

DECIPHERING RUSSIA'S 2021 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DOCUMENT

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- What is the National Security Strategy?
- What does the 2021 document envision?
- What are the priorities and primary threats mentioned in the document?

PERSPECTIVE: DECIPHERING RUSSIA'S 2021 THE SCOPE OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Russia is one of the countries that adhere to a number of regularly issued official documents while pursuing its policies at both domestic and international levels. Apart from the constitution, the Kremlin complies with military doctrines, naval doctrines, foreign policy concepts, national security strategies, etc. In other words, these documents draw a line – kind of a broad structure – within policymakers' road maps. Herein, the National Security Strategy (NSS) stands out as the most unique document that unites eclectic aspects of all of the aforementioned doctrines within itself. Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, refers to it as a “mother of all strategies”.¹

The NSS is a document that primarily reflects the direction of Russia's political trajectory aimed at strengthening the country's defense, internal integrity and political stability, modernization of economy and development of industrial potential, as well as strengthening the sovereignty of Russia and hereby its ability to carry out domestic and foreign politics without external pressure.² The latest National Security Strategy was signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 2, 2021.³ The document replaced and significantly modified the previous National Security Strategy issued in 2015.⁴

1. Дмитрий Тренин. “О матери всех стратегий”, *Коммерсант*, 6 July 2021, https://www.kommersant.ru/amp/4888683?__twitter_impression=true (retrieved on August 2, 2021).

2. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, 2 July 2021, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66098> (retrieved on August 2, 2021).

3. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*.

4. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации*, 2 January 2016, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/294430 (retrieved on August 2, 2021).

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2021 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: PROVISIONS AND DIFFERENCES

The 2021 National Security Strategy document revolves around six fundamental concepts: national security, national interests, strategic national priorities, insurance of national security, threats to national security, and the system of insurance of national security.⁵ The 2021 strategy presents a view of a world undergoing a “transformation”.⁶ The transformation presumes the end of Western hegemony and the West’s attempt to fight back as it loses its foothold.⁷ The document presents the hardships that Russia faces locally and globally, where unfair economic competition aimed at damaging it and holding it back prevails – e.g. sanctions. From the aspect of security, the use of force is perceived as a major threat. Moreover, Russian traditional values and historical heritage are perceived as under constant external attack. Apart from these challenges, domestically, Russia is pictured as facing foreign machinations aimed at provoking instability within its borders.⁸

The 2015 document was published as a corollary of the 2014 crisis in Ukraine. The situation regarding Ukraine has already caused a sharp decline in Russia’s relations with the West; nevertheless, it is the latest document that predicts a significant deterioration between Russia and the West.⁹ Both strategy documents are mainly shaped by Russia’s relations with the West. Yet, the 2021 strategy is regarded as the “manifestation of a new era”: the increase in confrontations with the US and its allies and a return to traditional Russian values.¹⁰ Alternatively, it has also

been summarized as: “deter the US, ignore the EU, partner with China and India”.¹¹

Broadly speaking, the central aspects of the 2021 strategy, unlike its predecessor 2015 document, focus on Russia itself. It includes a wide range of domestic topics such as demographics, political stability, the strengthening of sovereignty, national accord and harmony, economic development, persuasion of technological endeavors, environmental protection and protection of the Russian spiritual and moral code. At the same time, the new strategy lists a set of measures to deal with several domestic issues. These issues include rising poverty, dependence on imported technologies, the advent of green energy, and the loss of the Soviet-era technological and educational superiority.¹² Furthermore, the strategy spotlights exploration of space, the world’s oceans, the Arctic, and the Antarctic as some of Russia’s many national interests.

Overall, the 2021 strategy inclines towards domestic matters of the governance of Russia. Herein, moral and ethical aspects are placed at the “heart of the strategy”, where traditional Russian values are not only mentioned but meticulously elaborated upon.¹³ Furthermore, the strategy concludes that the aforementioned values are threatened by the Westernization that aims at depriving Russia of its cultural sovereignty. Therefore, the 2021 strategy is regarded as it highlights Russia’s official abandonment of the “liberal vocabulary” that was present in the 1990s by replacing it with a moral code akin to the country and its traditions.¹⁴

PRIORITIES AND PRIMARY THREATS

Perceiving the world as amid transformation, the strategy states that countries are losing their ultimate leadership position in a transforming global order (i.e.

5. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 2-3.

6. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*.

7. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 3-4.

8. Dmitri Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy: A Manifesto for a New Era” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 6 July 2021 <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84893> (retrieved on August 2, 2021). Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy”.

9. Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy”.

10. Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy”.

11. Simon Saradzhyan, “Russia’s New Security Strategy: Deter US, Ignore EU, Partner with China and India” *Russia Matters*, 15 July 2021 <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/russias-new-security-strategy-deter-us-ignore-eu-partner-china-and-india> (retrieved on August 2, 2021).

12. Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy”.

13. “Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”, *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 34-38.

14. Trenin. “Russia’s National Security Strategy”.

US and its allies). Hence, they try to re-establish their order and impose their rules on the members of the international community via imposing sanctions and violating the sovereignty of those states.¹⁵ By doing so, the US and its allies are accused of shattering universally accepted norms and institutions as well as sabotaging international law and sharpening the political atmosphere around the world.

The realization and protection of the national interests of Russia can be realized via the achievement of strategic national priorities.¹⁶ These national priorities include protection of the people of Russia and development of their full potential, insurance of the country's defense, security of the state and its citizens, informational security, economic security, eco-security, and rational/balanced usage of natural resources, protection of traditional Russian moral and ethical values, of its culture and historical heritage, as well as strategic stability and mutually advantageous international cooperation.

Russia's defense capabilities and their constant reinforcement are presented as an aftermath of an increased role of "use of force" in contemporary world affairs. The continuous reinforcements of military infrastructure near the Russian borders and intelligence gathering around it by the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are identified as a major threat to Moscow.¹⁷ Moreover, the US ignorance of its international responsibilities in the field of arms control and its plans to deploy American medium- and short-range missiles in Europe and Asia-Pacific are considered major threats to strategic stability and international security. Finally, military escalations in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and the Korean Peninsula are mentioned as other threats to regional stability.

15. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 38.

16. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 9.

17. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 11-14.

TABLE OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC NATIONAL PRIORITIES	
NSS 2015	NSS 2021
Strengthening National Defense Capabilities/ Protection of Sovereignty	Strengthening National Defense Capabilities/ Protection of Sovereignty
Improving Life Quality of Russian Citizens	Protection of Russian People and Development of Human Potential
State and Public Security	State and Public Security
Economic Growth	Economic Security
Science, Technology, and Education	Scientific and Technological Development
Protection of Public Health	
Culture	Protection of Traditional Russian Moral Values, Culture, and Historical Heritage
Ecology and Rational Use of Natural Resources	Environmental Security and Rational Use of Natural Resources
Strategic Stability and Equal Strategic Partnership (with everyone, including US and Europe)	Strategic Stability and Mutually Advantageous International Cooperation (mainly with CIS, BRICS, SCO countries, China and India)
	Information Security

Sources: Observer Research Foundation,¹⁸ Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации,¹⁹ Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России²⁰

While underlining the country's national interests, the strategy touches upon international cooperation as one of its top priorities. In fact, the end of the document is devoted to this subject and provides a more laborious explanation of foreign policy goals and tools that Russia relies upon. Among prioritized foreign policy destinations, the strategy mentions post-Soviet countries, strategic partners China and India, non-Western organizations such as SCO, BRICS, and other Asia-Pacific and Latin American integrative blocs.²¹ Herein, it can be concluded that relations with the US and its allies are no longer prioritized by Moscow. Moreover, the US and Europe are rarely mentioned in the document

18. Nivedita Kapoor. "Russia's new national security strategy", *Observer Research Foundation*, 7 July 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/russias-new-national-security-strategy/> (retrieved on August 3, 2021).

19. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации*, p. 8-9.

20. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*.

21. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 38-42.

and are referred by it primarily only when NATO is concerned.²² This, indeed, is one of the major differences between the 2021 strategy and the one of 2015. Meanwhile, the 2015 NSS was characterized by pointing out Moscow's desire to pursue mutually advantageous cooperation and partnership with the West. The 2021 NSS has shifted its focus from the North Atlan-

tic hemisphere to the East.²³ The document concludes that realization of the aspects covered in the National Security Strategy will ensure the security of Russian people, development of the full potential of its citizens, improvement of their living standards, strengthening of defense capabilities, and increased competitiveness of the country and prestige of Russia on the world stage.²⁴

22. Julian Cooper. "Russia's updated National Security Strategy", *NATO Defense College*, 19 July 2021, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=704> (retrieved on August 3, 2021).

23. Cooper. "Russia's updated National Security Strategy".

24. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации", *Официальные сетевые ресурсы Президента России*, p. 43.