

Russian Security Policy and Cooperation with the West (ARI)

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Theme: The West must find new ways to cooperate with Russia now that Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev have used its energy revenues to transform the country into a resurgent power and developed an assertive policy towards the West.

Summary: The Russian Federation has come back to the international arena as a resurgent superpower thanks to its oil and gas revenues and the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. An assertive Russian superpower has adopted a tough anti-Western stance in its external security policy against both NATO's expansion towards the East and against the deployment of the US missile shield programme in Europe. The Kremlin has used energy as an instrument of power in the Ukraine and has employed military power in Georgia, and new documents, such as the 2003 Defence White Paper, the 2007 Overview of Foreign Policy, the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept and the 2009 National Security Strategy express a consistent line of thought in Putin and Medvedev's foreign and security policy.

This ARI reviews the developments in Russia's foreign security policy,¹ the continuity in the ideas and action of both Russian leaders, the challenges and opportunities of Russian-Western cooperation in Afghanistan and the energy security and military-operational issues that can be addressed through a bottom-up approach.

Analysis:

Under Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, Russia has developed from a neglected regional power into a self-declared resurgent superpower. The basis for Moscow's forceful come-back to the international arena has been the inflow of enormous oil and gas revenues as a result of swiftly rising world prices. Russia's past as the Soviet superpower and its close ties with the upcoming new powers of China and India have served as a springboard for regaining an influential status in the world. Simultaneously, Moscow has developed an assertive policy towards both the West and its wary neighbours, culminating in armed conflict with Georgia. How can the West best respond to such an assertive Russian superpower?

Under President Vladimir Putin the Kremlin adopted an anti-Western stance, exemplified by its condemnation of NATO's expansion and policies –including the deployment of a missile shield– and its suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. His successor President Dmitry Medvedev has continued Russia's tough stance on

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security but adopting some personal initiatives of his own. For instance, as to policy structure, Medvedev has proposed a new European security architecture, aiming to remove the remaining vestiges of the Cold War, although this is also a natural feature of Russia's traditional policy of rejecting Western security organisations. Next, he launched (or updated) major security documents and released a dedicated strategy for the Arctic region. Furthermore, in support of his assertive external security policy, he announced large-scale military modernisation plans, absent during Putin's reign. In implementing this policy, Medvedev proved the continuity of the country's firm foreign policy stance by using military force in an armed conflict with Georgia and by engaging in a further round in Russia's gas conflict with the Ukraine (as Putin had done in 2005-06).

Likeminded Security Thinking and Policy Actions

Although security documents are highly declamatory and often propagandistic, the following comparative approach demonstrates that they are of value in assessing Moscow's security policy of today and tomorrow. Concerning the structure of foreign security policy, Putin's security documents of 2000-08 revealed a number of characteristics that would return in the foreign and security policy documents and statements of his successor, Dmitry Medvedev.

A first recurring element was that the 2003 Defence White Paper (DWP) already stressed the importance of establishing well-trained and equipped largely professional armed forces with a high level of combat readiness, capable of conducting high-tech warfare worldwide. These entries were repeated in Putin's Strategy 2020 speech of 2008 and were to be the foundation of the military reforms announced by Medvedev in the aftermath of the Georgian conflict, while also being laid down in his National Security Strategy (NSS) of May 2009. A second continuing aspect was the enumeration of the possible threats from the West, from NATO and the US in particular. A third characteristic, only mentioned in Putin's 2007 Overview of Foreign Policy (OFP), which was also dominant in Medvedev's security thinking, was the events in Kosovo and the separatist regions of Georgia, which in 2008 –because of Kosovo's independence and the Georgian conflict– brought about a serious deterioration in the relationship between Russia and the West. Fourth, Putin's second-term documents as well as Medvedev's 2008 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) and his 2009 NSS all stressed that Russia was now acting from a position of strength which enabled it not only to play an important role in the international arena, but also to influence its agenda. A fifth continuing feature, found in every security document and statement of Putin and Medvedev, was the protection of Russians citizens elsewhere, brought into practice in the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008. A sixth recurring theme, mentioned in Putin's second-term security papers and in Medvedev's documents, was energy (resources and security) as an essential element of Russia's international stance and as the ground for conflict caused by actors short of these resources. Gas conflicts with Ukraine and others, under Putin (2005-06) and Medvedev (2008-09) would prove the continuity of the importance of this 'energy weapon' as a major policy instrument for Moscow.

With regard to the implementation of policy, Medvedev's action also usually concurs with Putin's. In addition to the examples above, the Kremlin's prolonged vigorous stance has manifested itself in demonstrations of military force against Moscow's 'foes', for instance by threatening the European states involved in the US missile-shield programme, by conducting strategic nuclear bomber and naval exercises, by re-instating the traditional military parade on Red Square and by starting or resuming military cooperation with its traditional friends –countries 'hostile' to the West– such as Libya, Syria, Cuba and

Venezuela. Even when Russia became severely affected by the international financial crisis, at the end of 2008, the Kremlin only temporarily changed its assertive attitude towards the West into a more moderate one. Hence, Moscow's security documents from 2000 to 2008 have followed a consistent line in thought and practice under both Putin and Medvedev.

Energy as an Essential Instrument of Power

Along with the rise in oil and gas prices, President Putin gradually realised the importance of energy (resources and security) as an economic, political and military tool. To exploit it he began by implementing economic, human resources, military, policy-thinking and policy-execution measures. First, the state's role in the energy sector had to be consolidated. This he achieved by taking back assets from private owners, such as Yukos in 2003, and by limiting the role of foreign owners of Russian means of energy production. By 2007 the Kremlin controlled around 30% and 87% respectively of Russia's oil and natural gas production. In addition to gaining control of the ownership of these energy assets, Putin also demanded to have personal control over the energy sector, by appointing state officials in key positions in vital enterprises. Additionally, he appointed Gazprom's Chairman Dmitry Medvedev his successor for the Presidency and Sergei Ivanov, the Minister of Defence, as First Deputy Prime Minister. Hence, this closely aligned Gazprom and the armed forces, that is, energy and the military as instruments of power. Further evidence of the 'alliance' of these two state instruments was that the army has been given the task of ensuring the country's energy security. Energy (resources and security) for the first time became an integral part of policy thinking in Russia's security papers, including the Overview of Foreign Policy (2007) and the Strategy 2020 (2008). Finally, Putin put energy as a power instrument into practice by cutting energy deliveries, for different reasons, to the Ukraine (2005-06, because of the Orange Revolution and its Western aspirations), Georgia (2006, Rose Revolution and Western aspirations), Estonia (2007, war memorial removal) and the Czech Republic (2008, US missile-shield agreement). Furthermore, he started new pipeline projects –Blue, Nord and South Stream– to divert the Ukrainian transit route and to discourage the Western alternatives such as BTC, BTE and Nabucco.

Medvedev has basically continued with Putin's policy of energy as a tool of power policy. On the theoretical side, Medvedev –who is stronger than his predecessor– has addressed energy issues in his security documents, successively in the 2008 FPC, the 2008 Arctic Strategy and the 2009 NSS. The NSS openly says that Moscow considers energy resources a tool for exerting its leverage on other states. On the policy implementation side, Medvedev fought out a gas dispute with the Ukraine in January 2009, as Putin had done in 2005-06. Furthermore, he has continued Putin's policy of building alternative gas pipelines to northern and southern Europe in order to make the troubled transit route through the Ukraine to Europe superfluous and to counter Western attempts to divert supplies from Russian pipelines by creating alternative transit routes. This has also been achieved by negotiating contractually-binding energy resources from Central Asian states. The August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict was probably also part of this pro-active Russian policy, since the energy transit routes from Azerbaijan via Georgia to Europe were in a conflict area that would reduce their attractiveness to Western energy companies. Consequently, the use of energy resources as a strong-armed policy as introduced in Putin's second term, has even been reinforced under Medvedev as a vital element of Russian foreign security policy.

The West and Russia: How to Move On?

Although the current relationship between Russia and the West should not be regarded as a new Cold War, it is evident that interaction between the two parties is constrained by a number of obstacles that need to be removed. Options for an improved relationship between the West and Russia can especially be found in the fields of energy security, Afghanistan and cooperation at the political-strategic and military-operational levels.

Energy Security

At first sight, the topic of energy security reveals an exclusively hostile attitude of both players towards each other, as a result of Russia's energy dominance and the West's energy dependence from Russia. The West is seeking energy diversity in the aftermath of Russia's recurring use of it as an energy weapon, by means of cutting off the supply to pro-Western states in what it considers to be its sphere of influence –Georgia and the Ukraine– which also affect energy deliveries to NATO/EU states. The West is trying to ensure diversity and a lower dependence on Russia by creating alternative pipelines to tap Central Asian energy sources via Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, Russia is reluctant to accept the fact that energy producers in the former Soviet area, such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, are entitled to follow their own interests in trading their energy resources with NATO/EU member states. Moreover, Moscow wants to eliminate its transit dependence on the Ukrainian pipeline network and is trying to get western and southern European states interested in constructing alternatives, the so-called Nord Stream, South Stream and Blue Stream pipelines. For NATO, energy security –due to the increasing global demand and the danger of crises from decreasing supply levels– will steadily become more important on its agenda. Energy security is likely to be a crucial element of future NATO-Russia relations, either positively or negatively, or even both at the same time. The role of the military in energy security –whether for national armed forces or for the combined forces of alliances such as NATO and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)– is increasing at a rapid pace. The main actors, Russia and the US, have to decide whether their energy security policy will be one of confrontation or of partnership. By reducing its energy dependence on Russia, by obtaining oil and gas elsewhere and by replacing hydrocarbons by alternative durable energy resources, NATO and the EU can also decrease the tensions with Russia in this domain, because Russian opposition will then become less effective. Furthermore, international terrorism and piracy –as off the coast of Somalia– is a threat not only to Western but also to Russian energy infrastructures. These international developments offer possibilities for joint action in energy security for both actors, and can also have a positive effect on their relationship.

Afghanistan

Concerning Afghanistan, NATO and Russia –and its allies in the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)– face the same threats: Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorism and drug trafficking. Russia, as the leading member state of the CSTO and, together with China, at the forefront in the SCO, could promote a joint effort by these two Eastern security organisations to support NATO and the EU in Afghanistan. First, this could be achieved by a military contribution, by dispatching troops to the NATO-led ISAF contingent, which would strengthen the efforts in the war against the Taliban. However, actual military cooperation between NATO and CSTO/SCO still seems far off due to political sensitivities. Alternatively, other options for political and socio-economic cooperation between CSTO/SCO and NATO –for instance, in reconstruction projects in Afghanistan and in the fight against drugs, and with the EU in police and/or humanitarian aid cooperation– are also plausible. The SCO states have claimed their primacy in Central

Asian regional security, but so far the organisation has taken no action in countering the threats from Afghanistan. By cooperating in and around Afghanistan, the West and Russia –the latter in its prominent role in the CSTO and SCO– could reduce mutual suspicion and distrust and improve stability and security generally in Central Asia. An example of East-West cooperation on Afghanistan has been the granting by Russia and other CSTO/SCO member states of transit rights to NATO to ship goods and equipment for the ISAF operation in Afghanistan through their territory. Furthermore, Russia did not withdraw this permission during the deterioration of relations with NATO resulting from the Georgia conflict. This is a good example of structural and mutually beneficial cooperation on Afghanistan which could be followed by other initiatives.

Political-Strategic and Military-Operational Cooperation

Both parties can make efforts to improve their relations on the political-strategic level. From its side Russia should remove the anti-Western entries from its security documents and refrain from making anti-NATO/US statements. On the other side, unless there is a military necessity to continue with it, NATO should withdraw its air protection (Quick Reaction Alert) force over the Baltic States, after training and equipping these allies to perform the task themselves. Furthermore, the US and NATO should abstain from deploying substantial forces near Russia. However, such political-strategic changes are difficult to carry out and if they are implemented, they will take considerable time. In the meantime military-operational cooperation suggests itself as an option for improved relations that can be easier to achieve and is –from the example of arms control inspections– a proved confidence-building measure. Therefore, it would be helpful if Russia were to end its suspension of the CFE Treaty in order for mutual inspections to be restored, fostering confidence and trust on both sides. Increased military cooperation might in due course also encourage progress and the strengthening of political-strategic ties. With regard to military-operational opportunities, both parties share good experiences, such as Russia's contribution to NATO's peacekeeping operations in Bosnia (SFOR) and Kosovo (KFOR) and in NATO's Article 5 maritime operation Active Endeavour to fight international terrorism, and joint theatre missile-defence exercises. These examples of military-operational cooperation could be expanded with other joint operations, including cooperation between NATO (ISAF) and the Russian-led CSTO in Afghanistan against the narcotics trade, joint peacekeeping exercises, information exchanges between commanders and military-academic lecturers of operational experiences –for instance in irregular warfare and operational doctrine– and as exchanges of (cadet) officers in training modules and of military academic staff in lecture postings. In political talks, as well as in exchanges between military academies, a topic could be the statements in Russian security documents on threats from the West. To discuss these in public could clear the atmosphere. Such cooperation in the political-strategic and military-operational dimensions promotes international stability and reduces in mutual suspicion and distrust.

Conclusions

Recommendations for an Improved Relationship

A primary prerequisite for improved relations is that Russia and the West should seriously consider each other's sensitivities. Furthermore, Russia should realise that US policy is not necessarily the same as NATO's or the EU's. Conversely, the West should accept the fact that Russia is 'back in business' in the international arena, whether it likes it or not. Also, the US, the EU and NATO should carefully consider their actions in the East to avoid unnecessary conflicts with Russia, as is the case with NATO's air defence of the

Baltic States and was the case with the West's disapproving response to Russian protests against the removal of the war statue in Tallinn in April 2007. But at the same time, the West should continue guarding its own values and interests, regardless of whether they are rejected by the Kremlin. Since the problems between Russia and the West at the higher political-strategic level are likely to continue, emphasis should be placed on cooperation at the lower, 'grassroots', level in particular, eg by military (cadets) and civilian (students) representatives of the younger generation. In such a way, by fostering confidence and security between the young on both sides, the relationship between the West and Russia can be improved from the bottom up. Moreover, as regards cooperation at all levels between Russia and the West, this should concentrate on mutually beneficial, non-politically sensitive and practical projects.

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