests lose influence in the government it would undermine the liberal leanings of Russia's statist security policy, opening the way for a statist-*derzhavnik* synthesis.

The international environment and US foreign policy affect the stability of the synthesis by creating or thwarting opportunities for liberal-statist policies to be pursued at acceptable cost and with promising reward. NATO expansion and zero-sum exploitation of Caspian oil raise costs; joint Caspian development and engaging Russia in European security create rewards. While the United States cannot determine the internal factors which form Russian security policy, its policies and actions do influence the stability of the promising synthesis.

Kontseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, ukazom Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 17 dekabrya 1997 g., no. 1300, 37pp (internal Russian government document). It was also published in Rossiyskaya gazeta, 26 December 1997, pp. 4-5. The research for this analysis was supported by the Harvard Academy Scholars Program for its conference "Conflict or Convergence: Global Perspectives on War, Peace, and International Order."