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# Security Review

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**On the New National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation**

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## Introduction

On June 2, 2021, the new [National Security Strategy](#) of the Russian Federation was approved. It is a guiding document for Russia's security policy planning process; however, as a public document, it also has a significant political implication as it is saturated with political messages reflecting Russia's position on various important issues.

Russia's new National Security Strategy is the fifth such document. The first document, which was approved as early as in 1997 by then President of Russia, B. Yeltsin, was called the Concept of National Security. At the beginning of 2000, the decree on the amendments to this document was signed by V. Putin who, at the time, was only the acting president of the Russian Federation.

Afterwards, at a meeting of the Russian State Council in September 2008, then President, D. Medvedev, [declared the need to develop a new strategy](#). It should be noted that this session was officially dedicated to the "conflict in South Ossetia."

As a result, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, which was supposed to be active up until 2020, was approved in May 2009; however, this strategy did not last as far as 2020 - in late 2015, it was replaced by a new national security strategy developed by Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the armed aggression in eastern Ukraine. These events created a whole new reality which also strained relations between Russia and the West, eventually reflected in the strict tone towards the West in the 2015 National Security Strategy.

As for the National Security Strategy, it was developed in accordance with the requirements of the [Federal Law on Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation](#) adopted in 2014. According to this law, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation must be adjusted every six years. A new National Security Strategy was developed and approved on July 2, 2021, precisely in line with the requirement of this six-year period of the law.

First of all, it can be said that no significant changes have been made in the new National Security Strategy. As many commentators point out, it largely echoes the theses outlined in its predecessor, the 2015 National Security Strategy. Naturally, these theses describe the reality in a way that suits Russia's interests.

At the same time, it should be noted that Georgia is not mentioned in Russia's new National Security Strategy but its occupied territories - Abkhazia and South Ossetia - are mentioned as

independent states. Namely, the document indicates that deepening relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia is one of the main priorities of the Russian Federation (p. 40).

The purpose of this article is not to review the content and key provisions of Russia's new National Security Strategy. Our goal is to appropriate the content of the strategy to the foreign activities of the Russian Federation, its visions and its objectives at the current stage. At the same time, we will try to focus on the aspects of the strategy that are particularly important to Georgia's security environment.

### **Russia's Perception of International Order**

Under the new strategy, Russia's perception of international order remains unchanged. Russia has long believed that the unipolar world order established after the end of the Cold War is over and the world is becoming multipolar. This view was reflected both in the 2015 strategy as well as its predecessors. The only difference in this case is that the 2015 strategy used the term "polycentric world" while in the previous documents the term "multipolar world" was used to express the same concept. However, in essence these terms have an identical meaning.

Although none of these terms is mentioned in Russia's new National Security Strategy, it does in many occasions echo the view of a multipolar world order established in Russia. For example, the strategy states that the modern world is being transformed, the number of new political and economic centers is growing and the strengthening of the positions of new global and regional leaders precipitates a change in the world order, leading to the formation of a new architecture, new rules and new principles of the world order (p. 3).

Obviously, Russia first and foremost considers itself as a member of the new global leaders' cluster. Consequently, gaining an exclusive influence over the post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, and being recognized as a global leader by other players remains its priority. From the content of Russia's new National Security Strategy, we can clearly infer that Moscow still considers the West as its primary opponent in this regard and sharply opposes it. Moreover, it is clear from this document that Russia is not going to diminish its destructive activity, neither in the international arena nor in the post-Soviet space.

## **Approach to the West**

Most commentators agree that the new National Security Strategy is even harsher vis-à-vis the West than was its predecessor document. This is already a noteworthy circumstance because, as we have already mentioned, the document drafted in 2015 had a rather harsh tone towards the West.

According to the new National Security Strategy, the West is seen as Russia's main adversary. Moreover, most of the threats facing Russia, directly or obliquely, are related precisely to the West.

Sanctions against Russia are seen as a lever for pressure against Russia. In particular, the document states that political and economic pressure is exerted on Russia and its partners in order to gain advantage over them (p. 5). The long-established approach to NATO is reiterated; namely, the buildup of NATO military infrastructure near the Russian border is viewed as one of the threats facing Russia (p. 12).

More importantly, unlike the previous 2015 document, the new strategy no longer has a record of any kind of cooperation with the EU and the US. In particular, according to the 2015 strategy, Russia supported mutually beneficial cooperation with European countries and the European Union. It also expressed the interest to build a full-fledged partnership with the United States based on mutual interests.

The disappearance of such statements from the new National Security Strategy is an attempt to clearly demonstrate to the West the policy of so-called Red Lines. Namely, Russia wants to show the West that, despite the extremely tense situation between the parties, it is not even considering making any concessions.

In the context of Russia-West relations, another change is noticeable as compared to the 2015 strategy. In the new strategy, transnational corporations are mentioned in a negative context in a number of places. For example, they are accused of restricting the role of the state (p. 3), of establishing a monopoly on the internet (p. 19) and of attacking spiritual and moral as well as cultural and historical values (p. 37).

From the general context of the strategy, it is clear that Moscow considers transnational corporations as one of the main weapons of the West directed against Russia. In this regard, it

is noteworthy that in recent years a very active propaganda has begun in Russia against international social networks; in particular, Facebook and Twitter.

We should also highlight the development of a secure information space and the protection of Russian society from destructive information-psychological influences which are named among the priorities in the new strategy (p. 8). The section on information security states that the use of information and communication technologies to interfere in the internal affairs of countries, undermine their sovereignty and violate their territorial integrity is becoming more frequent (p. 19).

All of the aforementioned suggests that Russian authorities are seriously considering at least restricting access to certain international social networks for the Russian population. At the same time, it indirectly indicates that Putin's regime sees certain risks of instability in the country and considers the total management of public opinion to be an important factor in negating these risks.

### **Russia as the Alternative to the West**

The West and liberal values have long been the target of Russian disinformation and propaganda. Specifically, in this case, Russia has the following goals:

- 1) Demonstrate that the West and liberal values are on the path of decadence;
- 2) Show that the West is fighting against so-called traditional values;
- 3) Present itself as the only defender of traditional values.

Russia's activities in this regard are very dangerous because they:

- Form and strengthen attitudes which are antagonistic to the West;
- Promote radicalization of certain groups of the society;
- Create the high risks of community fragmentation and confrontation;
- Maximize the effectiveness of Russia's soft power.

The effectiveness of Russia's work in this regard is well illustrated by the tragic events which unfolded in Georgia in early July of the current year. In particular, these developments have shown how effectively Russia has managed to discredit the West in the eyes of radical groups in Georgian society through portraying it as a defender of the interests of the LGBTQ community. It is not an accident that radical groups have twice, on July 5 and 6, removed the EU flag from the Georgian Parliament, openly demonstrating their attitude towards the West.

The 2015 National Security Strategy, that paid special attention to spiritual and moral values, illustrates well the importance of this topic for Russia. Obviously, this approach would have been reflected in Russia's action plans in various directions, including Georgia.

Over time, Russia seems to have become even more convinced that focusing on this topic is particularly beneficial for it. This is corroborated by Russia's new National Security Strategy which places even more emphasis on spiritual and moral values. In addition to the fact that this topic is frequently mentioned, a separate subsection has been devoted to it in the new strategy (p. 35). Another major difference is that this subsection already directly accuses the United States and its allies of actively fighting against spiritual and moral values (p. 36).

## **Conclusion**

Russia's new National Security Strategy underpins the idea that Russia will continue to pursue a tough policy to increase its influence in the international arena. In this struggle, it considers the West an opponent. Consequently, both in the international arena and, especially, in Russia's immediate neighborhood, we should expect a further intensification of anti-Western activities by Russia, especially in countries where the results of such activities are already visible.

Recent developments in Georgia confirm that Russia's portrayal of itself as a defender of traditional values and anti-Western propaganda is gradually becoming popular with certain groups in Georgian society. Consequently, the risks of confrontation between different groups of society are increasing which can escalate into destabilization processes.

If such processes are initiated, the risk of damaging Georgia's image and presenting it as a failed state to the international community is very high. Such developments serve Russian interests as they provide more opportunities to weaken Western support to Georgia and, at the same time, discredit the West in Georgian society.