



The Russian Federation's New Foreign Policy Concept

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On 30 November 2016, President Vladimir Putin signed a new Russian Foreign Policy Concept. In the document, Russia states its aspirations to pursue an active policy in the field of international security (especially in the Middle East). One of its instruments will be seeking opportunities for cooperation with the administration of the new president of the United States. Relations with the EU will be reduced to economic cooperation, while more focus will be placed on developing political and economic relations with Asian countries.

The Russian Federation's previous Foreign Policy Concept was published as recently as February 2013. The Russian authorities justify the relatively rapid revision of the document by the necessity to adjust the most important guidelines to reflect the changing international situation. In the past two years, Russia has made changes in almost all major policy documents, such as the doctrines of war, maritime and information security, relating indirectly to foreign and security policy.

Political and Economic Cooperation. Post-Soviet states such as Belarus (forming with Russia the Union State), Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are singled out in the new Foreign Policy Concept, as the most important partners for Russia. There is no declaration of a need to develop relations with Ukraine, but this does not mean that Russia will give up its active policy aimed at depriving Ukraine of prospects of close cooperation with Western partners and isolating it in the international arena.

The new Foreign Policy Concept places less political significance than the 2013 version on the integration of post-Soviet space in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This is probably due to the difficulties encountered by the EAEU, which brings together countries with inefficient and diverse economic models for which Russia, in spite of its dominant position, is unable to become a source of modernisation. It is also doubtful that countries with authoritarian political systems are able to create an efficient economic union.

Asia, especially China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Mongolia, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, has become a key area of Russia political activity. Russia also continues to attach importance to contacts in the BRICS framework, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Russia-India-China (RIC) platform. The new Foreign Policy Concept places great importance on the Middle East and regulation of the conflicts in this region (specifically, in Syria).

The role of cooperation with the European Union is limited in the new document to economic issues, although efforts to the abolish the visa regime will be continued.

The Role of Russia in International Security. The new Foreign Policy Concept stresses the need to create an international coalition to fight terrorism far more than in 2013. Moreover, the activities of terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State, were considered to be among the most pressing threats. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the document is to create the impression that Russia's involvement in Syria is a counter-terrorist operation and, at the same time, it signals readiness to cooperate in this regard with the United States. In practice, however, Russia's intention is only to improve its own bargaining position and to oppose an internationally enforced change of leadership in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. This means that Russia will continue to engage in the Middle East, especially in Syria.

As in previous documents of this type, Russia declares the necessity of cooperation with the United States, especially in the fields of arms control, nuclear potential and resolving conflicts around the world. However, the new Foreign

Policy Concept makes no reference to the need for internationalisation of the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF), which may mean that Russia will decide not to meet its provisions.

Relatively little attention was paid to cooperation with NATO. The document emphasises that it should be based only on partnership relations, but, according to Russia's military doctrine, NATO is still seen as the main potential adversary.

In comparison to the document published in 2013, the importance of the Arctic in foreign policy was increased. This is compatible with the military and naval doctrines that stressed the necessity to increase Russia's military presence there. The Arctic, because of its strategic importance and natural resources, could become an area of intense international competition.

Russia once more calls for the UN's role in resolving international conflicts to be increased. Moreover, the new Foreign Policy Concept stresses that no currently existing military or political alliance is not able to resist the whole spectrum of challenges and threats. At the same time, Russia still sees the Collective Security Treaty Organisation as one of the most important elements of the security system in the post-Soviet space.

The "Russian World" Ideology and Information Space. The new Foreign Policy Concept places much greater significance on the "Russian World" (*Russkiy mir*) ideology, which should influence how Russia conducts its external policy. It openly states that the Russian Orthodox Church will support Russian government and diplomatic actions. It is also planned to increase the role of Russian media as a source of information to influence foreign public opinion (see the Russian Federation Doctrine of Information Security, of 5 December 2016). One of the main tasks of the media will be to change Russia's negative image in the world. Despite the economic crisis, it can be expected that the level of funding for mass media will at least be maintained (the 2017 budget assumes that *Russia Today* will receive additional support to launch the channel in French), which will be one of the most important tools for Russian foreign policy.

Conclusions. One of the main aims of Russian foreign policy is to establish Moscow as one of the most important centres of international politics. That is why further strengthening Russian military capabilities and increasing engagement in existing regional conflicts should be expected. Simultaneously, Russia will seek the possibility of agreement, especially in security field, with the administration of the new president of the United States.

The Russian authorities will continue to use foreign policy as an important tool to create in Russian society the image of the state as an international power.

Maintaining its zone of influence (the Eurasian Economic Union), will be still crucial for Russian foreign policy. This means that Moscow will gradually withdraw from the system of "incentives" for the EAEU countries, such as the extended system of economic preferences, and will begin demanding that these countries meet their commitments, for example in relation to pro-Russian security policy. In the event of a change of foreign policy in any of these countries, Russia should be expected to react in the form of media campaigns or economic restrictions, and this may cause further conflicts in the post-Soviet area. Russia also wants to strengthen its influence of other post-Soviet states such as Moldova and Ukraine, which are not members of the EAEU and may seek to implement pro-EU domestic and foreign policies.

Due to the economic situation, Russia will continue to seek potential trade and investment partners. However, cooperation with Asian countries will not replace relations with European Union partners. Russia will try to find allies in the EU, in order to gain influence on policies such as the lifting of sanctions.

It cannot be excluded that Russia will propose United Nations reform in order to enhance the organisation's efficiency. There is a possibility that Russia will propose the enlargement of the Security Council (while maintaining veto power only for its current permanent members), but only on the grounds of broad consensus. Increasing the United Nations' role also means increasing Russia's importance, as Moscow will have the possibility of vetoing the most important decisions concerning international security.