



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE  
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: [contact@chathamhouse.org](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org)  
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org)

Charity Registration Number: 208223

Russia and Eurasia REP 2013/03

# The New Russian Foreign Policy Concept: Evolving Continuity

Andrew Monaghan

Chatham House

April 2013

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/ speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions, but the ultimate responsibility for accuracy lies with this document's author(s). The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2013, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a new Foreign Policy Concept.<sup>1</sup> Preparation of the document was set in motion by Vladimir Putin's order in May 2012, while still prime minister, that the ministry submit a draft by December. Some media sources suggest that a draft was submitted in early November, but that Putin delayed it to make it more robust.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, but the concept is scarcely more robust than either the 2008 iteration or the May 2012 presidential order.<sup>3</sup> It may also be that the draft was simply circulated to different bodies for comment and improvement, so undergoing a short technical delay before being resubmitted to the Kremlin for final approval in early February. In any event Putin ratified the document on 12 February before presenting it to the Russian Security Council prior to publication.

The new Foreign Policy Concept has received little substantial attention in the West, where it has been dismissed as either simply a bureaucratic formulation, published and filed unread by the Russian leadership, or as just a reiteration of previous documents. The concept – like many of its Western equivalents – contains generic 'strategic' and empty bureaucratic language. Yet it also offers important insight into how Russia views an international environment that has changed considerably since 2008, where it fits in it and how it will seek to act. As Putin noted when he presented it, the concept takes into account the global financial and economic crisis and the instability in the Middle East and North Africa since 2011.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, understanding the new Foreign Policy Concept may help to overcome misunderstanding of Russian activity. Some observers suggest that Russian foreign policy is characterized by increasing isolationist tendencies. A careful reading of the document suggests the contrary and that Russia will be more active in international affairs.

---

1 'Konseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii' [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], 12 February 2013. An English language version of the text is available on the Foreign Ministry's website at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/0f474e63a426b7c344257b2e003c945f!OpenDocument>.

2 See, for instance, 'Rossiya ishet slova pozhestche' ['Russia seeks tougher words'], *Kommersant*, 24 January 2013. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2111063>.

3 An English-language version of the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept is available on the Kremlin website at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>. For Putin's Presidential Executive Order on Foreign Policy of 7 May 2012, see <http://news.kremlin.ru/acts/15256>.

4 See announcement on Kremlin website. 'Soveshaniye s chlenami Soveta Besopasnosti', [Meeting with members of the Security Council], 15 February 2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/17520>.

## RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Foreign Policy Concept fits into the wider framework of Russia's strategic thinking. It explicitly acknowledges the National Security Strategy to 2020 and the Military Doctrine.<sup>5</sup> Although it suggests that the intensification of new tendencies in international affairs required a 'rethink' of priorities, the concept is also a natural update of Russia's views given domestic and international developments since 2008, and it fits into strategic planning guidelines that envisage 'medium-term' updates approximately every five years.

It is worth also noting the submission of a new Defence Strategy to Putin by the new defence leadership team, Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov, on 29 January.<sup>6</sup> This document, which Shoigu and Gerasimov assert is a 'comprehensive analysis' of the challenges Russia faces, incorporates the national defence programmes and seeks to address the hitherto problematic implementation of the state armaments programme.

'Rethink' does not necessarily mean 'change substantially', of course, and there is a strong sense of continuity in the new Foreign Policy Concept. As Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has stated, it preserves the key principles set out in the 2008 version and even the basic approaches of the version of the Foreign Policy Concept that Putin signed in 2000.<sup>7</sup> As before, the concept is structured in five main sections ('general provisions', 'the modern world and Russian foreign policy', 'Russia's priorities in resolving global problems', 'regional priorities', and 'formulation and implementation of Russian foreign policy'). And large parts of the structure and wording are very similar, even identical, to previous versions, not least the focus on the central role of the United Nations in international affairs, and the overall apparent hierarchy of regional prioritization in which the post-Soviet space remains the top priority.

As in previous versions, there are interesting apparent anomalies. If the document notes an international power shift from West to East and to the Asia-Pacific region, and that the development of friendly relations with China and India are 'a most important direction' of foreign policy, there is precious

---

<sup>5</sup> The texts of both of these documents can be found on the website of the Russian Foreign Ministry. The National Security Strategy, published on 12 May 2009, at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/8abb3c17eb3d2626c32575b500320ae4!OpenDocument>. The Military Doctrine, published on 5 February 2010, at <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/2a959a74cd7ed01f432569fb004872a3!OpenDocument>.

<sup>6</sup> 'Prezidentu predstavlen Plan oboroni Rossiiskoi Federatsii' [Defence Plan of the Russian Federation presented to the President], 29 January 2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/17385>.

little further detail on how this important aspect is to be developed. This echoes other Russian strategic documents in which detailed discussion of China is absent. Such documentary silence is all the more noticeable given the burgeoning economic relationship and the regular reciprocal high-level visits between the two countries.

## REGIONAL PRIORITIES

But in a number of ways, some more evident, some more nuanced, the new Foreign Policy Concept differs from its predecessors. First, within the familiar hierarchy, some important nuances may be found across the world, with new insertions – Antarctica is a new point of interest noted, for example, though without embellishment, while the specific emphasis on Ukraine is also noteworthy – and small but interesting alterations made.

In the European section of the concept, for instance, the United Kingdom appears in a more positive light than before. Russia would like to see the potential of relations with the United Kingdom in the same positive, cooperative vein as relations with Germany, France and Italy, according to the concept. This may appear to be only a slight change, yet it signifies a potentially important development. Despite strong cultural, social and economic links, especially in the energy sector, Russia's relationship with the United Kingdom has been so heavily burdened by political difficulties over the last seven years that it is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that state-to-state relations had ground almost to a halt. This was in large measure the result of the murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006, which stopped aspects of practical cooperation and exacerbated a series of other underlying tensions between the two countries. The insertion of this point into the concept reflects the attempts being made by both sides to improve this situation, and the document was published shortly before a 2+2 format meeting was held between the foreign and defence ministers of Russia and the United Kingdom. The issue of Litvinenko's death remains prominent, continuing to block cooperation, and terms such as 'reset' are avoided. Nevertheless, Russian and British officials appear cautiously optimistic about improving the relationship.

Gone from the Foreign Policy Concept is the sense that Russia deems it important to ensure the progressive development of interaction with NATO.

---

7 Lavrov, S. 'Vneshnepoliticheskaya filosofiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii' [The Foreign Policy Philosophy of the Russian Federation], *Mezhdunarodaya Zhizn'*, No. 3, 2013. [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/newslines/01963BDE34F0EFDF44257B3C00435C17](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newslines/01963BDE34F0EFDF44257B3C00435C17).

The alliance warrants a paragraph but the Russian view of the Euro-Atlantic community appears less positive even than in 2008 when Russia launched a series of proposals for the reform of the European security architecture. It argued at the time that Europe was not well served by one that aggravated old issues and was unable to address emerging problems. As a result, according to Russia, European security was divided, and a new summit and legally binding security treaty were necessary to remedy this situation. This illustrated a fundamental divergence in understandings of European security, since many in the Euro-Atlantic community instead saw Europe to be whole, free and at peace. Of late, these proposals have faded from attention in the West. But, as made clear in the concept, their spirit remains an important element of Russian foreign policy thinking; indeed Moscow appears to be actively pursuing them in various formats of track II diplomacy.

Regional groupings also feature prominently in the new concept, but two stand out. First, it gives greater emphasis to the BRICS than previous versions, and it is worth noting here that Russia has prepared and published a separate concept of its participation in the BRICS, which seeks to emphasize the importance of the grouping and turn it into a more comprehensive and cooperative institution.<sup>8</sup> The Eurasian Economic Union, which has gained emphasis since Putin advanced the idea in October 2011, also now features in the concept as a priority for Russian foreign policy, not just to develop mutual economic relations, but also to act as a 'model association'. Built on 'universal integrative principles', the union is intended by Russia to become a link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCEPTUAL ASSUMPTIONS

There is further evidence of the 'rethink' of Russia's evolving views and differences with previous versions in the conceptual assumptions. The international environment is still seen to be 'decentralizing' as Western influence declines, and to be in transition to a 'polycentric world' that is both 'turbulent' and increasingly competitive. But while the 2008 concept noted the steady overcoming of the legacy of the Cold War and 'end of the ideological era', the 2013 version makes no mention at all of the Cold War. Instead it places greater emphasis on the world's 'civilizational diversity', competition

---

<sup>8</sup> 'Concept of the Participation of the Russian Federation in BRICS', <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/media/events/eng/files/41d452b13d9c2624d228.pdf>. This document appears to have been approved by Putin on 9 February and subsequently published in March in the run up to the BRICS summit in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Policy Concept, 2013.

over values and the negative impact of a 're-ideologization' of international affairs.

The introduction of and emphasis on the importance of the tools of 'soft power', defined as the full range of instruments, including civil society, information and communications, and humanitarian tools as alternatives to classical diplomacy, are another new aspect in the Foreign Policy Concept. Though in the Western lexicon for some time already, only recently has the term 'soft power' emerged in Russian foreign policy thinking. Thus, in the concept Moscow urges greater efforts by Russian media and business to consolidate and promulgate the country's positions in global affairs, and pledges support for such activities. Notably, the document also advocates support for civil society to advance Russian interests. This may surprise those in the West who question the existence of a developed civil society in Russia, let alone one that would support the state's interests. But this may be interpreted as Moscow promoting a version of the sort of body that is familiar, albeit contentious, to those who follow British politics: the quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization, or quango, a semi-public body with both financial support from and senior appointments made by the government.

Some in the West will argue that Russian decision-makers face an overwhelming series of problems at home and abroad and that the Foreign Policy Concept, although acknowledging some of these, such as the continuing 'crisis' in Afghanistan, does not provide a framework for dealing with this polylemma. Others will question the feasibility of some of Russia's aims, not least the attempts to build up its role in the BRICS and develop the Eurasian Economic Union into a sustainable entity.

Still others will note the prospects for continued tensions in relations with the West, reflecting not just on the more prominent disagreements about international affairs, for instance over Syria, but on the dissonance between Western and Russian understandings of concepts that use the same words but are defined differently, and the resultant friction in relations. Russia's emphasis on 'universal democratic values', for instance, will draw questions from those who criticize its human rights record and Putin's campaign against foreign funding of Russian NGOs.

Similarly, the understanding of phrases such as 'soft power' and the 'indivisibility of security' – both prominent in the concept – differ in the West and in Russia. 'Soft power', a useful but somewhat contentious term in the West, may be broadly understood to mean the use of a range of tools, including non-governmental ones, to co-opt – rather than coerce – others to

achieve desired goals. The Russian understanding of the term is more in the context of an information campaign: the Foreign Policy Concept notes the 'illegal' use of soft power and human rights concepts to put pressure on sovereign states, intervene in their internal affairs and destabilize them by manipulating public opinion. Russia's 'soft power' is understood as a means of promoting Russian culture and language and countering 'soft' attacks on the country. It may be better defined, therefore, as 'soft strength' to differentiate it from Western understandings.

In the West, the 'indivisibility of security' is understood as the comprehensive understanding of security in its three dimensions (economic, political-military and human), recognizing that regional security is embedded in wider global environment and that security within states is as important as security among states. For Russia, however, the 'indivisibility of security' is the connection between political and legally binding security agreements. This gap will continue to lie at the heart of disagreements about Euro-Atlantic security.

## CONCLUSION

To be sure, there are flaws in Russia's new Foreign Policy Concept – as there are in all such documents, marked as they are by generic bureaucratic language, gaps and silences. But it serves as both a marker of the country's evolving understanding of international affairs and a timely reminder of its intention to establish itself as an international centre and model. It is also a reminder that if there are apparent commonalities in how Russia and the West see the world and various challenges in international affairs, these points are not mutually defined – i.e. the nature of the problems, their causes and approaches to resolving them are differently understood, preventing true cooperative partnership between the two sides. It is also, therefore, another reminder that the West and Russia draw different lessons from the same bodies of evidence.

While Russian foreign policy is still guided by a blend of confidence and insecurity, this blend is evolving, creating another gap between the West and Russia. In the West, there is a broad orthodoxy that Russia is in decline, emphasizing the insecurity in the mix: unreformed economically and politically stagnant, on the verge of major domestic upheaval while dependent on high oil prices, Russia faces a range of challenges in a fast-moving and evolving international environment.

But Russia's view is different: if its Foreign Policy Concept acknowledges challenges, it also emphasizes opportunities and the need for the country to

be active. As the concept notes, Russia 'will work to anticipate and lead events'. Indeed, this is seen to be necessary as a means of addressing the challenges. Thus the West should not be surprised to see Russia being more prominent in international affairs, advocating its interests, using both more traditional 'hard power' instruments (such as deploying the Russian navy to protect sea lanes that it considers to be important), and developing its international presence by establishing new embassies and consulates and using more 'soft strength' to protect and assert its interests.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr Andrew Monaghan is a Research Fellow in the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House. He also holds a position as a Senior Associate Member at St Antony's College, Oxford. Previously he directed Russia related research in the Research Division of the NATO Defence College.